

Emotional Intelligence

The Smart Heart
**“It is only with the heart that one can see rightly;
what is essential is invisible to the eye.”**
-Antoine de Saint-Exupery

The end of the twentieth century saw an unparalleled surge of scientific studies on emotion, hitherto almost unexplored territory because the status of feeling in mental life has been devalued by the reductionist approach of science. There was a time when IQ was considered to be the major determinant of success in life but in the last decade the psychologist Daniel Goleman has argued that emotional intelligence, or EI, is more important. He attempts to explain why so many people with high IQs end up working for people with average ones and he comments that the popularity of his book ‘Emotional Intelligence’ could be due to the fact that “it validates the idea that people can be smart in a way that doesn’t have anything to do with IQ scores”. This popular belief is not simply a case of people who have scored low on an IQ test trying to make themselves feel better. It is increasingly evident that IQ tests do not measure the aptitudes that count most in life but merely measure the ability to do the tests. Societies define intelligence in terms of the society’s context, for example pre-literate societies depend on action- based skills taught in the context within which they will be used, technological societies require abstract reasoning skills transmitted by means of formal schooling. Consequently what is defined as intelligence in a technological society reflects factors that make for success in school.

Famous scientists have said that their discoveries seem to be merely following up the revelations of mystics from the past, and even the arrogantly sceptical Freud wrote, “everywhere I go, I find a poet has been there before me”. The poets and mystics have always known that true intelligence is a blending of head and heart, of thought and feeling and now psychology is moving towards a definition of what EI might be.

Goleman defines EI as including self-awareness, impulse control, zeal and motivation, empathy and social deftness; these are the qualities he identifies as prerequisites for success in career and in relationships. However the term EI was first formally defined in 1990 by the psychologists Mayer and Salovey as: “1) Knowing how you feel, how others feel and what to do about it. 2) Knowing what feels good, what feels bad and how to get from bad to good. 3) The emotional awareness, sensitivity and management skills which help us maximise our long term happiness and survival.” More recently they have updated their definition: “Emotional intelligence involves the ability to perceive accurately, appraise, and express emotion:

the ability to access and or generate feelings when they facilitate thought; the ability to understand emotion and emotional knowledge; and the ability to regulate emotions to promote emotional and intellectual growth.”



Emotional Intelligence and Yoga

It has been argued that Goleman’s definition is confusing because he has included variables which might be better called ‘personality traits’ than components of EI, and that the included areas reflect his personal biases and interests which include meditation and Eastern philosophy. Goleman’s book, however, contains very little reference to these areas and, considering the failure of western science to grasp the workings of the psyche, it might be worthwhile looking at EI from the perspective of Yoga. The yogic tradition of India, which has profoundly influenced the whole of the Orient through its absorption into Buddhism, posits the existence of three nadis or energy channels in the subtle body of the human being. The right channel (solar, yang energy) contains the qualities which would commonly be identified, in the West, with reasoning or intelligence or adaptation to the external world. The left channel (lunar, yin energy) contains the emotional half of our being and is concerned with internal things. The central channel has the quality of spiritual evolution. Therefore in terms of the three channels (nadis) and the three qualities that go with them (gunas), the word ‘emotional intelligence’ appears to be a combination or balance of left and right channels, which is the purpose of all the techniques of yoga. Yoga/meditation, then, could be seen as a practice which aims to develop EI.

In Hindu tradition the deity which governs the central channel, where this subtle balance of left and right occurs, is Mahalakshmi, the goddess who is known as the giver of intelligence and also presides over the human brain. The Mahalakshmi power is considered to be more than just a balance between emotion and rationality; a case not of $1+1 = 2$ but $1+1 = 1000$, or more.

The real meaning of yoga is the process of Self-realisation (Self with a big ‘s’, referring to a superpersonal sense of self). Goleman identifies self-awareness as the most important aspect of EI because it allows self-control. When this self-awareness becomes Self-awareness it automatically leads to genuine empathy- seeing the Self in others.

Perhaps EI should be understood as a quality of the infinite Self, beyond the ego (the small self with a small ‘s’) and the superego (conditioning, habituation), not just as a counterweight to IQ. The left brain (which controls the right side of the body) is credited with rational ability, while the right brain (corresponding to the left side of the body) is said to be the area of intuitive feeling; however, EI is not really the opposite of IQ, and should not be seen as a wholly right brain quality. Some people have a lot of both forms of intelligence, some have little of either. Researchers are trying to understand how EI and IQ complement each other. Emotional life grows out of an area of the brain called the limbic system, specifically the amygdala. The limbic area is where we experience joy beyond the duality of happiness and unhappiness, and intelligence beyond the blinkers of ego and conditioning; this is the Sahasrara or seventh centre of consciousness.

Maternal Intelligence

The great Arab philosopher Ibn al ‘Arabi (12th-13th centuries) may have drawn from Sufism’s contact with India and with the Gnostic traditions closer to hand, when he wrote that intelligence emanates from Allah as a primordial feminine principle: “This primordial nature is the breath of the Merciful God in his aspect as Lord. It flows throughout the universe and manifests Truth in all its parts. It is the first mother through which Truth manifests itself to itself and generates the universe”. This is very close to descriptions of Kundalini- the reflection within created beings of the primordial Shakti (manifest power of the unmanifest Self), which flows through the central channel of the subtle body nourishing and

enlightening the energy centres like a mother. Kundalini is considered to have its own intelligence independent of the mind, and it is credited with the power to raise consciousness to intelligent states beyond thought, which has its origin in either emotion or rationality. The notion of intelligence without thought is quite foreign to most of us, particularly in the West.

The Hindu idea that intelligence is the gift of the mother goddess makes it inseparable from the maternal qualities of empathy, forbearance, compassion, reflection, and selfless nurturing. Motherhood demands a high level of EI; yet Western society, the so-called developed world, may be increasingly undervaluing the role of the mother, which has also been attacked by Freudian sexualisation, to the point where society is becoming emotionally underdeveloped and risks civic decay. Social institutions are much more fragile than we like to think; they require constant nurturing. Societies in which the mother's role is respected and sanctified tend to be much more stable, producing civilisations that last millennia. Goleman's book is more than just an abstract thesis; he is looking for antidotes to restore 'civility to our streets and caring to our communal life'.

A mother must have the emotional brilliance to know how to discipline her children without inhibiting them. Goleman quotes Aristotle at the beginning of 'Emotional Intelligence': "Anyone can become angry- that is easy. But to be angry with the right person, to the right degree, at the right time, for the right purpose, and in the right way- this is not easy."

In traditional and tribal societies individuals have developed a high degree of EI to function within the close environment of extended families and village units, this ability to get on with one another has become invaluable in the overcrowded conditions of Asian cities. EI seems to be a characteristic of the older cultures of the world in which cooperation has long taken precedence over egoistical competitiveness. European writers of the age of expansionism, (even many of those who were otherwise very liberal and forward thinking such as H.G. Wells) took it as a given that the intelligence of the European was superior to that of the non-European. The horrors of fascism, and the threat of nuclear annihilation, in the twentieth century, have substantially shaken this idea, producing a sense that something is missing, perhaps in the area of EI. European culture now seems to be looking to non-European cultures, and to its own neglected spirituality, for a sense of wholeness. Interest in other forms of intelligence is a part of this trend.

Emotional Learning and the Intellect of Love

Goethe said "we are shaped and fashioned by what we love", and perhaps intelligence is given form by the heart. Emotional intelligence is true understanding of what is learned. Once learning is embedded in the heart, as well as the head, the lesson is converted to wisdom.

It is common knowledge that we learn much more easily, subjects for which we have a passion. In his spiritual biography of humanity 'The Face of Glory', the writer William Anderson calls this the 'intellect of love' which gave him a breakthrough in learning French, after reading a particularly evocative phrase in a novel by Balzac: "I was responding to the atmosphere and the emotions in the novel. It was the arousal of my emotions that enhanced both my fluency in reading French and my comprehension of it. Such experiences of the sudden grasping of an idea or a mathematical technique are very common. There would be no real education without it because it marks the point when the knowledge in the book or the mind and words of the teacher have become the possession of the pupil." Anderson writes that this 'moment of knowing' is a 'marriage of the waking and dreaming states but with an efficiency and power of coordination far beyond the sum of possibilities of the conjoined states', which is like the idea from yoga, mentioned earlier, that the balance of left and right, rational and emotional is much more than just an equilibrium, or a mere concession to the heart by the intellect.

Though he doesn't use the term EI, Anderson's understanding of poetic experience lends it a useful perspective: "The Sufis spoke of the eye of the heart, the opening of which is the true aim of religion, art and education. Dante and his friends spoke of the 'the intellect of love', the awakening of which made manifest the inner beauties of the beloved and of creation." Anderson relates that the phrase 'intellect of love' comes from the opening to Dante's first great poem which came to him suddenly as he thought about his muse Beatrice and nobility in women: "my tongue spoke as though moved by itself and said 'ladies who have the intellect of love'. I laid these words up in my mind with great joy." Women and poets both seem to take full advantage of their EI abilities. Anderson quotes the great German poet Schiller as an example of how emotion is at the core of poetic genius; 'With me emotion is at the beginning without clear and definite ideas: those ideas do not arise until later on. A certain musical disposition of mind comes first, and after follows the poetical idea.' "

The Future of Intelligence

As our understanding of human intelligence develops perhaps we will see other factors emerge in addition to emotion. The

Eastern model of the psyche is much more holistic than the Western model, which is based on Cartesian dualism. In yoga philosophy there is no real separation between mind and body, between consciousness and matter; consciousness is a continuum which pervades the entire body and even extends beyond it. This consciousness is thought to be concentrated in seven psychic centres which have their own intelligence and govern different areas of our being. The centres are believed to interact with one another, rather than just being controlled by the tyranny of the brain. Recent research into the workings of the human body has shown that the heart independently releases biochemical signals which effect the brain, and that the sacrum at the base of the spine is like a second brain. Through the unifying force of the Kundalini the yogi can experience many different aspects of intelligence which science may yet discover. Firstly the wisdom of the base centre, which seems to come from a connection with the earth and its Gaia principle (Rupert Sheldrake's revival of the ancient idea that the planet has its own intelligence). The artistic creativity of the second centre, is suggested by the words of the sculptor Rodin: "There are unknown forces within nature; when we give ourselves wholly to her, without reserve, she leads them to us; she shows us those forms which our watching eyes do not see, which our intelligence does not understand or suspect". Then there is the 'gut' intelligence of the stomach centre; the EI of the heart centre; the collective, communicative intelligence of the throat centre (many heads are better than one). The intellect and vision of the brow centre, tend to be inhibited by our ego and conditioning. An important aspect of intelligence is the ability to see things from another person's perspective and to think laterally. Intellectual arrogance limits our vision and causes a disabling ignorance. The philosopher Simone Weil said that "real genius is nothing but the supernatural virtue of humility in the domain of thought". Finally the still mostly untapped, super conscious intelligence of the Sahasrara (crown centre) where the Self in the heart is realised.

It has been said that the next phase of human evolution will depend upon a decline in egoistical competitiveness and an increase in collectivity, not in the form of totalitarianism, but as an expanded sense of self. The psychoanalyst Otto Rank predicted that "creativity and mysticism... will become the foundation of the new psychological type and with him or her will come the new civilisation". The levels of cooperation required in the future may mean that EI and other forms of intelligence such as creativity and self-transcendence, will be valued over the intelligence measured by IQ tests. An intelligence centred in the heart is centred in the Self and therefore has a superhuman, trans-personal connection; the next phase of evolution, with its enormous challenges and increasing load of information, will require an integrated intelligence with access to the infinite.

by Graham Brown

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