

The Heart of the Matter

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The Wizard of Oz movie left an indelible impression on many who grew up watching this classic film. The movie's captivating story, despite a few frightening scenes, had a cast of endearing characters that kept kids entranced and enchanted. A sweet, sixteen-year-old Judy Garland starred as Dorothy Gale. Once Dorothy arrived in the magical Land of Oz, the black and white screen changed into glorious Technicolor and a new adventure was underway.

One brave character in the movie was the Tin Man, who lacked a heart, or so he thought. He was seeking a new heart in order to love again. His frequent tears of sorrow and regrets repeatedly rusted his armored body, causing him to get stuck in place. The Tin Man came to realize the greatest loss he had ever known was the loss of his heart.

Throughout the movie the Tin Man displayed tender-heartedness. He was easily brought to tears despite knowing his body would seize up, rendering him motionless. The only way for the Tin Man to get unstuck was for someone to use the nearby oil-can to lubricate his joints, which then would loosen his body up enough for him to be able to move again.

Thinking about how hard life can be at times and the importance of learning how to forgive is when the analogy of the Tin Man and the oil-can came into my thoughts. Who can't relate to the Tin Man's broken-heartedness and his desire to have a new heart? Who can't empathize with the experience of a heart-crushing sorrow? What a terrible loss it is to lose one's heart, to feel hollowed-out, empty and unable to move on.

Forgiveness - A Prescription for Heart Health

Those acting out of pain find ways to judge, spread hate and seek vengeance, creating a cumulative, corrosive effect of hardening their hearts. It ought not to be a surprise then that the war going on in our

hearts correlates to a disturbing rise in heart disease, not only in the United States but also around the world. In October 2022, the CDC declared heart disease as the leading cause of death in the US. Heart attacks occurring under the age of 40 are on the rise, defying the notion that heart disease is only a problem of the elderly. The World Health Organization has also identified cardiovascular disease as the leading cause of death on a global level. Recommendations by the CDC place a focus on preventative guidelines and avoiding known risk factors. The medical community addresses the physical symptoms of heart disease, but that is only one aspect of an unwell heart.

Pema Chödrön, an American Tibetan-Buddhist teacher, has said, "...war and peace start in the human heart. Whether that heart is open or whether that heart closes has global implications." A person who strives to maintain an open, peaceful heart makes a huge difference in the world at large. So how exactly does one open their heart? One way is by learning how to forgive. Extending forgiveness to oneself or another is a gift you give yourself. Whenever you forgive, healing occurs. A heart will reestablish its natural rhythm of peacefulness. Forgiveness offers a fresh start as though you had a heart transplant. Learning how to forgive then becomes a necessary practice to cultivate, model, teach and encourage children to do. This is important not only to maintain physical heart health, but also to keep one's spiritual heart open to its unlimited capacity to love.

Maintaining an Open-Heart

A closed, walled-off heart is too often an unrecognized contributor to heart dis-ease. We all know how easy it is to ruminate over a litany of past hurts. Harshly judging oneself and harboring grievances only anchor in more deeply the pain felt. A Grinch-like heart of stinginess begins to form. Nursing slights and painful experiences will build an armored wall around one's heart, resulting in separating oneself from one's true nature of love. Even when the physical organ of the heart is clogged by arterial disease, the spiritual heart is never less than in a perfect state of wellness and harmony. It is this heart, the spiritual energetic heart, that the Sufis understand as the source of a deeper intelligence and wisdom. It is within this spiritual heart space that we need to sit within when offering forgiveness. The transformative act of forgiveness becomes an energetic heart-opener, similar to the insertion of a stent into a heart's artery to unclog what has been stuck. What once was narrowed and constricted by

blockages has been set free. The forgiveness process will widen and inflate a heart back towards mercy, compassion, and love. You'll feel lighter, less burdened, and peaceful. Whenever you release what has kept your heart stuck in the past, the natural state of open-heartedness returns. The world and others can then be seen through the lens of love instead of fear. Forgiving oneself or another is like using the Tin Man's oil-can to unlock the shut door of a rusty-hinged heart, throwing it wide open to love, as the onward journey begins afresh.