

The False Premise
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The poets say the brain and the heart are two different things. You either listen to one or the other. But what they don't take into account is that without blood pumping through the veins, the brain would not function. And a heart without a brain wouldn't know how to beat.

When I was eight years old there was a chain reaction. It now reminds me of what happens when you put red food coloring in a clear glass of water, how the tiny drop then explodes into something that was once so pure.

I was at the playground and I remember the confusion.. It was something that was so different and horrific that my cheeks burned and my tan skin became tinged with red. My legs felt heavy as I walked over to the monkey bars trying to piece together what mistake had been made because obviously there had been a mistake. Right?

My once friendly neighbor had been distant the past few weeks and as I was about to approach her, her eyes roamed over me. There was no recognition. I kept walking over to the monkey bars. My shaking fingers touched the metal that always smelt like blood to me. I closed my eyes, a cold sweat dripping down my back. I shut them so hard my eyelids hurt. I could see stars and darkness even with the sun shining behind me. I swung my body and my knee collided with the large metal pole connecting the playground structure. I went down a moment later, unable to ignore the shooting pain going up my leg. My face was pressed up against the asphalt ground, little black pellets of rock making tiny indentations in my soft cheek.

My dad had been talking to a neighborhood parent, which now I think was fortunate since he usually played basketball with local teenagers. But he had seen me fall. There was panic in his brown eyes, the kind of vivid vulnerability in a parent's eye that makes a child want to cry.

As my father started walking with me in his arms I saw my neighbor watching me with her sister and my eyes followed them. She was older than her, like a teacher influencing her thoughts. The whisper I heard from her sister as my father and I walked shut a large part of my soft emotional part of my heart. "She's not a Muslim. Always remember something, she's not like us. We don't play with people like that." That made me feel weaker than I had already felt. It seemed like they were superior and I was just some child that had fallen. I was weak. I was emotional. I was not like them.

How was I not like someone who, in all aspects, I thought was my equal. While I did know what racism was, I had never faced it myself before that moment. Growing up I thought of this story a lot and questioned, "Was that even really racism since we were both brown?" Her skin was brown like mine, but somehow, in some intricate place of her mind, we were so different.

Years later, in my freshman year of high school, a boy walked into my sixth period social studies class and I had a shocking revelation of how strong a wall I had put up. That wall was between myself and every other person trying to infiltrate my emotions. I feel like there are moments where the world stops moving and everything is suspended in a tense web. Fear coursed through my veins. My heart shook in its rusty cage that had formed from the lack of use throughout the years. I had always been scared of emotions and that was one of the moments in my life that I somehow knew I would be feeling a lot of them.

As the year progressed we slowly became friends and talks about our backgrounds and religions came up and I found out something: he was Muslim. Like my neighbor he had the same brown skin, and I

couldn't help but wonder if they shared another similarity—were they too going to mark me as “not like him”?

I used to use my brain for everything. Every decision and response had come from an analytical place. It was an unwanted friend whispering which path to take. My heart had not developed emotionally even if it was the strongest muscle in my body physically. In that moment, it tried so hard to escape that rusted spiky metal cage that I had built around it to suppress drowning myself in emotions of failure, hurt, and disappointment all rooted in childhood lessons I never asked to learn. I could not feel the pain I had once felt. I didn't think taking a leap of faith was worth closing the final door to my heart.

A prejudice is a preconceived notion that is not based on an actual experience. I did have an experience though so I asked myself another question, “Is it okay to keep my distance from this boy because of one experience?” “Was it okay to have prejudice because I had evidence?”

Like the future lawyer that I aspire to be, I wait until I have evidence to fight a case. I found the same was true with my heart. I had been waiting for something to prove to me that that experience I had when I was eight did not equate to prejudice against an entire group of people. It did not deserve a shield to be built around someone who was Muslim separating them from me. That is what my neighbor had done. She had been ignorant and decided to not look further than our differences. Humanity and kindness and love were lacking in her thoughts because, like me, her heart had been in a cage as well. Unlike her, I was able to realize the mistake of locking up my emotions .

Although that heart had been a caged animal, it was not a weak one. It was a lion in hiding. It was my time to fight that prejudice with everything I had.

It was not until months into our friendship that I realized I didn't want my heart to be locked in a cage forever and separated from my mind. It took having a strong love for him that I understood one experience should not make you give up. Your heart and mind are not an oil and water solution. It's more of a soluble one, one that mixes together until you can't see where one starts and the other begins.

So no, our hearts and our minds are not separate things. It is our heart that helps our mind when we have fallen and have not yet recognized it. Our heart, thought to be the weaker of the two, is actually the one that protects us from destroying ourselves.

That boy is my best friend of two years—and my boyfriend. He is the person I tell every secret to and even though we might have exactly the differences that kept my neighbor from being friends with me, inside I have never met someone more similar. Prejudice can not only destroy you on the inside but make you miss opportunities that will make your life worth living. If I had held misery in my heart. I would not have been able to see how much I loved him. Keeping your heart in a cage does not allow it to do what deep down it's supposed to do, which is love.

What I realized in my life is that sometimes, people deem it okay to be racist or prejudiced or judgmental because of something that has happened in their past. What I now understand is that it is easy to put up a wall between yourself and someone just because of something that hurt you in the past, something that has nothing to do with the person. It is easy to ignore your heart because feeling angry is better than feeling hurt. What is not easy is trusting when you have preconceived notions and leaning on your heart to guide you.

The poets are wrong. My heart is intertwined with my mind. They are one in the same. Without my heart

I would hate because of past experiences. But with it, I am stronger than anyone who has ever done something to me. Until I started thinking with my heart, I never forgave my neighbor but now having opened myself to hurt has allowed me to live life. Methodical and emotional, I am glad I have my mind to allow me to think about the world I see, but for my heart to make sure I don't go into a beautiful

world with hate and vicious eyes. To both that young girl at the playground who made me think for so many years that we were not the same and to the boy who allowed me to see who we were in our hearts and how everything is connected.