

YOM KIPPUR
5778

Sydney and Max are having coffee. It's the end of July and they haven't seen each other for a while. Sydney lets out a kretch and Max asks what's wrong? Sydney says that June was the worst month they ever had, his two top salesmen quit and went over to his main competitor and the I.R.S. audited them and they got slapped with serious penalties. Max says he is sorry to hear that and his July has been the worst time he has ever experienced. He tells Sydney his wife had serious surgery and was still not out of the woods, his brother got divorced and moved in with them and just a few days ago his son was indicted for embezzlement. What could be worst Max asks? Sydney looks at him and says, "August."

There is no shortage of tzoris; there is plenty to go around. Have you thought about why there is a concept about repairing the world, Tikkun Olam? If the world wasn't broken, we would not need to fix it. There are two fixings, two tikkunim: the Tikkun of the World and our individual tikkun, Tikkun Atzmi. They are interrelated; the more whole and healed each of us becomes, the more whole and healed the world is. Our Kabbalists saw the entire Universe created by the breaking of divine vessels thereby releasing the energy that ultimately created our world. As observed: "You need to break eggs to make an omelet." Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav insisted that we must never forget if we have the power to break something, we have the power to fix it be it a marriage, family, friendships, ourselves and even a society.

Rabbi Paul Steinberg taught that there is an innate brokenness to the human condition. Thankfully, there is much to be thankful for but we would not need to repair the world—Tikkun Olam—if it wasn't broken. Our Torah is a book filled with stories of broken and imperfect people: Adam and Eve, Jacob and Esau and Joseph and his brothers to mention a few. Being broken does not mean being defeated; it means that we are alive. Being broken is not the problem; the problem is when our brokenness takes away our hope and determination. The author, Louise Penny, wrote: "We are all marred, scarred and imperfect. We make mistakes. We do things we deeply regret. We are tempted and sometimes we give in to that temptation. Not because we are bad or weak, but because we're human. We are a crowd of faults. But know this. There is always a road back; if we have the courage to look for it, and take it. I'm sorry, I was wrong, I don't know...I need help. These are signposts; these are the cardinal directions."

We read in Genesis (41:52): "God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction." God works with those who are afflicted and broken provided we work on ourselves as well. When was the world more shattered than during the Holocaust? Kalonymus Kalman Shapiro, the rabbi of the Warsaw Ghetto, said the Holocaust tore God's heart apart; God cried as G-d never cried before. If God cried, what did all the victims, all those who suffered do? Our world is still not healed from the Shoah. In Isaac Bashevis Singer's novel, "Enemies, A Love Story," Shifrah Puah, a survivor who lives in Brooklyn, is constantly breaking glasses and plates because she is still broken. Victor Frankel taught that "to live is to find meaning in suffering." It may be the hardest thing to do but it is the only way to live meaningful lives after pain and suffering; it is

the only way to go on. The author Lilly Brooks Dalton wrote: "There are times when I didn't think I could feel whole again. How long does it take," she asks, "to heal? Longer than we want," she answers. What happened in Charlottesville just 72 years after the Holocaust is an example of how broken things still are and how long fixing can take. No one who is committed to Tikkun Olan should be mistaken about this.

Rabbi David Wolpe, who will be coming here at the beginning of November, reminds us that "spirituality is not always warm and fuzzy. It can be filled with fear and out of fear can come reverence." Rabbi Wolpe tells us that "our relationship with G-d can be intensified through suffering and through suffering we can get closer to G-d and be set free." We must not romanticize or glorify suffering; we are to grow and learn from it. Rabbi Wolpe knows; he had two surgeries for a brain tumor and lymphoma and his wife had cancer at the same time. Human beings have the resiliency and strength to engage in a type of alchemy: turning pain and sadness into healing and comfort. There is no room for being Pollyannaish and naïve. There is all the room for being determined and hopeful. The State of Israel was established less than three years after the Holocaust.

The author Paole Coehle wrote that "everyone is trying to control his or her own unhappiness" and Judaism teaches that we are able to control how we deal with our unhappiness. Trying to control our unhappiness so that it does not take over our lives is a huge spiritual task. In the U'netaneh Tokef prayer, as Rabbi Jaffe reminded us last night, we do not say that teshuvah, tefilah and tzedakah nullify the decree; they give us the strength to deal with the decree. U'netaneh Tokef starkly tells us that reality often is not what we want but challenges and encourages us to encounter reality with hope. Hope is how we control our unhappiness. The Psalmist (Psalm 66:20) says: "You have tried us O G-d, refining us as silver is refined." He not only tells that us he has suffered but that he has survived and emerged uplifted. Many know that the difficult experiences they have had are what led them to the strong and special place where they are now. Simply being in the presence of someone who has experienced hardships and even tragedies but who is thankful and life affirming is a powerful lesson. On a deep level, what does counting our blessings mean? Do our children and grandchildren know what their blessings are and how to count them?

Our rabbis understood that where sorrow dwells, joy can dwell. When preparing for a funeral with a family they will often go from tears to laughter in seconds and the same when sitting at the shiva table. If one can feel sadness one is able to feel joy. Sadness is not brokenness unless it smothers our hope and love. Death is certainly a break but not an end; allowing ourselves to grieve allows us to heal. Rabbi Nachman said that it is a big mitzvah to be in simchah always. Rabbi Nachman suffered from severe depression and he and his wife buried a child. He knew the importance of joy. He taught that it is no small thing for a person to bring even a little joy to another person. We are concerned with being significant. How much more significant can we be than to bring comfort and joy to another human being who is hurting? What if we taught our children this?

Anne Riophe tells us that sharing our personal stories with others and allowing ourselves to hear the personal stories of others is healing. Doing so connects us to something bigger than ourselves, makes us feel a part of something beyond ourselves and reminds us that everyone is in this thing we call life together. The story of the Jewish people is that we were born of brokenness, poverty and slavery. But our story does not end in the mud pits of Egypt or in the trials of the wilderness; we continue on and enter the Land. The message of this story of origin is that there is hope. Slavery of any kind breaks and freedom heals. Much of the brokenness in our country today is from slavery and our not understanding and accepting this keeps breaking us more and more. The Exodus story is our story of going from brokenness to wholeness, our story as to what is possible, our story of responsibility to help others do the same. It is a story of Tikkun Olam.

Rabbi George Gittelman wrote: “This is who we are, this is the human condition. We can’t escape it. But we can work with it.” When we allow it, our High Holy Days can move us from being broken to being more whole. If we continue with our denying, rationalizing, blaming and pretending we will remain broken. Accepting the truth of our lives, be it of our selfishness or racism and taking responsibility to work on ourselves be it our compassion or honesty makes us more whole. Genuinely asking for forgiveness makes us more whole and genuinely forgiving makes us more whole. There can be no wholeness without truthfulness. Lies break us and break those around us.

Memory allows us to remember our losses and failures but also, our blessings and accomplishments. There is no healing and wholeness without memory. This is why our remembering during Yizkor is so very important. We remember the Sabbath so that we can be made more whole by its restfulness and peace. We remember coming out of Egypt so that we will remember that we can come out of the Egypts of our lives and break the shackles that bind us. We remember Amalek so that we will stand up to injustice and human caused suffering that breaks our world. Our pain, burdens and brokenness are too much for us to carry by ourselves. Wholeness is not achievable in isolation. We need each other and we need to be there for each other. This is why community is essential if we are to be more whole and why we are concerned with the increasing number of American Jews, especially younger Jews, who choose not to be part of synagogues and Jewish communities. Community is an antidote to egotism and self-entitlement which break us and those around us. The rabbis knew this and created our Yom Kippur confessions—Ashamnu and Al Cheyt—so that we all confess together in full view of each other. Being vulnerable, honest, equal and, if you will, all standing naked on Yom Kippur makes us more whole.

What happened to the broken first set of tablets after Moses threw them to the ground? Our rabbis tell us that they were put in the holy Ark next to the new tablets. Yom Kippur is considered to be the day that Moses came down from Mt. Sinai with the new tablets; the day the Israelites were forgiven for the sin of the Golden Calf. The broken tablets were considered as holy as the new ones. There is a beautiful teaching about the elderly who may be broken due to old age but who remain holy like the broken tablets. Just as our ancestors respected the broken tablets so must we show respect to the elderly who may be physically and cognitively

limited. Every human being is created holy and remains holy throughout his or her life. Our discomfort with and disregard of the old and frail of mind and/or body is our brokenness, not theirs. As we age and become physically compromised, we must not think that who we are in our essence is broken or that our lives are not important. When we are old we remain holy and even if others do not remember this, we must. Too many in our culture do not understand this and for this reason add to our brokenness.

Tisha b'Av is the saddest day of the Jewish year; a day where destruction reigned and all was broken. Our rabbis tell us that the Messiah will be born on Tisha b'Av. From the darkness, suffering and death will come redemption. Lady Gaga said: "You have to go to that broken place of your heart to write songs." How much beauty—music, art and poetry—has been born out of brokenness, how much hope and inspiration? How many of us have experienced life becoming good after life was difficult and painful? How many of us have known joy after profound sadness? How many of us have picked ourselves up after falling and giving up hope? For the Jewish people, how many times has this happened? Let us remember Shimon Peres' words: "Optimists and pessimists die in the same way. They just live differently."

We break a glass at our weddings. Jews are not afraid of or superstitious about brokenness. Brokenness is a part of life. The brokenness at weddings directs us to think about the fact that although we are celebrating a simchah, not everyone is. We break the middle matzo at the seder encouraging us to search for the wholeness hidden within our fragmented lives. Rambam (Mishnah Keilim 2:1) tells us that breaking a ritually impure earthen vessel is the only way to purify it. If it remains whole, it cannot be purified. Our rabbis taught that a broken heart is most precious to G-d. A broken heart opens us up to deep and honest feelings and truths. The Kotzker Rebbe taught that there is nothing more whole than a broken heart and another hasidic rebbe said the problem Jews have is that we no longer cry during Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur.

Sometimes all we have to offer to G-d is our brokenness. Hidden within a broken heart is a heart made whole. There is a story of a woman who for two years carried water home in two buckets on a pole across her shoulders. One bucket had a crack in it and was half empty by the time the woman arrived home. One day this broken bucket began to cry. When the woman asked the bucket why, it responded that every day it loses its water as the woman walks home and it feels inferior and ashamed. The woman then said: "Have you not noticed that your side of the road is filled with beautiful and fragrant flowers whereas the other side is barren?"