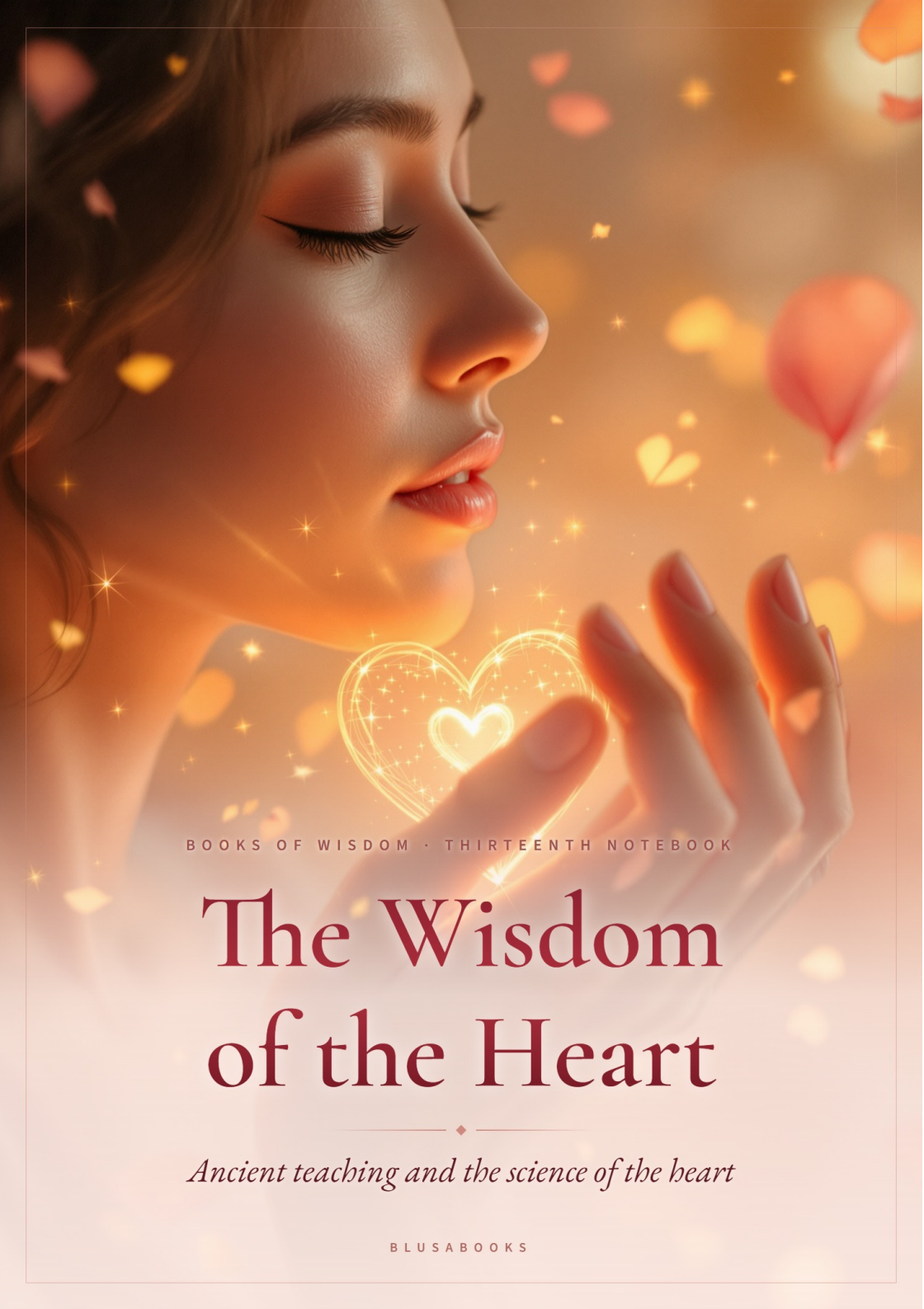




BOOKS OF WISDOM · THIRTEENTH NOTEBOOK

The Wisdom of the Heart

Ancient teaching and the science of the heart

BLUSABOOKS



The Wisdom of the Heart

ANCIENT TEACHING AND THE SCIENCE OF THE HEART

Every chapter — four parts

**WHAT THE TRADITION
TEACHES**

*what priests, prophets, mystics and healers
taught about the heart*

IN PLAIN WORDS

the same in one or two sentences

TERMS

the chapter's terms and what they mean

WHAT SCIENCE SAYS

*what is proven, what is still researched,
what is only an image*

This book is not medical advice. If your heart hurts — see a doctor.

Books of Wisdom · MMXXVI

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CONTENTS

<i>Foreword</i>	4
I The weighing of the heart in Egypt — Ma'at and the feather	5
II The heart in the Bible and Christian mysticism	10
III Anahata and the Sufi heart	15
IV How the heart really works	20
V Heart rate variability — HRV	25
VI Heart coherence and HeartMath	30
VII The broken heart — emotions and the heart	35
VIII Heart breathing	39
IX Gratitude, compassion and the language of the heart	43
<i>Closing words</i>	47
<i>Printable pages — four pages</i>	48
<i>Glossary</i>	53



FOREWORD

Place your palm on your chest and wait. There, slightly to the left of centre, something is working without your permission and without a break — since before you were even born. It is the only organ you can hear without a doctor's help, and perhaps that is why humanity has entrusted the heart with so much: conscience, love, courage, truth and even the soul.

The ancient Egyptians believed that after death your heart would be placed on a scale. In the Bible, God looks not at a person's face but at their heart. India's yogis hear, at the heart's centre, a sound that nothing has struck; the Sufis polish their hearts like mirrors; and Christian monks learn to "bring the mind down into the heart". And today the watch on your wrist measures how variable your heart rhythm is and calls it a marker of health.

This book walks both paths at once. Each chapter begins with the **tradition** — what priests, prophets, mystics and healers taught about the heart, told with the same passion with which they told it. Then the same thing **in plain words**, then the **terms**, which you will also find in the glossary at the end of the book. And finally — **what science says**: what anatomy, physiology and psychology know about it, what has been proven, what is still being researched, and what is simply a beautiful image.

One thing must be said right away and clearly. The heart is a pump — a marvellous, intelligent pump with its own nerve network and its own rhythm, but a pump. Nothing in this book replaces a doctor. The breathing and gratitude exercises you will find here are general well-being habits, not treatment. If your heart hurts, feels tight or beats unevenly — go to a doctor, not to a book.

At the end there are printable pages for calm practice. Read slowly. From time to time, place your palm on your chest and listen.

CHAPTER I

THE WEIGHING OF THE HEART IN EGYPT — MA'AT AND THE FEATHER

WHAT THE TRADITION TEACHES

Imagine a dim hall where incense is burning. The deceased has just passed through the gates of the underworld, the Duat, and now the final judgement lies before him. In the middle of the hall stands a great scale. On one pan lies his heart; on the other — a single ostrich feather. It is the feather of the goddess Ma'at, and Ma'at means truth, justice and the order of the world. The jackal-headed Anubis checks the scale, the ibis-headed Thoth, god of wisdom, prepares to record the result, and at the foot of the scale crouches Ammit — a monster with the head of a crocodile, the body of a lion and the hindquarters of a hippopotamus. She is waiting.

This is how the Egyptians themselves painted the scene. It appears in the so-called *Book of the Dead* — a collection of ritual texts that the Egyptians themselves called "Coming Forth by Day". The most famous image is in the Papyrus of Ani, made around 1250 BC and now kept in the British Museum. The deceased enters the hall of judgement and lists what he has not done: he has not stolen, has not killed, has not lied, has not taken bread from the hungry, has not put out a fire when it should have been kept burning. This list is called the "negative confession", and it is heard by forty-two divine judges.

But the words are not what matters most. **What matters most is what the heart will say.** For the Egyptians, the heart, or *ib*, was not just an organ. It was the home of the mind, memory, will, feelings and character. The heart remembered everything and knew everything, and so it could testify against its owner. That is

exactly why the Egyptians feared their own hearts. A stone scarab engraved with a plea was laid on the mummy's chest, in which the deceased addresses his heart roughly like this: "O my heart, which I received from my mother, do not rise up against me as a witness, do not speak against me before the judges."

If the heart was lighter than the feather or in balance with it, the person had lived in harmony with Ma'at. Thoth recorded the verdict, and the deceased was declared "true of voice". Horus led him to Osiris, and ahead lay eternal life in the Field of Reeds, which resembles Egypt, only without hunger and without pain. If the heart was heavy with wrongdoing, Ammit devoured it, and the person died a second time — completely and forever.

This belief even shaped how mummies were made. The embalmers removed the lungs, liver, stomach and intestines from the body and placed them in special jars, but the brain they simply threw away. **The heart was usually left in the body**, because without it a person could not stand before the court. In the Egyptian world, then, what mattered most was not what a person thought with the head, but what was written in the heart.

Ma'at was not only a matter for the court of the afterlife. On temple walls the pharaoh is shown again and again presenting the gods with a small figurine of a squatting goddess with a feather in her hair — the offering of Ma'at. It meant that a ruler's task was to uphold order against chaos, justice against violence, every single day. Egyptian wisdom teachings told scribes and officials to speak the truth, to listen patiently to petitioners and not to judge according to gifts. What a person did each day slowly accumulated in the heart — and one day all of it would be placed on the scale.

The lesson of the tradition is simple, and sterner than it seems. You do not need to be rich or powerful. You need to live so that your heart is light — so that it has nothing to be ashamed of. We still speak this language when we say someone does something "with a heavy heart" or that "a weight has been lifted from the heart".



FIGURE 1

The Egyptian judgement after death: the heart on one pan, the feather of Ma'at, goddess of truth, on the other.

IN PLAIN WORDS

The ancient Egyptians believed that after death a person's heart was weighed against the feather of Ma'at, the goddess of truth. The heart held the whole of a life: thoughts, deeds and memory. A light heart meant a just life and the road to eternity; a heavy heart meant annihilation. That is why the heart was left in place in mummies, while the brain was thrown away. Every deed, even a small one, made the heart lighter or heavier.

TERMS

Ma'at (Egypt. *m³t* "truth, order") — a goddess of ancient Egypt and at the same time a concept denoting justice, truth and the balance of the world.

Ib (Egypt. *ib* "heart") — the Egyptian word for the heart as the seat of mind, feeling, memory and conscience.

Duat (Egypt. *dw³t* "underworld") — the ancient Egyptian realm of the dead, through which the deceased had to pass before judgement.

Ammit (Egypt. *'m-mwt* "devourer of the dead") — a monster who devoured the hearts of those who failed the weighing.

Heart scarab (Egypt. *ḥprw* "scarab, the one who comes into being") — a stone beetle engraved with a plea to the heart, placed on the mummy's chest so that the heart would not testify against the deceased.

Book of the Dead (Egypt. *prt m ḥrw* "coming forth by day") — an ancient Egyptian collection of spells and prayers placed in the tomb to help the deceased in the afterlife.

 WHAT SCIENCE SAYS

Modern science knows that thoughts, memory and decisions arise in the brain, not the heart, and in this respect the Egyptians were wrong. They were not alone: the Greek philosopher Aristotle also regarded the heart as the centre of the mind and the brain as an organ that cools the blood. Yet Egyptian physicians knew a great deal about the heart. The Ebers Papyrus, one of the oldest medical texts, says that the heart "speaks" in all the vessels of the body and that a physician can feel it by placing his fingers on the head, the arms or the legs. That is a description of the pulse.

Even more interesting is why so many cultures spoke with one voice about the heart as the seat of feeling. The answer lies in the body. When we are afraid, ashamed or joyful, the autonomic nervous system instantly changes the heartbeat: the heart speeds up, beats harder, and the chest grows warm or tight. Emotions really are felt in the chest, even if they arise in the head.