

Mind and Heart

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While the Indo-Europeans used mind as the seat of thinking, the Egyptians, Semites, and other people in what is now the Near East imagined the heart to be the seat of thinking. With the Semitic religions—Judaism, Christianity, Islam and now Baha'ism—dominating the world for the last 1700 years, the word HEART, used approximately 300 times in the Bible means 'Intellect, Mind'.

However, the anatomy has helped to slightly change the meaning. It is defined as “the emotional or moral as distinguished from the intellectual nature: as (a) generous disposition: COMPASSION; (b) LOVE, AFFECTIONS; and (c) COURAGE, ARDOR. In fact, one's innermost character, feelings, or inclinations.” (Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 1996)

But Zarathushtra and his Indo-Iranian contemporaries, a branch of Indo-Europeans, were far from the Biblical peoples. To them Manah/Manas was Mind—“the element in an individual that feels, perceives, thinks, wills, and especially, reasons.” In Avestan and Vedic Sanskrit, it stands for MIND, intellect, intelligence, understanding, perception, sense, conscience, will; in fact, all the mental powers (see A Sanskrit-English Dictionary, Sir Monier Monier-Williams, Oxford, 1899/1956; Avesta Dictionary, Ervad Kavasji Edalji Kanga, Bombay, 1900; and Altiranisches Wörterbuch, Christian Bartholomae, Berlin/New York, 1904/1979).

The Indo-Iranians had another word *zereda/hrd*, meaning 'heart'. For them, it allegorically meant “the seat of feelings and emotions”. And emotions, as we all know, run wild. The Gathas would not recommend it. That is why, it is only used once in the Gathas—Song 4.12. And perhaps that is why we do not find it repeated in the Later Avesta. Here it is:

“Therefore, whether one speaks truth or not,
whether one is wise or otherwise,
one expresses in words
what is in one's heart and mind.
Accordingly, one enjoying serenity, may ask himself:
Where will the two mentalities lead?”
(Gathas: Song 4 - stanza 12)

Summary Substance: All—truthful, liar, wise, and stupid—express themselves in words of what their minds guide or their emotions dictate. It is then that one, cool and calm, may well understand where the good or the retarding mentality would lead to.

Pondering Points: Mind engages in thoughts. Heart throbs with emotions. Two ways of expression. Cool consideration decides which one to choose.

Against the solitary use of “heart”, the Gathas have the following words appear more than 250 times: *khrratu* (intellect), *chisti* (perception), *daênâ* (consciousness), *mainyu* (mentality) and above all, VOHU MANAH that encompasses Good Thoughts, Close Friendship, and True Love that translate into Good Words and Good Deeds only to unite mankind in mental and physical bonds that know bounties without boundaries.

Anthropological studies, conducted by me as an interesting sideline during my visits over the last 50 years, among Indo-Iranians from the western borders of Iran to the eastern boundaries of India, show that its seat was/is in HEAD. In spite of the Semitic influence, they still pointed to their head for thinking and contemplating and to their Heart/Breast when talking of feelings and emotions. The idea of Mind in one’s head has not been forgotten. And now we have the anatomical definition added to it for the learned.

Mind in the Gathas stands for all the mental powers and functions, and heart for emotions.

NOTE I: (a) Indo-Iranian: Avesta *zereda*, Sanskrit *hrd/hrday*, Baluchi *zirdâ*, Gilaki and a number of other Iranian languages *del*, Kurdish *zar*, Munji *zârl*, Osset *zârdâ*, Pahlavi *dil*, Pashto *zra*, Persian *dil/del*, Sangalechi *urzrây*, Sangsari, Sarkhei, and Valashgardi *dael*, Sarikali *zârd*, Semnani and Shahmirzadi *dâl*, Shughni, *zrâd*. (b) Armenian *sirt*. (c) European: English *heart*, German *Herz*, Greek *kardia*, Latin *cord*.¹

NOTE II: *Del/dil* in Persian means “heart, (seat of) feelings, emotions and thinking, abdomen, stomach.” It has the Indo-Iranian and Semitic notions combined.

¹ Some of the special characters were corrupted by the source of this article, and the terms therefore may contain errors in reproduction. – CG