

Abstract Submitted to Tucson-III in 1998

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On 11/7/06 I was looking to see if I could find my “Tucson abstracts” on-line and Googled [“SV Anderson” Tucson].

Instead of finding my three abstracts from Tucson-II, I was surprised to find the abstract that I had submitted to Tucson-III that was not accepted!

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The heart of consciousness

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Sri Adi Da, summarizing the Great Tradition of spiritual realization and numerous realizers before him, has identified the physical seat of conscious awareness (or attention) in the sinoatrial node (SAN) in the upper posterior wall of the right atrium.

In humans, the SAN is a thin oblong sheet of tissue about 1/2inch in length composed of several hundred thousand specialized myocytes. The SAN has a poorly defined central core of cells numbering 5-10, 000 out from which radiate columns of "transitional" cells to where the atrial muscle cells are contacted. The cells of the SAN are embryologically of mesodermal origin and begin their lifelong function as electrical pacemaker at about 21 days of gestation when the heart primordium is still anterior to the developing brain. The SAN is thus the first "organ" to form and begin functioning.

The electrical signal from the SAN initiates most contractions of the heart throughout life. Depolarization typically begins in the core area of the SAN and then travels slowly out to the atrial tissue. From there it radiates rapidly around the atrium converging on the atrio-ventricular node. Then it enters the cardiac conduction fibers via which it finally reaches the ventricular muscle.

Ventricular contraction generates both an acoustic pulse and a fluid pulse that travel throughout the body. The acoustic pulse, traveling at the speed of sound in flesh, by a bio-piezo-electric process, generates the EKG. Thus we can identify three major processes whereby the heart serves literally to sustain every cell in the body:

a) the acoustic/electric signal may act as a principle zeitgeber for the body.

b) the fluid pulse of blood into the arteries may serve other functions via shear force and fluid pulse "massage."

c) the delivery of molecular nutrients and removal of toxins and metabolites via circulation.

Heart-rate variability (HRV) has emerged in recent cardiology research as an indicator of overall health -- the greater the variation in the beat-to-beat interval, the less the likelihood of death from all causes. HRV is largely determined by the balance between sympathetic and parasympathetic autonomic tone at the SAN. However, there is a complex "neuro-cardiac" system that includes both afferent and efferent nerves intrinsic to the heart and the CNS-mediated baro-receptor system.

The SAN clearly plays a biological role central to the entire body. The esoteric tradition suggests that this role includes being "the seat of conscious awareness." As a comparatively small structure, the SAN seems a better candidate than the brain to house the "point" we know subjectively as our "point of view." Furthermore, it is located near where most of us point to when we refer to "me." Thus, consciousness may be even more intimate to the heart than to the brain. A dispassionate review of the biomedical facts makes the possibility seem at least worthy of consideration.

<http://www.zynet.co.uk/imprint/Tucson/4.htm>

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