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## THE MAN IS HIS HEART HUMAN DECISIONS AND THE MULTIFUNCTIONAL DIMENSION OF THE HUMAN HEART IN ANCIENT JUDAISM

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**ABSTRACT:** Scholars still debate whether ancient thinkers in Asia Minor believed the brain was the centre of human thinking, or - as it is often suggested - they attributed all noetic, spiritual, and emotional functions to the heart and the heart alone. The Hebrew Old Testament, for example, does not have a word for "brain" as an organ. For the most part, in their view the heart accomplished most of the functions that one would attribute to the brain today. The Hebrew Old Testament does have decent semantic range when it seeks to describe processes like thinking, planning, conceiving, scheming, and the like. There are times when the heart takes on some of these functions, and there are other occasions when a person merely thinks, plans, or conceives without any recourse to his or her heart. In the following study we will explore a number of texts in the Hebrew Old Testament with the purpose of understanding better the vision of the Old Testament with respect to the centre of human thinking. We will show that the Jewish sages viewed the human heart in a very complex manner, as they attributed literally tens of functions to this organ. We will also examine a number of other organs (kidneys, inwards, belly, etc.) that took on noetic, spiritual and emotional functions. Lastly, we will list and analyse a number of verbs of „thinking, planning, conceiving, and scheming” - among others - in order to complete the picture of the Ancient Jewish vision of the human person as a thinking and feeling person. Our analysis will also take into account the spiritual dimension of humanity, as most of these organs and the functions they fulfilled made possible the relation between human beings and God.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The following text is a revised version of the article A. Botica, „The Man is

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## 1. The Terminology and Background of the Term “Heart”

The Hebrew term for the heart is *ble* (*lev*) or *לֵב* (*levav*). Before focusing on the data of the Old Testament, it is important to know that the Old Testament itself shares some of the spiritual, mental, emotive and physical dimensions of “lev” with the surrounding cultures of Egypt, Assyria and Babilon.<sup>3</sup> Gerstemberg drew parallels between the god Amon, “the searcher of the body, who opens the heart,” and goddess Sia, “who knows the inner parts of the body.”<sup>4</sup> From *The Book of Dead* we know, for example, that the ancient Egyptians viewed the heart as the locus of ethical and religious life.<sup>5</sup> They thought that after the death of the person, the gods would place the heart on a weighing scale and weigh it against the “feather of Maat,” the Goddess of Truth. If the heart was heavier than the feather, that is, if bad deeds outweighed the truth, the presiding judges would condemn the deceased to eternal punishment, and his or her heart would be devoured by Ammit

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3 For the general background of the Ancient Near East see H. Hogg, “Heart and Reins’ in the Ancient Literatures of the Near East,” *JMOS*, no. 1 (1911), 49-91. For the specific phenomenology of the “heart” in Babylon, see W. King, “Heart and Reins’ in relation to Babylonian liver divination,” *JMOS*, no. 1 (1911), 95-98. For ancient Egypt see G. Smith, “Heart and Reins,’ Mummification,” *JMOS*, no. 1 (1911), 41-44, S. Morenz, *Egyptian Religion* (New York: Ithaca Press, 1973), 63ff., J. Currid, “The Egyptian Setting of the ‘Serpent,’” *Biblische Zeitschrift*, no. 39-40 (1995/96), 203-224, and J. Taylor, *Death and the Afterlife in Ancient Egypt* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 35ff.

4 E. Gerstemberg. *Psalms. Part II* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans), 515.

5 H. Hogg, “Heart and Reins’ in the Ancient Literatures of the Near East,” 59-10.

(Amemait), a funerary goddess in the Egyptian pantheon.<sup>6</sup> The Egyptians feared that the person whose heart was devoured would essentially go into “nothingness, or the endless void.”

In the Old Testament, the word “lev” occurs approximately 600 times. The term has at least two major designations. At its most basic level “lev” means “heart,” and it refers primarily to the organ in its physical form, or the chest. Thus, king Jehu shot the king Joram with an arrow that “pierced his heart” (2Kings 9:24).

## 2. The Classification of Categories for the Term “Heart”

What draws one’s attention, however, is that most of the 600 occurrences of “lev” belong to a secondary dimension, one that covers a range of rational, emotional and spiritual functions. This dual division has been expressed in various forms, as is evident in some of the most representative Hebrew dictionaries.

On the level of the evidence of the Old Testament, according to Koehler and Baumgartner “lev” can be found to belong to the following categories:<sup>7</sup>

- The organ
- Seat of vital force
- One’s inner self
- Disposition
- Determination, courage
- Will, intention
- Attention, consideration, reason
- Mind
- Conscience
- Metaphorical: in the “middle of the sea” (lit. “the heart of the sea”)

6 B. Wallis, *Osiris and The Egyptian Resurrection* (New York. Dover, 1973), 328.

7 L. Koehler, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 200).

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- The organized strength of
  - ✓ life
  - ✓ person
- God's heart

Furhtermore, Clines divides the Old Testament meanings of “lev” in five major categories, each with its own sub-categories.<sup>8</sup> According to this division, “lev” can take on the functions of:

- *Mind, thinking, intention, understanding*
  - ✓ thought, reason, knowledge, counsel
  - ✓ wisdom, common sense
  - ✓ attention, memory
  - ✓ ability, skill
- *Feelings*
  - ✓ joy
  - ✓ pain, grief, sadness
  - ✓ weakness, anxiety, fear
  - ✓ courage, strength
  - ✓ irritation, anger
  - ✓ contempt
  - ✓ jealousy
  - ✓ conscience
- *Will, inclination, disposition, personality*
- *Physical heart, chest*
- *Middle, depth, height*

Fabry classifies the occurrences on the basis of the categories of *anthropology* (the heart is “strong,” “powerful” and “faint”), *rationality* (the heart is “understanding,” “knowing,” “wise,” “pondering,” and “senseless” (Prov

8 D. Clines, *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew: Yodh-Lamedh* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press,

1998), 497-505.

15:21);, *emotions* (the heart is “cheerful,” “rejoicing,” “trembling,” “fearful,” and “dreading”), and *ethics* (the heart can be “good,” “evil,” “haughty,” “false,” or it can “go after idols.”)<sup>9</sup>

Post-biblical Hebrew literature, especially the early Rabbinic Literature, viewed “lev” in similar terms, as well. Solomon Schechter identified at least fifty five functions of the heart in the way Rabbinic sources read the Old Testament, as they appear in the *Ecclesiastes Rabbah*, i.16.<sup>10</sup>

“The heart sees, the heart hears, the heart speaks, the heart walks, the heart falls, the heart stops, the heart rejoices, the heart weeps, the heart is comforted, the heart grieves, the heart is hardened, the heart faints, the heart mourns, the heart is frightened, the heart breaks, the heart is tried, the heart rebels, the heart invents, the heart suspects (or criticizes), the heart whispers, the heart thinks, the heart desires, the heart commits adultery, the heart is refreshed, the heart is stolen, the heart is humbled, the heart is persuaded, the heart goes astray, the heart is troubled, the heart is awake, the heart loves, the heart hates, the heart is jealous, the heart is searched, the heart is torn, the heart meditates, the heart is like fire, the heart is of stone, the heart repents, the heart is warned, the heart dies, the heart melts, the heart accepts words (of comfort), the heart accepts the fear (of God), the heart gives thanks, the heart covets, the heart is obstinate, the heart is deceitful, the heart is bribed, the heart writes, the heart schemes, the heart receives commandments, the heart does willfully, the heart makes reparation, the heart is arrogant.”

### 3. Cognate Terms that Describe Functions Similar to Those of the Heart

Classifications such as these show that the heart took on the same functions that people today associate with the brain.<sup>11</sup> As such, various schol-

9 H. Fabry, “Lev”, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), 7:399-438.

10 S. Schechter, *Some Aspects of Rabbinic Theology* (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1961), 255-56, citing *Midrash Rabbah* (London: Soncino Press, 1939), 46-49.

11 Thus A. Botica, Aurelian Botica, *The Concept of Intention in the Old Testament, Philo of Alexandria and the Early Rabbinic Literature* (Piskataway, NJ: Gorgias

ars have raised the question of whether the ancient Hebrew people were aware of the difference between the heart and the human brain. For example, North argued that essentially the heart exhibits the same functions that people today associate with the brain.<sup>12</sup> On the basis of the evidence that we presented above, North's assessment is correct. He pointed out elsewhere that ancient Israel had "no word for brain and did not associate thinking with the head," but rather with the heart.<sup>13</sup>

For the beginning, it must be stated that, indeed, the Hebrew language of the Old Testament did not produce a specific word for "brain" as an organ. The texts, however, describe people engaging in different rational or volitional acts that did not necessarily have the heart as a subject. Rather, people would merely "think," or "conceive" or "calculate," though not necessarily, and always using their heart. We have noted above the very many functions of the heart, some of which evidently we would attribute to the brain. But when the ancient Hebrews thought of "thinking," they did not always associate it with the heart.

The Hebrew language has, for example, the verb חָשַׁב (*hashav*), "to devise" , "to think," and the noun form מַחְשָׁבָה (*mahashavah*), "thought."<sup>14</sup> It is true that at times the verb "to think" can have "the heart" as its subject, as in, "He does not intend, his heart does not think" (Isaiah 10:7), or, "Do not think evil in your heart" (Zachariah 7:10). The noun form "mahashavah" can work in conjunction with "lev" as well. Thus, "the heart devises wicked thoughts"

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Press, 2011), 119ff.

12 R. North, "Brain and Nerve in the Biblical Outlook," *Biblica*, no. 74 (1993), 577-597.

13 R. North, "Did Ancient Israelites Have a Heart?" *BibRev*, no. 11 (1995), 33. See also F. Glasson, "'Visions of Thy Head'—the Heart and the Head in Bible Psychology," *Expository Times*, 81, no. 8 (1970), 247-48, and W. Robinson "Hebrew Psychology," in *The People and the Book*, A.S. Peake ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925), 253.

14 K. Seybold, "hasab," *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, G.J. Botterweck ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), 5:231-40.

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(Proverbs 6:18). But as the following table shows, these two terms – “hashav” and “mahashavah” – can by themselves describe cognitive or emotive functions, without any recourse to the “heart.”<sup>15</sup>

עַלִּי רָעָה אֱלֹהִים חֲשַׁבְתֶּם חֲשֵׁבָה לְטָבָה	You <i>meant/intended</i> evil against me, but God intended good	Gen 50:20
מִפֶּר מַחֲשָׁבוֹת עֲרוּמִים	[God] frustrates the devices of the shrewd	Job 18:12
וְכָל־יִצְרַר מַחֲשָׁבוֹת מִבֵּין יְהוָה	The Lord understands every intent of the <i>thoughts</i>	1Chr 28:9; 18
וּמִזְמוֹתַי עָלַי תִּחְמְסוּ מַחֲשַׁבוֹתַיִכֶם	Your <i>thoughts</i> and intentions [with which] you would wrong me	Job 21:27
כָּל־מַחֲשַׁבְתָּם לְרָע	All the <i>thoughts</i> [of people oriented] toward evil	Ps 56:6
עֲבַת יְהוָה מַחֲשָׁבוֹת רָע תו	<i>Evil thoughts</i> —an abomination to the Lord	Prov 15:26

Another verb that Ancient Hebrew uses in order to describe cognitive or emotive processes is זָמָה (*zimah*), “to devise” or “to scheme” with the purpose of “intending” evil. Along with the verb with notice the noun form מִזְמוֹה (*mezimah*), with the sense of “devices”, “schemes” and “intentions.”<sup>16</sup> In this sense we see that ~m;Z” is constructed 6 times with the preposition ל. and the infinitive constrcut verb, for the most part in combination with verbs of action (Gen 11:6; Deut 19:19; Ps 31:14). One will note that whatever organ or inner experience is involved in the act of “devising/conceiving,” it

15 A. Botica, *The Concept of Intention*, 128-29.

16 S. Steingrimsson, „zamam,” *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, G.J. Botterweck ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980), 4:88, T. Fretheim, “The Will of God in the OT,” *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, D.N. Freedman ed. (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 6:914-20.



is not the “heart.” Most of the occurrences of these terms have no relationship to a person’s “heart.” This shows that the ancient Hebrews were indeed able to express the process of thinking without always appealing to one’s “heart,” even though the “heart” remains the most important human organ in Hebrew thought.<sup>17</sup> One will note the following occurrences:

חֲשִׁבוּ מַזְמָה	[People] conceive a <i>plot</i> , but won’t succeed)	Prov 21:11
וְאִישׁ מִזְמוֹת יִרְשִׁיעַ:	[God] will condemn a man of [evil] <i>intents/devices</i>	Prov 12:2; cf. 14:17
לֹא בַעַל־מִזְמוֹת יִקְרָא מַחֲשֵׁב לְהַרְעֵ	The “planner” of evil is called a man of “schemes:”	Prov 24:8-9
זִמְתָּ חֲטָאִי	The devising of folly is a sin	Prov 24:9
אֵין אֱלֹהִים כָּל־מִזְמוֹתָיו	The <i>thoughts</i> [of the wicked are]: “there is no God:”	Ps 10:4
חֻעֲבָה אֶף כִּי־זִמְנָה זֶבַח רָשָׁעִים יְבִיאֵנוּ	Especially if one brings (the sacrifice) with [evil] intent	Prov 21:27
זִמְתָּ יַעֲזֵב בְּאִמְרֵי־שָׁקֶר הוּא	He plans wicked schemes (against the poor) with lying words	Isa 32:7
לֹא כַּאֲשֶׁר זָמַם לַעֲשׂוֹת וַעֲשִׂיתָם לְאָחִיו	You shall do to him as he had intended to do to his brother	Deut 19:19

<sup>17</sup> A. Botica, The Concept of Intention, 130.

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כל אֲשֶׁר יִזְמוּ לַעֲשׂוֹת	All that they purposed to do (divine punishment at Babel)	Gen 11:6
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In support of the view that Ancient Israel did not always associate the heart with emotive or cognitive functions, we argue that there are various Old Testament texts that list other human organs which took on some of the same functions as the heart. Among these organs there were: **br,q**, (*qerev*), usually translated as “entrails” or “inward parts,” **!j,be** (*beten*), that is “abdomen” or “belly,” and **hy’l.ki** (*khilyah*), as “kidneys.”<sup>18</sup> The following table describes the three basic physical organs that, in the view of the Old Testament, take on cognitive, emotional or volitional functions. In essence, this shows that for the ancient Hebrews, cognitive, emotive and volitional processes could take place in other parts than the heart.<sup>19</sup>

קֶרֶב		
בְּפִיָּהּ נִכְוֶנֶה קֶרֶבָם הָיוֹת כִּי אֵין	There is no truth in mouth; only [thoughts of] destruction <i>inwardly</i>	Ps 5:10
בְּפִי יְבָרְכוּ וּבִקְרָבָם יִקְלְלוּ	They bless with their mouth, but curse <i>inwardly</i>	Ps 65:2

18 J. Pedersen, *Israel—Its Life and Culture*, vols. I-IV (London: Oxford University Press, 1926), 173ff., H. Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1974), 65-66.

19 A. Botica, *The Concept of Intention*, 123-124.

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מִחֲפָשׁ וְקָרֵב אִישׁ לִלְבּוֹ עֵמֶק חֲפָשׁ	[People] devise plans, for the <i>inward</i> thought and heart are deep	Ps 64:7
וְנָכַר וּבִקְרָבוֹ יֵשִׁית מְרֵמָה בְּשִׁפְתָיו	He is disguised with his lips but <i>inwardly</i> he's laying deceit	Prov 26:24
אֶת־רֵעֵהוּ יִדְבֹר וּבִקְרָבוֹ יֵשִׁים שָׁלוֹם אָרְבוֹ	He is speaking peace to his friend but lays ambush <i>within</i> himself	Jer 9:7)
בֶּטֶן		
נֵר יְהוָה נִשְׁמַת אֹלָם חֲפָשׁ לִלְחִדְרֵי־בֶטֶן	Lamp of the Lord... searching all the <i>in-</i> <i>nermost</i> chambers	Prov 20:27
הָרָה עֹמֵל וְיֵלֵד אָוֶן וּבֶטֶן חֲכִין מְרֵמָה:	They conceive trouble and birth evil, and their <i>womb</i> prepares deceit	Job 15:35
כְּלִיָּה		
אַתָּה קָרוֹב בְּפִיָּהֶם וְרָחוֹק מִכְּלִיֹּתֵיהֶם	You are near their mouth, but far from their <i>kidneys</i> (thoughts)	Jer 12:2
וּבִחֵן לְבוֹת וּכְלָיוֹת	Who tests the heart and the <i>kidneys</i>	Ps 7:10; 26:2
רֹאֶה כְּלָיוֹת וְלֵב	[As a judge, God tests and] sees the heart and the <i>kidneys</i>	Jer 20:12; cf. 11:20

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חָקַר לֵב בְּחֵן כְּלָיוֹת	[God] searches the heart and tests <i>the kidneys</i>	Jer 17:10
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In addition, the Old Testament refers to two other important entities that appear to perform cognitive or emotive functions. Neither one is an organ, unlike the heart, kidneys, entrails or the abdomen. The two entities are נֶפֶשׁ (*nefesh*), with the sense of “life”, “breath” and/or “soul,” and רוּחַ (*ruah*), that is, “wind” and/or “spirit.”

“Nefesh” is a well-known term which a generic sense of the inward vitality of life, or the spirit of life. It usually occurs in verses that describe a living human being, or in contexts where someone’s “nefesh” leaves his or her body, i.e., it dies. The word “ruach” can take the meaning of “spirit,” as in the “spirit of God” (Isaiah 63:11), or the spirit of a human being (Genesis 45:27). The occurrences where these two take on cognitive or emotional functions are rather rare, in comparison to the other terms, especially the “heart.” But they do occur, as the following verse demonstrate.<sup>20</sup>

נֶפֶשׁ		
אִוְתָהּ רָע	Soul of the wicked “desires” evil	Prov 21:10
נֶפֶשׁ רָשָׁע		
תִּנְהוּ בְנֶפֶשׁ אֹיְבָיו	He does not give him up to the “ <i>desire</i> ” of his enemies	Ps 41:3
וְאַלֹּתַי		
רוּחַ		
תַּעֲיִרוּחַ בִּינָה וִידְעוּ	Those who err <i>inwardly</i> will gain understanding	Isa 29:24
וְאֵין בְּרוּחוֹ רְמִיָּה	... and in who <i>spirit</i> there is no deceit	Ps 32:2
וְהָעֹלָה עַל־רוּחְכֶּם	What will come up to your spirit (i.e. “plans”) [shall never happen]	Ezek 20:32

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 126.

#### 4. The Heart as a Medium of Intending, Devising, and Conceiving Evil or Good

It is evident from its wide number of occurrences that “lev” was “by far the most important organ” in the eyes of the Old Testament authors.<sup>21</sup> This may be the reason why, due to its wide semantic range, the word “lev” has escaped a simple definition.<sup>22</sup> One of the most important dimensions of the word is that of “intending, devising, and conceiving” good or evil. In the view of the Old Testament, it is precisely this moral function of the heart that draws the direct attention of God. The following table lists a number of verses that portray the heart as a “medium of intending, devising, and conceiving” evil and good.

<i>The heart as the medium of intending, devising, and conceiving evil</i>		
וּבְּעוֹלַת תַּפְעֻלוֹן אֶת־בֶּל	Also in the <i>heart</i> (and hands) you work out injustice	Ps 58:2
דִּבְרֵי שְׁלוֹם עַם־רֵעֵיהֶם וְרָעָה בְּלִבָּבָם	Words of peace to their friends, but <i>malice</i> in their <i>heart</i>	Ps 28:3
שָׂתָה וְיָאֵמַר לְךָ וְלִבּוֹ אֵכֵל וְ	Eat and drink (he says to you) but his heart is not with you	Pr 23:7
בַּל־עֲמֹךְ תוֹעֵבּוֹת בְּלִבּוֹ	An <i>abomination</i> of heart (inward deceit masked by outward pretension)	Pr 26:25

21 A.R. Johnson, *The Vitality of the Individual in the Thought of Ancient Israel* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1949), 77.

22 A. Botica, *The Concept of Intention*, 118-19.

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וּלְבוֹ רֶחֶק מִמֶּנִּי	Their heart is far from Me (in spite of display of public worship)	Is 29:13
אִן אֶסְרֵאֲתִי בִלְבִי	If I had thought evil in my heart, the Lord would not listen to my prayer	Ps 66:18
מִחֲשַׁבַּת לִבּוֹ רַק רָע יֵצֵר	The <i>intention</i> of the thoughts of the <i>heart</i> is only evil	Gen 6:5; 8:21
<i>The heart as the medium of positive intention</i>		
כִּי הָיָה עִם־לִבְכֶּךָ הַטִּיבָה לְבִנוֹת בַּיִת לַשָּׁמַיִם	It was good that you in- tended (lit., “it was in your heart”) to build a House	1Ki 8:17-18
וַיַּהֲוֶה יְרֵאָה לְלִבָּב	But God looks at [David’s] <i>heart</i> (not his physical ap- pearance)	1Sam 16:7
לִבִּבִּי הִתְנַדְּבֹתִי כָל־אֱלֹהִים בִּישָׁר	In integrity of my heart I made these offerings	1Chr 29:17
נָקִי כַפַּיִם וּבֶרֶךְ־לִבָּב	(Approaching the Temple) with clean hands and <i>pure</i> <i>heart</i>	Ps 24:4

### 5. The Heart as the Object of Divine Examination and Testing for Appraisal

The verses listed above show that in the view of the Old Testament authors the heart was capable of both evil and good thoughts. Evil, malice, abomination and hypocrisy – these are inner states of the heart that God can see and test. God, however, is not portrayed only as a judge seeking to determine guilt. He assesses the human heart in order to appraise the good intentions and to reward them accordingly. Reacting to the intention of king David to build the Temple, Solomon, his son, said: “the

LORD said to David my father, ‘Whereas it was in your heart to build a house for my name, you did well that it was in your heart’” (1 Ki. 8:17-18).

Nevertheless, the ability of the heart to form evil or good thoughts makes it the main “organ” for moral discernment. It also makes it the main object of divine testing. Numerous texts in the Old Testament portray God as particularly interested in the way human beings use their heart. Even though a number of scholars argued that the Old Testament was concerned mainly with human behaviour, not necessarily human thinking, there remain plenty of data in the Old Testament that show the fact that in the eyes of God, how one thought about a matter was as important as the material expression of that matter itself.

In this sense, the Hebrew language employed a large number of verbs that portray God examining or testing the heart in order to determine the true identity and character of human beings.<sup>23</sup> Testing the heart, then, appears to be one of the most important attributes of God. The verbs of testing/examining that we will list in the following table are: ראה (raah: “to look at”), בין (bin: “to perceive/discern” the thoughts), ידע (yadah: “to know”), חזה (hazah: “to see”), בחן (bahan: “to test/examine”) צרף (tsaraph: “to test/try”), חקר (haqar: “to search”) פקד (phaqad: “to test/visit”), תכן (takan: “to probe/ weigh/measure”) דרש (darash: “to search/seek”), אסן (nasa: “to try/test”).<sup>24</sup>

ראה		
הָאֱלֹהִים יִרְאֶה לְעֵינָיו	Man looks at the appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart	1 Sam 16:7
וַיַּהוֶה יִרְאֶה לְלִבִּי		

23 P. Dhorme, *Le Livre de Job* (Paris: Librairie Victor Lecoffre, 1926), 98, R. Pettazzoni, *The All Knowing God* (London: Methuen, 1956), 97-114, M. Tsevat, “haqar,” *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, G.J. Botterweck ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1975), 2: 69-72, O. Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World*. NY: Seabury Press, 1978), 82-86.

24 A. Botica, *The Concept of Intention*, 112-117.

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בַּחֵן צְדִיק רְאָה כְּלִיּוֹת וְלֵב	God tests the righteous, <i>sees</i> the inwards and the heart	Jer 20:12; cf. 12:3
בִּין		
וְכָל-יֵצֵר מַחְשְׁבוֹת מִבֵּין	God <i>discerns</i> every intent of the thoughts	1Chr 28:9
יָדַע		
לְנִסּוֹתוֹ לַדָּעַת כָּל-בְּלִבּוֹ	Test him to <i>know</i> everything that was in his heart	2Chr 32:31
כִּי-הוּא יֹדֵעַ תַּעֲלָמוֹת לֵב	God <i>knows</i> secrets of heart	Ps 44:22
בַּחֵן		
וַיְהוָה צִבְאוֹת שֹׁפֵט צֶדֶק בַּחֵן כְּלִיּוֹת וְלֵב	The Lord... <i>tests</i> the inwards and the heart:	Jer 11:20; 12:3; 17:9
חָקַר		
יְהוָה חָקַר לֵב	The Lord <i>searches</i> the heart	Jer 17:10
צָרַף		
מִצָּרַף לְכֶסֶף וְכוֹר לְזָהָב וּבָחַן לִבּוֹת יְהוָה	The <i>smelting</i> is for silver... but the Lord tests the hearts	Pro 17:3
פָּקַד		
«בָּחַנָה לִבִּי פָקֳדָה לַיְלָה צִרְפָּתָנִי בַּל-תִּמְצָא	You tested my heart, <i>visited me</i> at night	Ps 17:3
נִסָּה		
לְנִסְתֶּךָ לַדָּעַת אֶת-אֲשֶׁר בְּלִבְּךָ	Test you to know what was in your heart	Deut 8:2; 2Chr 32:31
חָכַן		
וַתְּכֵן לִבּוֹת יְהוָה	The Lord <i>probes</i> the heart	Prov 21:2;



One will note that some of these verbs come from the realm of cognitive abilities (to “know,” to “discern”). Others come from the area of physical acts that sometimes work with a spiritual object. For example, the verbs *hqr* (to “test”) and *tsaraph* (to “smelt”) were used in connection with “testing” mixed wine (רָקָה Proverbs 23:30), and smelting gold and silver in order to purify them of all impurities and thus obtain precious metals of the best quality (*tsaraph*, Proverbs 17:3, Isaiah 1:25, Jeremiah 51:17).<sup>25</sup> By extension, God tests the heart to determine whether its motives are pure or not. In this sense, God becomes the ultimate and most just judge, because He judges not only on the basis of material evidence, but also on the basis of the hidden intensions and desires of human beings. Furthermore, God does not judge arbitrarily, nor is his purpose vindictive. On the contrary, God “examines” and “tests” the heart of his people in order to guide them in the way everlasting (Psalm 139:24). Even when he tests the heart for the purpose of punishing, he does so out of justice and holiness (Jeremiah 17:10).

We are now in the position to summarize the main terms that we believe the Old Testament uses in order to express importance of the “heart”. This evaluation allows us to view the entire spectrum of the physical organs that have psychological and spiritual functions, as well as the verbs that have the heart as their object of testing.<sup>26</sup>

Idioms for Internal Organs	לֵב	<i>heart</i> —mind, brain, thoughts
	כִּלְיֹת	<i>kidneys</i> —emotion, thought, feeling
	קֶרֶב	<i>bosom, inwards</i> —the inward life
	בֶּטֶן	<i>womb</i> —inmost soul

25 M. Tsevat, „haqar”, 69-72, and M. Saebo, „tsaraph”, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, G.J. Botterweck ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 12:475-79, for references to the technology of the „crucible” and the „furnace” (Proverbs 17:3).

26 A. Botica, *The Concept of Intention*, 132.

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Physiological and Spiritual/ Psychological Functions	נֶפֶשׁ רוּחַ	<i>soul</i> —inward life <i>spirit, breath</i> —inward life
Intellectual/ Emotive Functions	מַחְשְׁבָה חֶשֶׁב זֵמָה זְמַח מִזְמָה	<i>thought, plan, intention (to think, intend)</i> <i>devise, purpose, intention (to devise conceive)</i>
Verbs for the “Divine Examination” of the heart	רָאָה בִּין יָדַע חָזָה בָּחַן צִרְף חָקַר פָּקַד תִּכַּן דָּרַשׁ נִסָּא	<i>to see, look</i> <i>to perceive, know</i> <i>to know</i> <i>to see</i> <i>to test, examine</i> <i>to test</i> <i>to search</i> <i>to visit, test, search</i> <i>to probe, evaluate, measure</i> <i>to search, seek</i> <i>to try, test</i>

## Conclusions

Our study has shown that for the Old Testament authors the human heart was indeed the most important part of the human body, on the one hand, and the representative of human mind, will and emotions, on the other. The reason why the heart plays such an important role is that it is the organ, and the “function” for that matter, that makes it possible for a

man or a woman to relate to God in a way that no other organ is able to do. In fact, most of the cases where God is described as “examining” or “testing” the heart have a direct relation with the notion of human justice and/or piety before God. In other words, the ultimate proof that a person is indeed just or pious is not found in his or her deeds alone, but in the purity of his or her heart, as well.

Hundreds of years later from the Old Testament times, when Jesus talked about the importance of the human heart, he said:

“Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth passes into the stomach and is expelled? But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person. But to eat with unwashed hands does not defile anyone” (Matthew 15:17-20).

It is evident that both for the authors of the Old Testament, as well as for those of the New Testament, the human heart was the center of cognitive, emotional, spiritual and volitional processes, many of which had clear physical ramifications. For these authors, all matters of life were important, whether one talked about the religious cult, various aspects of criminal or civil law, relations among the people, or the most private spiritual concerns that one may have had.<sup>27</sup> The New Testament continues the Old Testament theme of the redemption of the human heart, as it was expressed by Ezekiel: “And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you..., and cause you to walk in my statutes” (Ezekiel 36:26-27).<sup>28</sup> According to the apostle Paul, the Spirit of Life transforms the human ability to fulfill the Law.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 443-52.

<sup>28</sup> For the importance of the renewal of the heart in the new covenant in Ezekiel, see Corin Mihăilă, “The Prophecy of Ezekiel in Light of Biblical Theology. A Diachronic Study of Biblical Themes” in *Teme în Teologie Biblică și Hermeneutică. Sesiunea de comunicări științifice ale studenților și absolvenților U.E.O.*, ed. Corin Mihăilă (Cluj-Napoca: Risoprint, 2022), esp. 25-29.

<sup>29</sup> Thus O. Hanc, “Good without God? Paul’s View of the Law as a Response to Moral Relativism,” *Semănătorul*, vol. 2, no. 1 (September 2021), 106.

As such, based on the evidence that we presented above, we can say that, indeed, “the man is his heart.” Even though the Old Testament often referred to organs other than the heart (entrails, kidneys, abdomen, etc.), or cognitive, volitional and emotional entities or processes that did not have the heart as their source (spirit, breath, etc.), by its sheer presence, the “heart” remains the most important organ in the Old Testament sources. In the absence of a clear terminology for organs such as brain, synapses and the like, for the authors of the Old Testament the heart remains the organ that is responsible for all cognitive, emotional and volitional acts.

True, often times the Old Testament used the word “heart” in a metaphorical way, in order to describe processes that today we associate with the brain. These ancient authors were aware that human thinking could take place, in a way, apart from the heart. We listed a number of verbs (thinking, devising, scheming, planning, etc.) that do not use the heart as their source, and that seem to indicate that the Ancient Hebrews thought that thinking may take place in the head, not only in the heart. The heart remained, however, the object of divine appraisal – both for good and for evil thoughts – and the source not only of thoughts, but also of all matter of actions (Matthew 15:17-20).

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