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All Heart

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All Heart

When we say of someone that he or she is “all heart,” we usually intend it as a compliment, referring to personal qualities like kindness, compassion or generosity that are exercised far more than reason or rationality could require. We do not mean to say that such a person is irrational, but most of us do believe that “heart” is more a source of selfless love than “mind.”

In the interests of becoming a more loving person, would we consider it wise to forsake thinking, and act almost exclusively according to feelings?

Probably not, when we recall that some of our feelings are negative; we recognize anger, fear and pain as feelings that we neither seek nor want to be affected by as our guiding forces. A person who is “all heart” must make use of his or her powers of reasoning as well as feelings, but in a manner that is directed outward rather than primarily towards one’s own interests.

Thinking and feeling function together, just as salt and pepper are quite different from each other, but both add seasoning to the same food item. The most generous of persons might appear to act spontaneously on behalf of others without having any reasons. But we sometimes say that there are “reasons of the heart,” which implies the reasonableness of acting according to feelings when we make decisions based on those that indicate a course of action that is in accord with our values.

Someone who is “all heart” has learned, through reflecting upon experience, which interior impulses to follow and which to ignore. The difference between the two kinds of movements within us can seem small, but for those who consistently monitor their feelings, a kind word seems reasonable, and an unkind word seems unreasonable.

Beliefs that affect our behavior are rational, but they are closer to “reasons of the heart” than they are to doctrinal statements or quotations from Scripture. When we say that we believe “all people are equal” but find ourselves treating some people with disdain, our belief is probably more an intellectual proposition than a description for a heart-held realization. When we intervene in a situation where two people are letting their anger get the better of their judgment, we most likely act according to a feeling that we need to act right now, in order to prevent harm. Only later might we describe our action as expressing a belief in “blessed are the peacemakers” or something similar.

Jesus Christ could be called someone who is “all heart,” even though he was at times quite logical in some of his teaching, and followed some very direct lines of reasoning. But the consistent direction of his life, as is true for all

persons who habitually choose to help others, comes from a heart where love is the primary force, served by reason, logic and knowledge. Reason serves love, not the other way around. The way we are made, a feeling of peace accompanies decisions that are in accord with our calling, while feelings of un-ease go together with choices that for us are wrongly-ordered.

We might not identify with being a person who is "all heart," but surely we aspire to being helpful to others rather than only seeing to our own interests.