



The Wholeness of a Broken Heart

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Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Kotzk

Nothing is more whole than a broken heart.

Estelle Frankel, *Sacred Therapy: Jewish Spiritual Teachings on Emotional Healing and Inner Wholeness*, pages 16 & 19

From the mystical perspective, reality is always both broken and perfect all at once.

The fact that darkness is the womb from which all life emerges is understood by the Kabbalah to have deep spiritual significance. It implies an understanding that creation, in all its forms, emerges out of its opposite, the state of emptiness. All life moves in cycles from darkness into light, from contraction into expansion, brokenness into wholeness. In the symbolism of the Kabbalah, the darkness of night is associated with the fragmented state known as exile - the state of being disconnected and dislocated from one's true place.

Psalms 137

(1) By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat, sat and wept, as we thought of Zion. (2) There on the poplars we hung up our lyres, (3) for our captors asked us there for songs, our tormentors, for amusement, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion." (4) How can we sing a song of the LORD on alien soil? (5) If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand wither; (6) let my tongue stick to my palate if I cease to think of you, if I do not keep Jerusalem in memory even at my happiest hour. (7) Remember, O LORD, against the Edomites the day of Jerusalem's fall; how they cried, "Strip her, strip her to her very foundations!" (8) Fair Babylon, you predator, a blessing on him who repays you in kind what you have inflicted on us; (9) a blessing on him who seizes your babies and dashes them against the rocks!

תהילים קל"ז

(א) עַל נְהַרֹת | בְּכֹל יְשָׁם יִשְׁבְּנוּ גַם-בְּכִינֹו
בְּזָכְרֵנוּ אֶת-צִיּוֹן: (ב) עַל-עַרְבִים בְּתוֹכָהּ
תְּלִינֹו כַּנְּרוֹתֵינוּ: (ג) כִּי יִשָּׁם שְׁאֵלֵנוּ שׁוֹבֵינֹו
דְּבַר-יְשִׁיר וְתוֹלְלֵנוּ שְׁמַחָהּ שִׁירוּ לָנוּ
מְשִׁיר צִיּוֹן: (ד) אֵיךְ נִשְׁיֵר אֶת-שִׁירֵי עַל
אֲדָמַת נֶגֶר: (ה) אִם-אֲשַׁפְּתֶהּ יְרוּשָׁלַם
תִּשְׁפַח יְמִינִי: (ו) תִּדְבַּק-לְשׁוֹנִי | לְחֶכְי אִם-
לֹא אֲזַכְּרֶכִי אִם-לֹא אֶעֱלֶה אֶת-יְרוּשָׁלַם עַל
רֹאשׁ שְׁמַחָתִי: (ז) זָכַר יי | לְבָנֵי אֱדוֹם אֶת-
יוֹם יְרוּשָׁלַם הַאֲמָרִים עָרוּ | עָרוּ עַד הַיְסוּד
בָּהּ: (ח) בְּת-בְּכֹל הַשְׂדוּדָה אֲשַׁרִי שִׁישְׁלֵם-
לָךְ אֶת-גְּמוּלָךְ שְׁגַמְלָתָ לָנוּ: (ט) אֲשַׁרִי |
שִׁיאֲחֹז וְנִפְץ אֶת-עַלְלֵיךְ אֶל-הַסֶּלַע:

Michael Fishbane, *Sacred Attunement*, page 19

But then it may happen that the thoughtless ordinariness of daily life is jolted and gives way to a more elemental specificity. Suddenly something occurs that claims us with an overwhelming intensity, and floods our sensibilities without any accompanying thoughts of its human meaning. Rather, the sense of rupture is all, and it seems as if primordial energies have burst from the depths and ripped the veil normally stretched over things, concealing them in blandness. Such moments may occur within the bounds of nature, as with the uprush of some overwhelming vista or sound; they may happen in the human world, as with the unsettling impact of sudden death or love; or they may happen through the creations of culture, as with the capacity of certain compositions to propel us to the edge of sensibility. We then shudder before what is given to us from the fullness of phenomenal existence, manifesting mysteries of the surge of things at the core of world-being. Just here is an absolute “somethingness,” pulsing in elemental specificity - for we suddenly sense the raw plenitude of existence; but here too, simultaneously, is seems, is a revelation of primordial “nothingness,” yawning like an “inconceivable chasm of invulnerable silence in which cataclysms of galaxies rave mute as amber” - for we also sense that the event is in excess of human meaning. In time we come back to our normal selves, and when we do we more knowingly confirm this happening and ourselves as well, answering the ever-present question “Where are you?” with the confession “Here I am - just here.” On such occasions, consequent to the restabilization of consciousness, a renewed subjectivity is aroused in us (the “here *I* am”), together with an awakened sense of the great immensity in which we are suffused, now experienced at a particular time and place (the “just *here*”).

Yehudah Halevi (c. 1141), “My Heart is in the East,” trans. Nina Salaman, 1924, JPS, *Essential Texts of Zionism*

My heart is in the east, and I in the uttermost west--
How can I find savour in food? How shall it be sweet to me?
How shall I render my vows and my bonds, while yet
Zion lieth beneath the fetter of Edom, and I in Arab chains?
A light thing would it seem to me to leave all the good things of Spain --
Seeing how precious in mine eyes to behold the dust of the desolate sanctuary.

Babylonian Talmud Megillah 29a

§ It is taught in a *baraita*: Rabbi Shimon ben Yoḥai says: Come and see how beloved the Jewish people are before the Holy One, Blessed be He. As every place they were exiled, the Divine Presence went with them. They were exiled to Egypt, and the Divine Presence went with them, as it is stated: “Did I reveal myself to the house of your father when they were in Egypt?” (I Samuel 2:27). They were exiled to Babylonia, and the Divine Presence went with them, as it is stated: “For your sake I have sent to Babylonia” (Isaiah 43:14). So too, when, in the future, they will be redeemed, the Divine Presence will be with them, as it is stated: “Then the Lord your God will return with your captivity” (Deuteronomy 30:3). It does not state: He will bring back, i.e., He will cause the Jewish people to return, but rather it says: “He will return,” which teaches that the Holy One, Blessed be He, will return together with them from among the exiles.

מגילה כ"ט א:ד'

תניא ר"ש בן יוחי אומר בוא וראה
כמה חביבין ישראל לפני הקב"ה
שבכל מקום שגלו שכינה עמהן
גלו למצרים שכינה עמהן שנאמר
(שמואל א ב, כז) הנגלה נגליתי
לבית אביך בהיותם במצרים וגו'
גלו לבבל שכינה עמהן שנאמר
(ישעיהו מג, יד) למענכם שלחתי
בבלה ואף כשהן עתידין ליגאל
שכינה עמהן שנאמר (דברים ל, ג)
ושב יי אלקיך את שבותך והשיב
לא נאמר אלא ושב מלמד שהקב"ה
שב עמהן מבין הגליות

Yehuda Amichai, “A Man Doesn’t Have Time in His Life,” *The Selected Poetry of Yehuda Amichai*

A man doesn't have time in his life
to have time for everything.
He doesn't have seasons enough to have
a season for every purpose. Ecclesiastes
Was wrong about that.

A man needs to love and to hate at the same moment,
to laugh and cry with the same eyes,
with the same hands to throw stones and to gather them,
to make love in war and war in love.
And to hate and forgive and remember and forget,
to arrange and confuse, to eat and to digest
what history
takes years and years to do.

A man doesn't have time.
When he loses he seeks, when he finds
he forgets, when he forgets he loves, when he loves
he begins to forget.

And his soul is seasoned, his soul
is very professional.

Only his body remains forever
an amateur. It tries and it misses,
gets muddled, doesn't learn a thing,
drunk and blind in its pleasures
and its pains.

He will die as figs die in autumn,
Shriveled and full of himself and sweet,
the leaves growing dry on the ground,
the bare branches pointing to the place
where there's time for everything.