

The Heart

Part two

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I will shortly come back to St. Augustine, about whom I was saying that he was locating in his heart everything was most specific to his person, in the intimacy of his being. In other words, he thought that the more you advance on the road towards yourself, you encounter something that is more of yourself, which does not resemble other's "self": your own self. Well, one other line of thought understood that, the more you advance in your own depths, something appears which is not yourself, it is something separate and foreign to you. The deeper you go there is an instance where you are identified with the community. This type of thinking generated the psychoanalysis in Freud's vision, but also analytical psychology, in the Jungian version. Once you go deeper, you discover a collective "ego", something that is not you anymore. The 'solar' version of this depth which has lunar features is that the deeper you go into your heart there is a place where you are identified with the principle to which you owe your existence: God. "The heart is the holy palace where God resides" – states Kabbalah. It is not by accident that one of the names of Messiah is Emmanuel, which means 'God in ourselves'. The Holy Scriptures talk about the "holy city" or the heavenly Jerusalem. Other metaphor is the one of a seed, the eternal seed in the heart. In other words, there is a place in our hearts

which functions as a seed of our being, of the world and knowledge.

I will quote two texts (I will not insist anymore on the passage in the New Testament, Luke: „Regnum Dei intra vos est). In Chandogyia Upanishad it is stated – „in this home of Brahma there is a small lotus, a place where there is a small cavity which is filled with ether." In other texts, the small cavity is more precisely defined: the small ventricle. Other example in Upanishad: „This Atman (divine spirit) that resides in the heart is smaller than a grain of rice, smaller than a grain of rye, smaller than a grain of mustard, smaller than a grain of millet, smaller than the seed inside a millet grain. This Atman that resides in the heart is also bigger than the earth, bigger than atmosphere, bigger than the sky, bigger than everyone together."

This superposition between the smallest and the biggest possible things, which coincide in the space of the heart, is present in many other texts: thus shall the last be first, the point with no dimensions is actually the source of all dimensions, unity is the smallest number, but, in the same time, it is the source of an infinite numeric series. This is an universal motif. After the text in Upanishads, here is another renown text from Matthew: „The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field. Which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is

the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof." The heart is the place of the infinitely small point from which man and the world came into being, and to which both will be finally reabsorbed.

The heart is the cup of the Grail – one other symbolic line of which we have no time to talk about now. Geometrically speaking, the heart is a triangle pointing down, similar to a cup, and which contains the very mystery of the blood of Christ. This is why a true prayer is a prayer that is concentrated on the space of the heart, brings the mind in the heart and unifies those compartments that we usually think about as being separate. "In the heart", says St. Macarius, "there are depths which cannot be measured. God is there with the angels, the light and life are there, the kingdom and the apostles, the heavenly cities and the richness of charisma. All are there." Ambrosius, the saint who served as model for Dostoyevsky's father Zosima, says: "The heart is the center not only of consciousness, but also of human unconscious, not only of the soul but also of the Father, not only of the Father but also of the body, not only of what can be understood, but also of that which is ineffable, in a word, it is the absolute center".

As we can see, a discourse on the heart slowly becomes a discourse about everything. It is a daring act from me and only your patience is greater than it. I will allow myself, at the end, to remind you two other things: First: Where the ultimate thesaurus is, the ultimate danger lies, and one of the sicknesses of solitude, and implicitly of the monastic life, is *taedium cordis* (tiredness of the heart). There is no better word for it than "to be tired of it all" (in Romanian, *lehamite*). It is in the heart where so many riches are, that the supreme tiredness can come, when your relation with the world, with God and with yourself is flawed.

One second thing: The heart is also the step where our posthumous destiny starts. „When we die”, an Upanishad says, „or when we are in great danger, the whole life energy is gathered in the heart, the point of which starts to shine. It is through that light that spirit goes out.” I have found a spectacular abstract of all the things I have said to you today, in a poem by Milarepa: "I pray in the mountain monastery which is my body, in the temple of my chest, in the point of the triangle which is my heart." We

cannot hope to enter all the intricacies of this theme. I just wanted to remind you that the heart exists in a form that is much more complex, historically, epistemologically, religiously, than what we are used to believe when we reduce it to its daily face – the heart of death and the heart of love. Thank you.

M.M: We want to thank Mr. Andrei Plesu for reminding us that we also breathe. I am hereby inviting you to address him specific questions.

Question: I would like to know how you would deal with a clear situation where the heart wants one thing, and reason wants the opposite?

A.P: You are asking for the story of my life! There are always solutions "to the right" and "to the left". However, more important than the tool we use in such a situation (heart or reason) become the rigor and consistency of the option. You must decide once and, once the decision is taken, to exhaust all there is from this decision. The most embarrassing moments in my life were not those when I felt I had both options – a reasonable solution and a "cardiac" solution – but those when I perceived both and I was unable to yield to one or another. This indecision is more serious and more deforming than the drifting that can result from a wrong choice. Which ever way you choose, you must exhaust it and assume its eventual errors.

But I would prefer to answer to your question in a different way. When a crisis occurs, the answers – at least this is what I believe, I would not want to "legiferate" – do not usually come from inside. If for solving such a situation, you are based only on your own discerning, things are difficult and you can never be sure that you made the right choice. The solutions often come from outside; which is why you have to always be very attentive to the signals you receive. A good 'response' – this is the bet of knowledge through the heart. You must pay attention, register the types of calls that are coming to you and then choose. Thus, do not expect to solve a life issue by pondering: I sit down, I clearly formulate what is the issue to be solved (shall I marry Joe or Jim), I weigh it, analyze it, and tomorrow morning I will know what I have to do. Things do not work this way! In short: do

not rely exclusively on yourself when you take decisions, because you are, like me, unable to do it. You must participate to the decision and also count on the angels...

Question: How did you decide to talk today on this topic, of the heart?

A.P. I came to this topic following a challenge that came from outside. In September, there was an international cardiology congress in Poiana Brasov. The organizers of this event (that about 1500 doctors dealing with the heart from different parts of the world were attending) proposed me to open the congress (at first, I thought they had invited me to be an exhibit!). They told me that they usually open such events with a concert, but they had decided to try another option. When you are in my situation, you cannot afford to refuse a cardiologist; you must be crazy to say no when you know that sooner or later he'll be the one talking to you about the heart, and in a drastic way! So, I accepted there and then.

After that, I was a bit scared and I realized that it is a guaranteed failure to speak about the heart to cardiologists, so I strived to find a way to approach things that might be of interest to them too. Then, the subject became more and more interesting, and I found the inner drive to go deeper. I was helped by a few very good texts that I can also recommend to you. There is, for example, an anthology that appeared in the late fifties, in France, in the

collection "Carmelitan Studies" – About the heart. As it is a collection founded by Catholics, it mostly treats about the affective aspects of the topic. There is a strong sentimental dimension in the solid catholic tradition, with topics like Sacré-Coeur, blood mixed with water that pours from the heart of Christ, when one of the Roman soldiers pricks his rib, and other important characters in the Sacré-Coeur mythology, especially in the French-speaking world.

The Carmelites collection includes however some very serious studies about the heart, written in the ancient times, in Asia or in Islam. I used these texts for this conference. I would also mention a follower of Jung, named James Hillman, who had a series of very inspiring conferences, held in Eranos, some sort of Swiss literary circle, and who was often visited in the fifties and the sixties by Jung, Mircea Eliade and others. Hillman talks about the heart by adding a lot of value to a territory where I did not want to enter. It is the alchemy topic, the "lion heart" as a source of vital transfiguration of things. There are inevitable pages about the symbolism of the heart in René Guénon (in *Fundamental Symbols of Sacred Science*, as well as in his books about Hinduism) or in Frithjof Schuon. Let us not forget the strictly cultural dimension of this topic, from the poetry of the troubadours to the surrealism. Once entered this space, the territory is endless. And since I do not like to learn without the joy of sharing with others that which I learn, I thought I'd answer the invitation with a conference about the heart.