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Hebrew Influence on the Book of Mormon: Metaphoric Heart Expressions

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Some time ago, when looking for Hebraisms in the Book of Mormon, I was impressed with the high frequency of metaphoric expressions using the word heart. After eliminating Old Testament quotations and intentional paraphrases or allusions, one finds that heart occurs in a metaphoric sense 424 times in 255,541 words or once every 603 words.¹ Although heart metaphors do occur in English, this appears to be an unusually high frequency for normal English usage either in speech or in writing.

In the Old Testament, however, heart occurs in metaphoric usage also at a high frequency: 774 times in 565,595 words or 1 per 731 words.² These occurrences in the Old Testament result from literal translations of Hebrew expressions using *lev*, *levav*, and *libbah* (all denoting "heart" in Hebrew). The high frequency of heart metaphors in the Old Testament can be explained on the basis of a literal translation into English of the Hebrew text, which frequently employs a metaphoric style.

Since the Book of Mormon is supposed to be a translation of a record written by a Hebrew-speaking people, one might also conclude that the high frequency of metaphoric heart expressions in it may be explained as the result of the influence of this Hebrew speech-pattern on its translation. There are, however, other possible explanations for the high frequency of metaphoric heart expressions in the Book of Mormon, but when they are checked against controls, they seem inadequate. These explanations include:

- 1) Such expressions could have been common in the speech of Joseph Smith's environment, 19th century New England and vicinity.
- 2) Even though it may not have been common in daily speech, this mode of expression may have been common in religious sermons, discussions or writings in Joseph Smith's time.
- 3) It may have been a peculiarity of Joseph Smith's speech to use metaphoric heart expressions frequently.
- 4) Joseph Smith may have picked up this style from the sources he is said to have used in producing the Book of Mormon, such as Solomon Spaulding's *Manuscript Found* or Ethan Smith's *View of the Hebrews*.³
- 5) Joseph Smith tried to use an elevated literary style in the Book of Mormon; and since literary styles tend to be more metaphoric, such heart expressions would be more common than in common speech.
- 6) Joseph Smith was trying to imitate Biblical style and consequently picked up this metaphoric usage, including the element of frequency.

Let us consider each of these possibilities.

Were metaphoric heart expressions used with such a high frequency in common speech by Joseph's contemporaries? Although we can not examine colloquial conversational speech patterns, we can check on the common writing styles of Joseph's contemporaries. Ethan Smith's *View of the Hebrews* was published in 1825. It deals with several of the same topics as the Book of Mormon. In fact, some have claimed that it served as the source of Joseph Smith's ideas on those topics. Be that as it may, with respect to heart metaphors, it has 18 occurrences in 90,720 words or 1 per 5,040, a rate 1/8 that of the Book of Mormon.

The nature of a work, as well as the content or subject matter under discussion will surely have an influence on the frequency of metaphors such as heart expressions. Ethan Smith's work, although it deals with several of the same topics as the Book of Mormon, is written as a scholarly treatment, which may explain the very low frequency of heart metaphors. One would expect religious sermons or writings, on the other hand, to contain a relatively larger number of metaphors.

As an example of sermons or lectures I have used the addresses by Alexander Campbell, a Christian minister who was a contemporary of Joseph Smith. The addresses selected were those which dealt with religious topics.⁴ The results are 33 occurrences in 68,640 words or 1 per 2,080, less than 1/3 as frequent as in the Book of Mormon, and even this figure is somewhat magnified since nearly 2/3 of the occurrences appeared in two appeals for contributions to the missionary fund (10 occurrences in only 4 pages). Apparently the high frequency of heart metaphors exhibited in the Book of Mormon is not typical of the speech pattern of religious discussions or sermons in Joseph Smith's day.

Was it, perhaps, simply a peculiarity of Joseph Smith's religious vocabulary to use heart expressions so frequently? An examination of the compilation of Joseph Smith's writings titled *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* gives a count of 109 instances in 136,500 words or 1 per 1,252 words.⁵ Even though these writings, which are generally religious, were produced after the writing of the Book of Mormon which could have had an influence on Joseph Smith's style, the frequency of heart expressions in them is less than half that in the Book of Mormon.

One's style of writing when trying to create a literary work will differ from that of conversations, sermons and lectures. Although one would not classify the Book of Mormon as a piece of literary writing, other than in a rather broad sense of the term, it is obvious that Joseph Smith attempted to use a more literary or elevated style in the Book of Mormon than in his discourses. The use of metaphors is a common device in elegant literary style. Nevertheless, heart metaphors do not occur in other literary works with such frequency as in the Old Testament and the Book of Mormon. For example, John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, shows a frequency of 26 heart metaphors in 80,774 words or 1 per 3,107.⁶

We see from this author, who wrote shortly after the publication of the King James Version, that the frequency of heart metaphors in the King James Version is not representative of the language in England about 1611, but rather results from the underlying Hebrew text. (One may also note in this respect that the King James Version of the New Testament exhibits a frequency of only 1 per 1,102, about half that of the Old Testament).⁷

Just as the frequency of heart metaphors in the King James Old Testament is not typical for English in 1611, when it was written, the frequent occurrence of heart metaphors in the Book of Mormon is not typical of the writing style in New England in the early 1800s. For example, Solomon Spaulding's *Manuscript Found*, which has been named as a forerunner to the Book of Mormon, yields a count of 25 occurrences in 39,240 words or 1 per 1,570, and this frequency would be even lower if it weren't for a Romeo-and-Juliet-type episode contained therein.

Finally, since it is obvious from the "thee's" "thou's" and other archaic expressions in the Book of Mormon that Joseph Smith was trying to imitate Biblical style in the Book of Mormon, could it be that he picked up this metaphoric pattern from the King James Version and applied it successfully, even with respect to frequency, in the Book of Mormon?

This would seem rather unlikely. In the first place, according to his mother, Joseph Smith, as a youth (i.e. before publication of the Book of Mormon), was not an avid reader of the Bible.⁸ Furthermore, what reading he may have done would have been mostly in the New Testament: the religious emphasis of his day was on the New Testament, not the Old. Similarly, the Biblical language he would have heard at local religious meetings would have been New Testament-type language. Consequently, it is not surprising that, when one detects Bible influence on the wording of passages in the Book of Mormon, it is generally from the New Testament that that influence comes,⁹ and, as noted above, heart metaphors are not unusually frequent in the New Testament.

There would seem, however, to be a precedent for someone's using a high frequency of heart metaphors in his writing due to the influence of the King James Bible. John Bunyan (1628-88) was an English preacher who wrote *The Pilgrim's Progress*, an allegorical treatise on the challenges which face a Christian who tries to live a Christian life.¹⁰ A count of heart metaphors in *The Pilgrim's Progress* gives 142 occurrences in 110,260 words or 1 per 776, not far from the Old Testament's 1 per 731.

How did he do it? First, he was an avid reader of the scriptures (in The King James Version) and consequently, he "was permeated with the English of the Bible."¹¹ Second, he wrote on a religious theme. The entire treatise is about the conflicts a Christian meets in life. Third, he chose to make the entire story an allegory, intentionally using metaphoric language throughout. Note his comments in his apology for the allegoric nature of his book:

[some complain that metaphors] 'want solidness' . . .
 They drown the weak; metaphors make us blind'
 Solidity, indeed, becomes the pen
 Of him that writeth things divine to men;
 But must I needs want solidness, because
 By metaphors I speak? Were not God's laws,
 His gospel laws, in olden times held forth
 By types, shadows, and metaphors? . . .
 The prophets used much by metaphors

To set forth truth; yea, who so considers
 Christ, His apostles too, shall plainly see,
 That truths to this day in such mantles be.
 Am I afraid to say, that holy writ
 Which for its style and phrase puts down all wit,
 Is everywhere so full of all these things—
 Dark figures, allegories? Yet there springs
 From that same book that lustre, and those rays
 Of light, that turn our darkest nights to days¹²

And so all his characters are given metaphoric names, among whom are Mr. Faint-heart, Mr. Great-heart, Mr. No-heart and Mr. True-heart. One is not surprised to find that metaphoric heart expressions occur in this work far above the average for writers of the time.

Joseph Smith is a different case, however. Although he demonstrated in later years his knowledge of the Bible, and one can see the influence of its language on his writings, since, as a youth, he was not an avid reader of the Bible, one would not expect to see a lot of its influence on his language early in his career.

Furthermore, The Book of Mormon, although it has a religious tone throughout, is not presented as a religious allegory, but contains, in addition to sermons, a great deal of purported secular history of wars and politics which do not tend to call forth metaphoric expressions. It does not have overall an allegorical flavor; consequently, the high frequency of heart metaphors comes as a surprise. There can be no comparison, here, between The Book of Mormon and *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

Since the usage of heart metaphors is strongly dependent on context or the subject matter dealt with, it alone is not sufficient for drawing any conclusions. After all, the Book of Mormon is in essence a religiously oriented document, and one should expect it to have more metaphoric religious language than normal secular writing. The fact that it has a frequency above the norm even for religious treatments, however, is an indication that it would be worthwhile to pursue the subject further.

In addition to frequency one should consider the nature or types of heart metaphors employed, that is, what sort of activities or qualities are attributed to the heart. The English language is quite amenable to a wide variety of heart expressions, many of which would overlap with heart expressions in other languages of the world including Hebrew or other Semitic languages. Others, however, are more peculiarly English. The frequency of heart metaphors in John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* would decrease somewhat if we were to eliminate such expressions as "dear heart," "poor heart" and "sweatheart" which are used when addressing someone. These are clearly English expressions not related to Hebrew or the Bible. Such blatantly English metaphors do not occur in the Book of Mormon. Its usage appears to be reasonably Semitic throughout.

We shall now turn to the usage of heart expressions in Hebrew. As can be noted in the Old Testament, the Hebrews attributed a wide variety of activities and qualities to the heart. Some of the connotations listed by Koehler and Gesenius include:

1) the middle or midst, 2) the inner man or soul, 3) mind, knowledge or understanding, 4) will, inclination, disposition, mood, 5) moral character, 6) the seat of emotions, courage and 7) the man himself (used figuratively in a reflexive sense).¹³ Some of these overlap with English usage, but some are more peculiarly Near Eastern. For example, whereas we consider the brain to be the center of thinking, in the Ancient Near East this function was attributed to the heart.

Let us look at some of those connotations applied to the heart which are unusual in English. With reference to heart meaning inner man or soul, one finds in the Old Testament expressions such as "grieved at his heart" (Gen 6:6) or "my heart and my flesh crieth out" (Ps. 84:2). Corresponding expressions in the Book of Mormon include "his heart again began to sicken" (Alma 31:1), "many whose hearts had swollen in them" (Alma 24:24) and "my heart cries wo unto this people" (Moroni 9:15).

In Hebrew the functions of the mind such as thinking, having knowledge and understanding are referred to the heart. Some examples from the Old Testament are "I also have a heart" (Job 12:3) (translated, "I also have understanding" in the King James Version), "the imaginations of their heart" (Ps 73:7) "his heart thinks so" (Isaiah 10:7). Also included under this heading might be "to steal the heart" which in addition to meaning "to estrange the affections" may have the meaning "to outwit or deceive."¹⁴ Compare the Book of Mormon example in Alma 31:22, "their hearts were not stolen away to believe in things to come."

Further Book of Mormon expressions where heart replaces mind include: "imagine up in their hearts" (Hel. 16:22), "neither can the hearts of man conceive" (3 Nephi 17:17), "the name be not blotted out of

your hearts" (Mosiah 5:12), "ye have not applied your hearts to understanding" (Mosiah 13:11), "thou had it in thy heart" (Alma 11:25), etc.

As in the case of the Old testament, The Book of Mormon applies to the heart many attributes and qualities in addition to those dealt with above. (Time limitations preclude my giving further examples along these lines).¹⁵ But is this usage of heart metaphors necessarily due to the influence of Hebrew? English, too, has its share of metaphoric heart expressions such as "heartless," "hard hearted," "big hearted," "have a heart," etc. Nevertheless, there is not a universal overlapping of expressions—some are characteristic for one language, some for the other. In the Book of Mormon the heart expressions are compatible with Semitic thought patterns throughout.

In summary then, the King James Version of the Old Testament contains a high frequency of heart metaphors, 1 per 731 words. This is due to the literal nature of the translation of the King James Version which reproduces the metaphoric speech patterns of the underlying Hebrew. The Book of Mormon also contains an unusually high frequency of heart metaphors, 1 per 603 words. This cannot be accounted for on the basis of common, religious, or literary speech patterns in Joseph Smith's environment. Furthermore, those heart metaphors employed, rather than being specifically English in nature, display a manner of expression which would be natural for one living in the Ancient Near East. Although one cannot refer back to the original language to look for the Hebrew source of these expressions as one can in the case of the Old Testament, the usage of heart expressions in the Book of Mormon, both with respect to their frequency and nature, could, in a similar way, be a reflection of a somewhat literal translation of an original document influenced by Hebrew terminology.

¹ Joseph Smith Jr., *The Book of Mormon* (Palmyra: E. B. Grandin, 1830) published by Wilford C. Wood as *Joseph Smith Begins His Work*, vol. I (Deseret News Press, 1958 [1963]). See also George Reynolds, *A Complete Concordance of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1930 [1968]) *sub voce* "heart(s)". Counts of the occurrence of heart metaphors in this paper have been determined through the use of concordances and/or personally counting the entries on every page. Total word counts, however, are approximations based on counting the words on several pages and taking an average. The resulting figures should be accurate to within 10% which is sufficiently precise for the purposes of this paper.

² See Robert Young, *Analytical Concordance to the Bible* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls Co., n.d.) *sub voce* "heart" and Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti Libros* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1953) pp. 468-70.

³ Ethan Smith, *View of the Hebrews* (Poultney: Vt, 1825) photomechanical reprint; Solomon Spaulding, *The "Manuscript Found." Manuscript Story* (Salt Lake city: Deseret News Press, 1886, [verbatim copy of the unpublished manuscript]).

⁴ Alexander Campbell, *Popular Lectures and Discourses* (John Burns: St. Louis, 1861), pp. 142-162, 186-212, 403-452, 516-530, 531-550.

⁵ Joseph Fielding Smith, ed., *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1954).

⁶ John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (New York: The Heritage Press, 1940). Milton lived in the mid-17th century (1608-1674).

⁷ Young, *Analytical Concordance*, pp. 468-69.

⁸ Lucy Mack Smith, *Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith the Prophet and His Progenitors for many Generations* (Independence, Missouri: Herald Publishing House, 1969), p. 72, reprint of 1912 ed.

⁹ See, for example, the list of Book of Mormon and Bible parallels in the authors M. A. Thesis, "Possible Lexical Hebraisms in the Book of Mormon (Words of Mormon - Moroni)" BYU, 1973, pp. 189-194.

¹⁰ John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress* (Collins, London: 1966), first published in two parts, 1678 and 1684.

¹¹ from dust jacket of above cited edition.

¹² Bunyan, p. 21-22.

¹³ See William Gesenius, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (trans. E. Robinson, eds. Brown, Driver and Briggs (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1906) pp. 523-25) and Koehler, pp. 468-70.

¹⁴ Gesenius, pp. 170, 523 (3.a.), Koehler, p. 270 (7).

¹⁵ For further examples see Pack, "Hebraisms," pp. 65-74.