

A Mind That Loves
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This is the last in a series about the mindset that God desires for his people

The creedal nucleus of Deuteronomy is the Shema in 6:4—5, “Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord alone! Therefore, you shall love the Lord, your God, with your whole heart, and with your whole being, and with your whole strength.” The theological significance of this text cannot be overstated, but the intellectual import is also critical. The Shema depicts with upmost clarity “such a mind as this”—the mindset that God desires for his servants. The text shows the centrality of the mind in biblical spirituality and reveals how thinking covenantally impacts every area of life.

Verse 5 specifies the expected response to the declaration in verse 4—“love.” On one hand, given Israel’s deliverance from Egypt, “love” was a demand for loyalty and obedience to the transcendent Lord’s demands. Faithfulness to Yahweh meant Israel would not divert allegiance to other gods and their national domains. “Love,” therefore, was a rational assessment to choose faithfulness over apostasy, life over death, and blessing over woe (28:1—2, 15; 30:19).

On the other hand, “love” also entailed an emotional aspect. First, “love” arose from gratitude for the abundant grace bestowed on Israel as God’s “treasured possession.” Daniel I. Block writes:

The Lord, their divine Suzerain, who by grace had rescued them from the bondage of Egypt, and who by grace had called Israel to covenant relationship with Himself, and who by grace was calling on them to represent Him to the world, retained the exclusive right to define the appropriate response to the grace He had lavished on them. Total acceptance of the will of the divine Benefactor would be the correct and reasonable response.

Second, “love” was a response in kind, a form of divine imitation. The Lord had clearly demonstrated his affection for Israel through their calling, deliverance, sustenance, and law (4:37; 7:13; 10:15; 23:5). Moreover, he carefully planned their well-being, so that they would flourish in Canaan. He demonstrated benevolent intentionality toward Israel as their Lord. He had saved them from bondage and did not subjugate them by brute force, unlike other nations and their deities that attacked one another for spoils and glory. Thus, Israel’s duty was to mimic Yahweh’s intentionality as stewards and image-bearers, seeking his glory on earth and the best interests of their countrymen as a testimony to the nations (4:6).

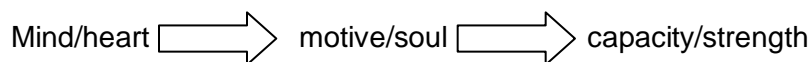
The word “heart” denotes more than emotions and it often refers to the mind. Indeed, the heart functions, as it were, as an intellectual rudder for the soul. Michael Carasik depicts the heart as the “organ of knowing and understanding.” It includes the mental capacity to receive, inventory, and evaluate data. When it functions well, the heart acquires critical understanding. In intellectual terms, it “knows that” (facts about God and the world), “knows how” (learning in relationship), “knows why” (purpose and obligation), “knows who” (knowledge derived from and orientated to God), and “knows where” (knowing given by God through creation and covenant). With reference to the Shema (and chapters 4—6 generally), therefore, “such a heart as this” discerns an essential fact: there is only one God—Yahweh Elōhīm—and that thinking must be conditioned by covenantal “love.”

The term “soul” appears in the Old Testament with a range of meaning, depending on context. The “soul” includes the imagination and curiosity. In many settings, however, such as the Shema, it also refers to desire—physical, psychological, and spiritual. As such, the “soul” is associated with longing, motivation, and passion. Psychologically, our deepest motives (often hidden or unknown), real aspirations, and what one is willing to do (rightly and wrongly) arise from the “soul.” For this reason, Paul Overland adds that “to love God with the soul” means to advance one’s devotion to God beyond all longings of a mental or physical sort.”

“Strength” in this context it conveys an economic nuance: abundance, wealth or resources, that is, stewardship. Israelites were obligated to use all that God endowed—material assets, economic prowess, physical capacity, social capital, personal gifting, and intellectual ability—for his honor and human well-being alone. Thus, “to love God with your whole strength” meant that nothing could be withheld for egoistic or secular motives or rededicated for illicit religious affiliation.

The threefold “whole” (or “all”) indicated that every aspect of life should be fully engaged in loving God with covenantal fidelity. The mind, desire, and capacity—in that order—should be dedicated to the Lord. To love God according to the Shema entailed a life dedicated to divine imitation: to reflect God’s thoughts, motives, and beneficence in accord with creational and covenantal norms. Similarly, to love others required God-oriented thinking, desire, and conduct.

Scholars have noted a phenomenological pattern associated with verses 4—5. The process implied listening, learning, and application. A mind informed by revelation generated godly motivation and fostered stewardship that demonstrated love in action. In other words, the Shema showed the centrality of the mind and how thinking covenantally impacted every area of life. This principle can be illustrated by the diagram below:



In summary, servants of Yahweh’s kingdom learn about their Lord and what he expects from them intellectually and existentially. They discover how to use their minds profitably as apprentice rulers, architects, economists, and philosophers in this world. They learn what walking in his ways, keeping his statutes, and heeding his voice means intellectually. In these ways, they nurture minds that serve the one and only Lord with every motive and every resource provided them