

# When We Feel Broken

*When we feel broken*

*When the ground beneath our feet has slipped away*

*When we are unanchored*

*When we are vulnerable*

*We need somewhere to turn.*

*For some of us that is G-d*

*For others that is our family*

*For others that is our community*

*But each of us needs something to cling to, to hold dear.*

I say words like this at the cemetery when explaining why we say words like *Tziduk HaDin*, that G-d is our rock in whom there is no flaw; or the *Mourners Kaddish*, when we sanctify and praise G-d's great name. Why do we say these words at a time when we might be angry and frustrated with G-d? Certainly not for G-d's sake but for our own. When we are broken, when we are rudderless, we need something to hold onto.

In the reading *As We Remember Them*, I think about the line “When we have decisions which are difficult to make, we remember them.” Those times in life we are at a crossroads, we think about what would the beloved matriarch or patriarch of our family have said? How would they have prompted us to act?

The connection to Shavuot is clear: the ark that Israel carried around the desert held two sets of tablets: the new intact ones that Moses had written and the broken ones that had come directly from G-d.<sup>1</sup> Why maintain the broken tablets?

Rabbi Aaron Goldscheider writes, “The bereaved, and especially those that have suffered painful loss, often live their life with two compartments within one heart – the whole and the broken, side by side. To be a good friend is to know this and to be respectful of the brokenness that always remains.” How often do we want to take away someone’s pain and sadness, to fix their suffering, rather than be present with them as they currently are? Our job is not to be the fixer but rather

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<sup>1</sup> Babylonian Talmud Bava Batra 14b

the one who is present with people, acknowledging their losses and their grief.

Rabbi Goldscheider continues, “The idea of brokenness appears in a number of significant places in Judaism: We sound the shofar with the broken notes of the *shevarim*; the Hebrew root ‘*shever*’ meaning ‘broken’. We begin the Seder breaking a whole piece of matzah. When the bride and groom stand under the wedding canopy, a glass is shattered into pieces. These important symbolic rituals represent shattered and broken events in both our personal and communal lives. Breaking the matzah represents the broken life of the slave, the repentant spirit of a remorseful person is symbolized by the broken sounds of the Shofar, and the breaking of the glass represents a world that is incomplete without the presence of the holy Temple in Jerusalem. The two sets of tablets in the Ark offer a striking metaphor. Namely, that brokenness and wholeness coexist side by side, even in Judaism’s holiest spot – in the heart of the holy Ark.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.aish.com/h/9av/oal/The-Broken-Tablets.html>

At times we feel complete, that nothing can touch us. At others we feel like we are the lowest of the low. Humility teaches us to occupy the middle ground between self-effacement and haughtiness. We should always strive for balance, yet at painful times like losing a loved one, we sink to great depths. It is our job, when we feel broken, to be present with our experience as it is and work day by day towards wholeness, recognizing that there will always be a void.

One prayer, based off Psalm 147, that illustrates this is Healer of the Broken-Hearted by Shir Yaakov. We sang this at the rally at the Mid Island Y following the murder of 11 precious souls at Tree of Life congregation in Pittsburgh. It goes “Healer of the broken-hearted, Binder of the wounds, Counter of uncountable stars, You know who we are.” No other person can understand who you are or what you are going through. Only G-d knows. When we are broken, no one can tell us to snap out of it; only we can do it with G-d’s help. When we are in mourning, no one can give us advice or rationalize how we can escape from it.

This has been a very difficult year of loss for the Jericho Jewish Center. A number of our steadfast congregants lost parents. While I cannot help you restore a sense of wholeness or a “new normal,” my heart goes out to you. I cannot fix but I can be present with you as we remember our loved ones who came before us. The brokenness and the wholeness lie side-by-side in the holy ark.

*To Hold in awe*

*Those words of law*

*Inscribed in stone*

*Which God had hewn,*

*Then to cause truths*

*Those laws impart*

*To transpose to*

*The human heart.<sup>3</sup>*

We continue with *Yizkor* in our booklets.

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<sup>3</sup> Lucille Frenkel, “Goal of Shavuot Prayer,” in *A Jewish Adventure* (Milwaukee, WI: The Eternity Press, 1983), p. 159.