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To live is the rarest thing in the world. Most people exist, that is all

OSCAR WILDE





Follow your heart

We explore the concept of 'heartfulness' and discover how the key to wellness could already be within us, literally

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When the world around us is full of noise, stress, and pressure, it makes sense that we might want to retreat inside ourselves for moments of solace. It's not groundbreaking to point out that our hearts are at the core of our being, both literally and figuratively. But have you ever taken the time to consider how this vital organ can support your wellbeing?

Simply put, 'heartfulness' is the practice of centring mindfulness around the literal, emotional, and spiritual heart. Meaning to use the heartbeat as an 'anchor'

during mediation (something to bring your focus back to when your mind wanders), or reflecting on its emotional and spiritual significance, those who tune-in to heartfulness are simply using what is readily available to them, to reach another level of wellbeing, and to create coping mechanisms for when times get tough.

"For me, heartfulness is the process of living life by focusing on how your life impacts your heart – because the heart is central to your vitality," says Jacqueline Denton, a meditation teacher and holistic therapist.

To her, this means creating an awareness of the relationship between your emotional state and your physical body – noticing your heartbeat, when it accelerates, can take your body into flight or fight mode and, equally, noticing what things make your heart 'sing'; things like receiving love, laughing with friends, or being in nature.

On a literal level, you might pay attention to the steady beat of your heart to bring your mind back to the present. Beyond that, by centring yourself to focus on that central beat, you can remind yourself of where you are. >>>

When our heart (read also: spirit, soul, desires, or character) harmonises with our body and emotions, we can call it 'heart coherence'. It's a state where we are true to ourselves – we're listening to, and understanding, our needs. Here, we have a greater awareness of our bodies, thoughts and feelings, and how all of that comes together harmoniously.

As Valentine's Day approaches, we're inevitably going to see hearts popping up in supermarkets and

on cards; hearts and love come together in culture as they do in heartfulness. Though we're not talking about red foil balloons or the 'heart-eyes' emoji – but something deeper, something warm, comforting, and intuitive. It could be the love that we have for those who are close to us, the love invested in our passions and values, and the love that we have for ourselves, too.

"We are aware, as humans, that living in love makes us feel so

much better," says Jacqueline. "As we develop our emotional intelligence, we become increasingly aware of how unpleasant it is when we are not in the love of our hearts."

Being in the love of our hearts is what that 'heart coherence' is all about. It means that we're honouring those feelings, and tuning in to the power, wisdom, and serenity that's already beating in our chests – again, ask what makes your heart 'sing'?



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Three steps to heartfulness

Jacqueline Denton shares exercises to take you into your heart:

1. Enter your heart space

First, focus on being in your mind. Now shoot your consciousness out the back of your head, in through your shoulder blades, and into your heart. Do this a couple of times. Each time, sense your energy change when you arrive in your heart.

2. The heart lift

Now, imagine your consciousness is taking a lift down to the heart. Get in the lift and travel down through the head and neck to the back of the heart. Now go into the back of your heart. It's easy to sense your energy changing to the calmness and peace of the heart in this exercise.

3. Enter the state of 'heart coherence'

If you're really stressed, I've got another exercise that will calm your brain chatter. Sit and relax in a chair. Stretch out your brow by lifting your eyebrows and tilting your head back slightly, and watch how you feel. You will sense the calmness coming down from your head, rolling gently down like honey until it reaches the heart. Let it keep going until it reaches your feet. It only takes a few moments and this will shift your whole energy field so that you're much calmer, and enter the state of 'heart coherence'. Finish with a sigh and a lovely breath to anchor this energy in your field.

Keep it literal, or delve into the spiritual, and next time you come to a crossroad in your life, embark on a unknown path, or simply start a new day, take some time to recognise the strength you have within you, and do it from the heart. **■**



Jacqueline Denton is a meditation teacher, passionate about helping her clients heal from their past, so that they can go on to flourish.

Find out more by visiting therapy-directory.org.uk

As with any mindfulness practice, there's also a very real physical effect. When you find a sense of calm through turning your focus inwards, your blood pressure is reduced, and your heartbeat and breathing will slow down. "This impacts your gut health and aids the digestive process," explains Jacqueline. "Your nervous system changes as your fight-or-flight mode switches off (perhaps for the first time in years), and the nerves release their tension. All this

positively affects your brain and how it controls the finely-tuned balances within your hormones, water system, muscle tension, and much more."

As Jacqueline sees it, a daily practice of focusing on the heart will bring about a state of balance, fulfilment, and harmony. And the best part is it's there for the taking, for all of us, at any time.

