Toward an Understanding of the Heart -- A Scriptural and Psychological Perspective

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TOWARD AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE HEART--A SCRIPTURAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE
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Abstract

The word heart was used by the Hebrews and Greeks as an equivalent of our modern words of mind, emotion, will and personality. The Lord who revealed his ideas about the heart anciently has continued to use this word in modern revelations, thus raising the possibility that it is still useful to us. This paper defines heart, examines seven ways a treasure is established in the heart, and draws implications for a theory of personality and psychotherapy. Recommendations for research are also included.

The purpose of this paper is to examine more closely the word heart as it is used in the four standard works of the Church as well as the talks and writings of general authorities of the Church. Heart is a fundamental word used in conceptualizing human behavior in the scriptures. The ancient Greeks and Hebrews used heart to encompass a number of concepts which today are the province of psychology. Is it possible to find useful concepts for a theory of personality and psychotherapy by examining more closely the scriptural teachings regarding the heart? This paper will first define heart, second, look at what it means to build a treasure in the heart, third, discuss ways treasures are built, and fourth, examine some implications for a theory of human personality and psychotherapy.

Defining the Heart

Most of us have used the word heart fairly glibly in daily discourse. However, the word is worth looking at less casually because of its ancient and lavish use in the scriptures. The New Testament usage is very similar while it does not altogether lose its physical reference, for it is “made of flesh” (II Corinthians 3:3) but it is the seat of the will (e.g. Mark 3:5), of the intellect (e.g. Mark 2:6-8), and of feeling (e.g. Luke 24 and 32). This means that “heart” comes the nearest to the New Testament terms to mean “Person.” Furthermore, there is no suggestion in the Bible that the brain is the center of consciousness, thought, or will. It is the heart that is so regarded, and though it is used for emotions also, it is also more frequently the lower organs (bowels, etc.), in so far as they are distinguished, that are connected with emotions.

“Mind” is the closest common term to the Biblical usage of “heart,” and many passages could well be so translated. (e.g. Eccles. 1:17, Matt. 5:28)

In Greek usage (New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology 1976), the heart was the seat of the emotions and feelings, of the instincts and passions. The Greeks thought of emotions like joy and sadness, courage and cowardness, strength and fear, love, hatred and anger. Further on the similarity of heart and mind, The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible (1962) says:

Because of its concrete character the Hebrew language can hardly express the idea “to think” except by the phrase “to say in the heart” (Gen. 27:41, Ps 10:6).” With the heart man makes his plans (Prov. 16:19) and seeks knowledge and understanding (Eccles. 8:16). The heart is the storehouse of memory (Prov. 3:3, Luke 1:77). So intimate is the connection of heart and thought that the English versions (of the Bible) sometimes render the Hebrew word for heart as “understanding (Job 12:3) or mind.”

“To steal the heart” means “to deceive the mind.”

Kallistos (1966) has summarized the scriptural meaning of the heart very well:

The term “heart” is of particular significance in the Orthodox doctrine of man. When people in the west today speak of the heart, they usually mean the emotions and affections. But in the Bible, as in most ascetic texts of the Orthodox Church, the heart has a far wider connotation. It is the primary organ of man’s being, whether physical or spiritual; it is the centre of life, the

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determining principle of all our activities and aspirations. As such, the heart obviously includes the affections and emotions, but it also includes much else besides: it embraces in effect everything that goes to comprise what we call a “person.”

Building a Treasure in the Heart

A number of scriptures and sayings of the Savior and the prophets emphasize the critical importance of building a good treasure in the heart. In Luke Christ made the following remarks about the role of the heart in human behavior:

A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth that which is evil: for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh.” (Luke 6:45)

In this scripture Christ likens the heart to a treasure chest, for it is out of our treasure chest that our thoughts and actions are generated. The heart is seen as a container of thought. In modern days the elders of the Church were told to “treasure these things up in your hearts…” (D&C 43:34)

However, a container does not have the power to fill itself; it must be filled by someone and it is critical to fill it with good things. Jesus scathingly rebuked the scribes and Pharisees by saying “Cleanse first that which is within...” (Matt. 23:25-28) Paul taught that the treasure in our heart will be evaluated when he said, “Even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God which trieth our hearts.” (I Thess. 2:4; see also Ps 17) He further proposed we should speak, “To the end he may establish your hearts unblameable before God.” (I Thess. 3:13) Thus we should “...answer them which glory in appearance, and not in heart.” (II Cor. 5:12) Samuel declared, “for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart.” (I Sam. 16:7)

Why is the quality of the treasure in our heart so important that it serves as the criteria by which the Lord judges man? The answer apparently lies in the belief of the prophets that the treasure in our hearts is the motivator of our thoughts and actions. For example, in Abraham 1:6-7, Abraham asserts that the heart of his fathers were “set to do evil...” Jesus taught that it was “out of the heart and not from without” that evil thoughts proceed. (Mark 7:15,21-23.)

If the contents of our heart are so important, what do the prophets have to say about how those contents are established, built up, maintained, or changed, and does this have relevance for theory building in education and psychotherapy today?

Man Controls the Treasure in His Heart

If we were to ask the question, “who controls the treasure in our heart--God, Satan or us?” the prophets would answer that we do. However, the individual cannot build a “good” treasure without God’s help. Brigham Young said, “Man cannot govern himself, he never was able to do it, and never will be able to until he receives this wisdom and intelligence which comes from God.” (Journal of Discourses, 1966, Vol. 1, p. 153) Further, he said, “In and of ourselves we have no power to control our minds and passions; but the grace of God is sufficient to give us perfect victory.” These statements imply that we are not able to build a good treasure by ourselves and that we must be submissive in order for God to become our instructor. Only then can we govern ourselves.

Brigham Young was once asked to explain the origin of thought. He replied,

The origin of thought was planted in our organization at the beginning of our being. This is not telling you how it came there, or who put it there. Thought originated with our individual being, which is organized to be as independent as any being in eternity. (ID. 1966, Vol. 2, p. 134)

In Mormonism we believe that individuals have free agency guaranteed by God. God cannot violate this basic principle of agency of man in exercise of free will. Of this Brigham Young said in 1866:

The volition of the creature is free. This is a law of their existence, and the Lord cannot violate his own law; were he to do this he would cease to be God...this is a law which has existed from all eternity and will continue to exist through all the eternities to come. Every intelligent being must have the power of choice, and God brings forth the results of the acts of his creatures to promote his kingdom and subserve his purposes in the salvation and exaltation of his children. (ID. 1966, Vol. 2, p. 171)

Nels L. Nelson, a Mormon apologist writing in 1904 declared that the primal intelligent entity must have been a free agent. He said:

This ultimate, uncreated being was a free agent. I reached that conclusion from the following reasons: being eternal and therefore co-eternal with the universe, it was beholden to no power whatever for its existence; and being indestructible, it might, in a negative way, defy all powers outside of itself combined. That is, if all forces of the universe and of all other intelligent beings beside itself, should combine to make it say yes, it might still say no, and maintain its attitude. This evidently is the real meaning of free agency: without such ultimate negative power, no being can be said to be free. (Nelson, 1904)

This statement on agency is reminiscent of Viktor Frankl’s description of agency as a prisoner in a war camp. When everything we normally consider as freedoms was taken away from him, he gained a belief in free agency because he still had the freedom to live or die. And, that is, to say “no” to this world.

In the Doctrine and Covenants the Lord explains further the relationship between law and agency:

And unto every kingdom is given a law; and unto every law there are certain bounds also and conditions. All beings who abide not in those conditions are not justified. (D&C 88:38-39)

Apparently, if we want to master a kingdom (or world order), we must learn the laws of that world and then live them. But we may choose not to obey those laws and pay the consequences of not being eligible to live in that world, and thus be relegated to some different world order where we are willing to abide the laws. The gospel teaches us that we do indeed have the power to say no and that no one or no influence can defy that power.

These statements, along with many scriptures which could be cited (Moses 3:16-17; 2 Nephi 2:11, 16, 17; D&C 58:28), teach that man is a free agent in his thinking, beliefs, emotions, and behavior. It is reasonable to
conclude that man can indeed build a treasure, either good or bad, in his heart—not only that he can, but he does—and that it can be built in no other way than through his volition.

From our discussion so far it is clear that the heart is like a container that can be filled with good or bad things, and that which comes out of us—speech and actions—is the result of what is in our treasure. We have also established that what is in our treasure is of immense concern to God and that we are in control of our individual treasures, but that they cannot become good treasures unless God becomes our instructor.

Building a Treasure

We now turn to the question of how we build a good treasure in our hearts? Brigham Young taught that the first principle of building this treasure was to inculcate true religion in our hearts. He defined religion as principles (ideas) and feelings:

If the religion we possess does not control and reign predominate over every other principle and feeling, we have not been schooled in it so as to learn our lessons correctly—we are not masters of this heavenly science. (J.D. 1966, Vol. 1, p.335)

To John Taylor it was very important to plant in the heart true beliefs and attitudes. Every belief and feeling is to be screened through this Gospel net of true ideas, principles, and feelings. To quote:

Man is an intelligent being, but how far does that intelligence fall short of that which regulates the world! He cannot even govern himself....If he can receive it from God as his instructor, he is then able to govern himself, possessing intelligence which he now knows nothing about; an intelligence which indeed is worthy of God and man. (J.D. 1900, Vol. 1, p. 153.)

Other scriptures corroborate this view. For example, Paul taught that:

For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their minds, and write them into their hearts: And I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people. (Hebrews 8:10; see also Hebrews 10:16)

Sources of the Treasure in the Heart

There are at least seven sources alluded to in the scriptures for developing a treasure, either good or bad, in our hearts. First, the treasure may be built through imagination. Imagination is the process or power of forming a mental image of something that is not or has not been seen or experienced. All persons have the capacity to make images in their minds to one degree or another. This process is apparently important in building a treasure as well as telling us what has already been established. To use a computer metaphor, imagination is a way to program as well as to provide a playback function to see what is already programmed. Some examples of scriptures that mention or allude to imagination include:

And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. (Genesis 6:5)

Oh Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, our fathers, keep this forever in the imagination of the thoughts of the heart of thy people, and prepare their hearts unto thee. (I Chron. 29:18)

Neither shall they walk anymore after the imagination of their evil heart; (Jer. 3:17), and speaking of the Jews who were wicked, Jeremiah added, “They walked in the counsels and the imagination of their evil heart, and went backward and not forward.” (Jer. 7:24)

Speaking to William Law, the Lord said, “He shall mount up in the imagination of his thoughts as upon eagles wings.” (D&C 124:99)

It was said of the events surrounding the birth of Jesus, “Mary kept all these things and pondered [imagined] them in her heart.” (Luke 2:19)

Second, the treasure is built by choosing what one thinks about. That an individual can select what he thinks or imagines may not be accepted by all theorists. Most of us recognize that thoughts and images are very fleeting, ethereal, and ficker in and out of consciousness like motion pictures with a variety of degree of color and clarity. The evidence presented by some neurotic and psychotic conditions seems to argue against the idea that we can always control our thoughts. For example, people with obsessive-compulsive thoughts strive endlessly to keep troublesome thoughts from entering their mind, and, to themselves, they seem powerless to be able to do so. The origin and dynamics behind obsessive-compulsive thinking are not fully known; but, following gospel principles, we have to conclude that normally thoughts are under the control of the individual.

Brigham Young said:

If you are injured by a neighbor, the first thought of the unregenerate heart is for God to damn the person who has hurt you. But if a person blesses you, the first thought that arises in you is, God bless that man; and this is the disposition to which we ought to cleave. But dismiss any spirit that would prompt you to injure any creature that the Lord has made, give it no place, encourage it not, and it will not stay where you are. You can let the black man, (bad thought) or the white man (good thought) into your house, as you please; you can say, Walk in, to both of them...When the white man presents himself, you know him at once by his complexion; the same when you see darkness and blackness advancing, you know it is from beneath, and you command it to leave your house. When the good man comes, he brings with him a halo of kindness which fills you with peace and heavenly comfort; invite him into your house and make him your constant guest. (J.D. 1966, Vol. 2, p. 134;135)

This same doctrine has in recent years been taught by Boyd K. Packer. To quote:

Years ago I put some signs in my mind. They are very clearly printed and simply read: No trespassing. No dumping allowed. On occasions it has been necessary to show them very plainly to others. I do not want anything coming into my mind that does not have some useful purpose or some value that makes it worth keeping—i have had to evict some thoughts a hundred times before they would stay out. I have never been successful until I have put something edifying in their place. (Packer, 1977)

Most of us believe that we have the power to control our thoughts. We do this by what we attend to. Each of us can pay attention to what we find interesting; and when self-discipline is exercised, we pay attention to what we find disinteresting. We also intuitively understand that the mind needs disciplining in what we
attend to. From the early years of school, one of the major tasks children must learn is to concentrate. When we do this we exercise control, by choice, over what we are paying attention to and thinking about. This leads us to our next method of building a treasure in the heart.

Third, the treasure in our heart is built by training. The early leaders of the Church believed that we established a treasure in our heart by training ourselves to think. Brigham Young said:

Do you know that it is your privilege to so live that your minds may be so well-schooled in the knowledge of your religion, that your minds are as perfectly under your control as are your bodies, except when they are nervous [psycotic or very neurotic]? ...Study to preserve your bodies in life and health, and you will be able to control your minds. And when you come to meeting, bring your minds with you. (J.D. 1966, Vol. 8, p. 135)

Elder Orson Hyde said, referring to the incident of Solomon and the two women:

To divide that child would have destroyed it, just like dividing the mind: it destroys its power and efficiency, let the mind be concentrated, and it possesses mighty power. It is the agent of the Almighty clothed with mortal tabernacles, and we must learn to discipline it, and bring it to bear on one point, and not allow the devil to interfere and confuse it, nor divert it from the great objective we have in view. (J.D. 1966, Vol. 7, p. 152)

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Fourth, thoughts that go into our treasure may be initiated to meet the needs of the body. The scriptures do not always describe man as being a unitary whole: They tell of a spirit and a body, which together are a living soul.

You are aware that many think the devil has rule and power over both body and spirit. Now, I want to tell you that he does not hold any power over man only so far as the body overcomes the spirit that is in a man, through yielding to the spirit of evil. The spirit that the Lord puts into a tabernacle of flesh is under the dictation of the Lord Almighty. (Brigham Young, J.D. 1966, Vol. 2, p. 255)

Brigham Young believed that thoughts may be motivated by the body but they need not be forced into the treasure in our heart. We only put them in our treasure when we choose to do so by being enticed by the flesh. Such fleshy thoughts may include fearful, worrisome, hedonistic, envious, sexually debasing, or other selfish impulses. When we persist or train ourselves to think these thoughts, then a fleshy treasure is established in our heart.

Fifth, Satan can be the source of thoughts which effect our treasure. Orson Hyde taught,

I have an idea that the devil comes and catches away the word that is sown in our hearts, to defeat the design that the Lord had in sowing it. Whereas, if we could control our minds, and not allow them to be caught away, then our eye would be single and the whole body would be full of light. (J.D. 1966, Vol. 7, p. 152; see also John 13:2, Acts 5:3)

In this thought, Elder Hyde is warning us that Satan is able to steal from the treasure of our heart by causing us to be confused and to doubt the true principles which have been placed there from the Lord's sources. In other words, Satan effects our hearts by enticing us to change our beliefs away from the truth.

Sixth, our spirit generates thoughts. Thoughts are apparently also generated from our individual spirits. Brigham Young taught the saints to:

Continually and righteously watch the spirit the Lord has put in you, and I will promise you to be led to righteousness, holiness, peace, and good order...Let the spirit take the lead, and bring the body and its passions into submission and you are safe. (J.D. 1966, Vol. 2, p. 256)

Thoughts can come from our own individual spirit, and thoughts from this source are reliable according to Brigham Young.

Seventh, we can build our treasure through revelation. John Taylor said,

What will enable you, brethren and sisters, to govern yourselves? The Spirit of God; and you cannot do it without the Spirit of the Living God dwelling in you. You must have the light of revelation, or else you cannot do it. If you get the Gift of the Holy Ghost and walk in the light of the countenance of the Lord, you can govern yourselves and families, that is, if you retain it by your good works. (J.D. 1966, Vol. 10, p. 55)

One of Job's antagonists gave us important insight about revelation. He said, "But there is a spirit in man: and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding. (Job 32:8) After King Benjamin's address to the Nephites--

he sent among them to find out if the people believed his words. And they all cried with one voice, saying: Yea, we believe all the words which thou hast spoken unto us; and also, we know of their surety and truth, because of the Spirit of the Lord Omnipotent, which has wrought a mighty change in us, or in our hearts, that we have no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually. (Mosiah 5:1-2)

According to these scriptures, man's treasure may be built directly in his self--by-passing the physical senses. This phenomenon of revelation is wonderful for the individual but problematic for development of a science of personality. Psychologists have struggled with the issue of individual consciousness. Subjective internal experience cannot be made public--thus violating one of the first principles of science, that data must be public.

The philosopher Polanyi distinguished between two kinds of knowledge. These two knowledges are propositional and tacit knowledge. Propositional knowledge is the knowledge of both reason and gossip. It is composed of all "interpersonally shareable statements," most of which--for most people--are observations of objects and events. Tacit knowledge may also dwell on objects and events, but it is knowledge gained from experience with them, experience with propositions about them, and rumination. A further elaboration of this idea was made by Tolstoy who proposed that "Through reason man observes himself; but he knows himself only through consciousness." Tacit knowledge is all that is remembered somehow, minus that which is remembered in the form of words symbols, or other rhetorical forms. (Stake, 1978)

Psychologists have been convinced that propositional
knowledge is the only sure foundation for building a science of psychology. However, public knowledge is rather removed from the most important and influential knowledge possessed by an individual—that of individual awareness and understanding. It is easy to be discouraged by the fact that God does not often reveal himself through public knowledge, but there are good reasons for this. Human beings are not motivated by public or propositional knowledge. We may know about something academically, and we may have this knowledge explained to us in great detail, but such knowledge is not the same as that understanding which convinces us and changes our attitudes and beliefs. The Lord reveals his mind directly to our hearts because it is more convincing. Tacit knowledge not only has direct access to our hearts but it is regulated by the Lord according to the amount and kind of information which we can process and absorb. This process is described as “line upon line and precept upon precept.” (II Nephi 28:30) Thoughts planted in our heart by revelation from God are indeed a treasure.

Summary

From our discussion thus far it can be seen that the quality of our heart, our treasure chest of desires, attitudes, beliefs, and understandings, is very crucial both within a religious framework and a psychological framework. We feel and act according to the treasure that is in our heart. To establish a good treasure is to work out one’s salvation as well as build strong emotional strength. The establishment of our treasure is an individual endeavor and cannot be accomplished except by individual choice. God is unable to build our treasure, and the devil is unable to add to or take away from our treasure without our voluntary consent. There are a number of processes by which we build our treasure. These include imagination; choice of thought; training our thinking; listening to the impulses of our body, Satan, and our own spirit; and, grandest of all—revelation. This paper has not attempted a comprehensive discussion of all the ways that a treasure may be established in the heart. There probably are more ways which could be documented.

Implications

The concept of “heart” has probably been overlooked by those attempting to build theories of personality, probably because it has appeared to be too imprecise to be useful. There are, however, some important implications which can be drawn about human personality by studying the way heart is used by the prophets in the scriptures.

The first implication is that thought and images become crucial in the development of the personality. As the proverb says, “For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he.” (Prov. 23:7) This suggests that if secular theories are to be drawn upon by us, those with a perceptual-cognitive orientation may be useful. The key to building a righteous and strong personality, or changing personality, appears to be in altering thinking and thinking habits. It would appear that with most of us emotions, habits, and motivations follow from thinking.

Distinguished writers discussing the phenomenon of the heart have used a computer metaphor. Schumacher (1977), an economist and philosopher, in pointing out the enormous superiority of the human over the animal because of our capacity for self-awareness, noted:

Now, self-awareness is closely related to the power of attention, or perhaps I should say the power of directing attention. My attention is often, or perhaps most of the time, captured by outside forces which I may or may not have chosen myself—sights, sounds, colors, etc.—or else by forces inside myself—expectations, fears, worries, interests, etc. When it is so captured, I function very much like a machine. I am not doing things; they simply happen. All the time, there exists, however, the possibility that I may take the matter in hand and quite freely and deliberately direct my attention to something entirely of my own choosing, something that does not capture me but is to be captured by me. The difference between directed and captured attention is the same as the difference between doing things and letting things take their course, or between living and “being lived.” No subject could be of greater interest; no subject occupies a more central place in all traditional teachings; and no subject suffers more neglect, misunderstanding, and distortion in the thinking of the modern world. (p. 66-67)

Wilder Penfield, a world famous neurologist and brain surgeon, published a summary of his findings about human personality under the title The Mystery of the Mind. He says:

Throughout my own scientific career I, like other scientists, have struggled to prove that the brain accounts for the mind. But now, perhaps, the time has come when we may profitably consider the evidence as it stands, and ask the question: Do brain mechanisms account for the mind? Can the mind be explained by what is now known about the brain? If not, which is the more reasonable of the two possible hypotheses: That man’s being is based on one element, or on two? (Penfield, 1975)

Dr. Penfield comes to the conclusion that “the mind seems to act independently of the brain in the same sense that a programmer acts independently of his computer, however much he may depend upon the action of that computer for certain purposes.”

An emphasis on thinking raises a number of empirical problems for investigators who use the scientific method. Much of the data language necessary for public communication of knowledge about thinking is undeveloped and many concepts are not operationalized. This state of affairs may require new methods and techniques not now available in traditional science. This does not mean, however, that new methods and techniques may not be developed. We need to learn a great deal more about what constitutes proper thinking, how people can be trained to think properly, and how to diagnose what has been programmed into the heart.

Another implication of this study into the heart is that somewhere in the human personality there is a programmable part (the heart) that is deeply profound and open-ended in the sense that it has access to intelligence that is outside the individual. The heart is programmed by another part of our personality that is immediately aware and attendant to thoughts and perceptions in the environment. This immediately aware part of the personality performs its programming largely by focusing on certain perceptions and by...
choosing to think about them in certain ways. There are
definite elements in the concept of heart as discussed in
the scriptures that are reminiscent of the unconscious as
used by Freud, but little to support the concept of divided
consciousness as used by Hilgard (Hilgard, 1977). The
heart as used in the scriptures appears to be more of a
servomechanism which turns repeated thoughts and
acts into habits which occur automatically and take place
at a level of thinking which is largely out of the
individual's awareness. Nowhere in the concept of heart
is the idea that there is a fully articulate subconscious
in the personality, which is unknown to the individual, as
postulated by Hilgard. The closest gospel concept to the
idea of divided consciousness is the individual spirit
belonging to the person or the possession of the person
by other spirits. The unconscious is a problem for some
concerned with harmonizing gospel and secular
concepts because it implies that motivation is
unconscious. Hence, the person cannot be responsible
for his behavior and is not a free agent. Our study of the
heart, however, suggests that we are totally responsible
for our programming. Once it has become habitual, free
choice enters into a less conscious area. But we can alter
our programming by examining our thoughts, and
changing them, or by inviting in the Holy Ghost, which
also cause a change in programming if such a change
is the will of God and of ourselves. However, it is
interesting to note that the prophets do not see that we
can program our heart in such a manner that we can
control ourselves or obtain salvation without help from
God. The new covenant, meaning the Gospel, is seen as
the basic rules and regulations which must be
programmed into the heart before the heart is truly
effective or right before God.

Another implication which can be drawn about
human personality is that right or proper programming
allows us to function totally in harmony with the world
order in which we find ourselves. When the heart is not
properly programmed we find ourselves out of harmony
and suffering as a result. If we are truly progressing as
the scriptures say "from one kingdom to another,"
through the stages of eternal progression, then one of
the great developmental tasks of this life is to learn to
live the rules of this kingdom or world order. When we
do not, we not only suffer, but apparently we are held
back from progressing to a more complex or higher
world order. This is rather consistent with certain
rational-emotive therapies and theories of personality
which suggest that individuals can overcome a number
of personal problems by learning to think rationally.
One of the criteria for rational thinking as used by
Maultsby (1975), for example, is that it must be based on
reality and not be magical thinking. Construing the
world as magical in a sense puts us in the position of
trying to be a creator of the world order, or, that is, we
are not willing to abide by the law of this kingdom and
are not "justified." (D&C 130:20-21) Many times in
therapy we hear the word "should." This situation
should be that, or that person should be this. Whereas,
according to this scripture, everything in the world is
exactly as it should be. Our problem is to figure it out
and to live in harmony with it.

Another implication is that our theories must rest
firmly on a foundation of free agency, and must focus on
an internal locus of control. Extreme environmental
determinism must be rejected. While it is true that the
environment can and does influence perception and
thinking, it is not the factor that directly determines
human personality. There is no doubt that environment
can be a tremendous influence on personality,
particularly in the early years of a person's life.

However, the scriptures are firm in asserting that the
individual chooses (or decides) to focus on certain
perceptions and to think certain thoughts. If we can
decide to think one way, we can also decide to think
another if we become aware of the options. Extreme
biological or hereditary determinism is also to be
rejected in building sound theory. There is nothing in
the concept of the heart that suggests that the body
controls the human personality. There is the implication
that it has certain needs which can influence our
thinking, but still we remain in control. If we decide to
follow our biological inclinations, we may do so, but we
may also decide not to by what we choose to think about.
It is implied from our study of the heart that the body is a
sort of wonderful machine which may run in control,
or out of control, at our own decision. A great deal of the
body's performance is determined by the programming
in the heart.

Based on our investigation into the heart, the
following areas of research appear to be useful in
building personality theory. First, methods and
procedures are required to enable us to conceptualize,
communicate and undertake investigations into the
establishment of a good heart or the changing of the
hardened or impure heart. These methods and
procedures may or may not be along traditional scientific
lines. It would indeed be beneficial if they could be
observable and measurable, but if it proves impossible or
unfeasible then other convincing procedures must be
developed.

Second, a clear concept of a good heart needs to be fully
defined, particularly within a psychological and
therapeutic framework. This paper has suggested some
of these characteristics but only in general terms. If
possible, the concepts need to be much more fully
operationalized. For example, what steps should be
undertaken to soften the hardened heart, or to program
peace into one's heart, or to change a fearful heart and so
on?

Third, methods need to be developed to diagnose and
evaluate the state of a person's heart. How can what has
been established in the heart be made open and visible? It
may not be possible for the treasure in a person's heart
to be made known publicly, but at least the individual
should have access to his own heart and be able to be
fully aware, when he desires, of what has been placed
there.

Fourth, methods need to be clearly identified and
operationalized which enable a person to change the
programming in his heart. Based on the scriptural
completely on page 27
discussion of the heart, these methods will have to include helping to put the person in touch with revelation, which can, apparently, not only reveal correct thoughts to the person but assist in making a rapid and permanent change in his programming. For purposes of psychotherapy, it would be most beneficial to identify, if possible, how programming takes place internally by the spirit and how we can draw on these powers.

It is admitted that many of these comments and suggestions for emphasis on building a theory of personality and psychotherapy may lead us into non-traditional and unpopular pathways. However, we can be tied down to the approval of our secular brethren or take a new and lonely road. Perhaps it is better to say with Isaiah, “Behold, I will do a new thing--...I will even make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.” (Isa. 43:19)

REFERENCES

Book of Mormon.
Doctrine and Covenants.
The Holy Bible