

Balancing Head and Heart

by Erica L. Bartlett

Good morning. My name is Erica Bartlett, and I've always been very practical. When making decisions, I tend to do a lot of research and list out pros and cons, so I know my choice is rational. This is probably also why in *Star Trek*, Spock and Data were some of my favorite characters. And why majoring in Computer Science has worked out pretty well for me.

But as some of you know, I've also been looking at something new. For a little over a year, I've been learning how to write copy. That means writing content for emails, websites, newsletters, and more.

Except what I'm *really* learning is psychology and persuasion. This includes figuring out how to balance head and heart. And I learned something that made me pause.

Namely, people don't make decisions based on logic. We make them for emotional reasons, and only then do we look for proof to rationalize our decision. So we might *sound* like we're being logical. But really, we're not.

I have to say this shook me. Did I do this, too? I thought back to what I always considered the main example of me using logic instead of emotion for a decision. My choice of where to go to college.

I really, really wanted to go to Tufts University. I loved the idyllic, green campus, and the Universalist connection, since P.T. Barnum was a trustee. That's also the reason Jumbo the elephant is the school's mascot, which I thought was pretty great. It's a good school, but it's also expensive.

On the other hand, I really did *not* want to go to Northeastern University. I suspected I'd be miserable in Boston, without trees and lakes and seeing the stars at night. And I was scared of being in a big city after growing up in tiny Casco, with a population of 3,500.

But – Northeastern has a cooperative education program, where you can get work experience while you're in school. More significantly, they offered me a full academic scholarship.

I agonized over the decision. My heart was with Tufts, but my parents had explained they had no money to help me. My head knew that Northeastern was the right choice from a financial perspective, and eventually that prevailed.

In retrospect, though, I realize that emotion actually *was* the deciding factor. It just wasn't something I acknowledged at the time.

Scared as I was of the city, something else terrified me even more. Not being able to get a good job after graduation and being forced to live hand to mouth while I scrambled to pay college debt. I knew how close to the edge we were growing up, and I didn't want to repeat that.

So in the end, Northeastern was the right decision on both fronts. Thanks to the co-op program, I came out of school with money in the bank, job experience, and new-found confidence in my ability to navigate cities. True, I did miss Maine terribly for those five years, but it was worth it when I got a job in Portland the summer after graduating.

But apart from P.T. Barnum, what does all of this have to do with Unitarian Universalism?

It makes me think about how often we UU's are in our heads – too often, I think. And that doesn't appeal much to people, especially younger people. If we want to connect with others, leading with intellect is not the best approach.

This goes for our social justice work, too. For instance, have you seen much evidence of changing someone's viewpoint by giving them a table of pros and cons, or running through bullet points of statistics? If you have, I'd be curious to hear about it, because that hasn't been my experience.

Or consider our connections with each other. If I simply told you I went to Northeastern, would you learn much about me? Would you be able to relate to me any better? Probably not, unless you happened to go there yourself.

But now I've told you what that decision was like for me. The deeper emotions that influenced me – fears that these days are becoming universal if they aren't already. Do you feel like you know me a little better now? Am I more real and human to you? I hope so.

I'm not saying the head and intellect aren't important, or that we should ignore them. Even when we're guided by emotion, we usually want something more logical to back it up. But we talk about getting to the heart of the matter for a reason – because the heart drives so much of what we do.

So I hope we can all continue to think about ways of finding the right balance between the head and heart. And to consider leading with emotion – because opening and sharing our hearts is the best way to connect with others. And, in the end, isn't that really why we're here?