

Entering the "Zone of Memory" prior to Yizkor on Yom Kippur, we have a feeling of brokenness. It is augmented by the brokenness we are witnessing after 10 months of weekly protests in Israel, and the 50th anniversary of the Yom Kippur War. The veterans of that war are a particular study in brokenness. Despite winning that war, it shattered Israel's soul. Post Six-Day-War Israel was jubilant and triumphant. Post Yom-Kippur-War Israel was introspective and reserved. Veterans of the Yom Kippur War are playing a prominent role in the current protests. They fought to save the country 50 years ago, and they are fighting to save it again today, standing as broken heroes before a broken public. Brokenness is a theme that we find in the Mahzor. We find it in the Selichot section with this Aramaic line:

רַחֲמֵנָא דַּעֲנִי לְתַבִּירִי לְבָא עֲנִינָן.  
 רַחֲמֵנָא דַּעֲנִי לְמַפְיְכִי רוּחָא עֲנִינָן.

Here it is in Hebrew.

רַחֲמֵנוּ הַעֲוֹנָה לְשֹׁבְרֵי הַלֵּב עֲנֵנוּ.  
 רַחֲמֵנוּ הַעֲוֹנָה לְנִמְוָכֵי הַרוּחַ עֲנֵנוּ.

And in English:

*May the Merciful One who answers  
 the brokenhearted answer us.  
 May the Merciful One who answers  
 the downtrodden answer us.*



We have similar Hebrew phrases for **brokenhearted** or **broken of spirit** in the book of Psalms and Isaiah.

קְרוֹב ה' לְנִשְׁבְּרֵי לֵב וְאֵת דַּכְּאֵי רוּחַ יוֹשִׁיעַ. תה' לד:יט	<b><i>The LORD is close to the brokenhearted; those crushed in spirit He delivers.</i></b> Psalm 34:19
זָבַחֵי אֱלֹהִים רוּחַ נִשְׁבְּרָה לֵב נִשְׁבֵּר וְנִדְכָּה אֱלֹהִים לֹא תִבְזֶה. תה' נא:יט	<b><i>True sacrifice to God is a broken spirit; a broken heart, and crushed spirit God, you will not despise.</i></b> Psalm 51:19
פִּי כֹה אָמַר רֵם וְנִשְׂא שָׁכֵן עַד וְקָדוֹשׁ שְׁמוֹ מְרוֹם וְקָדוֹשׁ אֲשַׁכּוֹן וְאֵת דַּכָּא וְשַׁפְלָא רוּחַ לְהַחְיֹת רוּחַ שְׁפִלִים וְלַהַחְיֹת לֵב נִדְכָּאִים. ישעיהו נז:טו	<b><i>For thus said the One who high aloft forever dwells, whose name is holy: on high and in holiness I dwell yet with the contrite and the lowly in spirit—reviving the spirits of the lowly, reviving the hearts of the contrite.</i></b> Isaiah 57:15

The theme of brokenness resonates deeply in the spiritual life of every worshiper. Everyone is likely to feel broken at one time or another, certainly in the aftermath of loss or in a moment of societal turmoil. It is not difficult to see how

this theme would inspire the theological reflections that we find in Psalms and Isaiah: God is close to the brokenhearted; God sees the supplication of the brokenhearted as a kind of sacrificial offering to which God responds lovingly; God revives those who are broken. Not surprisingly, the rabbis develop this theme in the following teachings.

***Being a Broken Human Being is Kosher in God's Eyes***

אָמַר רַבִּי אַבָּא בַר יוּדָן: כָּל מַה שֶּׁפָּסַל הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא בְּבִהְמָה הַכָּשִׁיר בְּאָדָם, פָּסַל בְּבִהְמָה: עֹרֹת אוֹ שְׂבוּר אוֹ חֲרוּץ אוֹ יִבְלֵת (וַיִּקְרָא כַּב, כַּב) וְהַכָּשִׁיר בְּאָדָם לֵב נִשְׁבֵּר וְנִדְכָּה. (תהלים נא:יט) וַיִּקְרָא רַבָּה ז:ב	<b>Rabbi Abba bar Yudan said:</b> All of the blemishes that God disqualified for sacrifice in animals are blemishes that God affirms as acceptable in a human being. Those that God disqualified among the animals were: <i>the blind or broken, or mutilated or [with] spotted-eye...</i> (Lev. 22:22) and those among human beings that God affirmed as acceptable, are ones with a <b>broken heart and a crushed spirit.</b> (Psalm 51:19) Lev. Rabbah 7:2
--	--

In Leviticus 22:20-24 we read that sacrificial animals were supposed to be blemish free. Animals that had deformities or broken limbs were not acceptable for sacrifice. Similarly, priests who were afflicted by the same list of blemishes as the unacceptable animals, were also disqualified from serving in the priesthood (Lev. 21:17-20). But is God interested in physical perfection? Or even emotional perfection, (if there is such a thing)? Not at all. Inspired by Isaiah and the Psalmist, Rabbi Abba bar Yudan points out that God cares deeply for the brokenhearted and broken of spirit. God desires our human imperfection not our human pretension to perfection.

***God's Tools are Broken and That's Just Fine***

אָמַר רַבִּי אֶלְכְּסַנְדְּרַי הַקְּדוּשׁ הַזֶּה אִם מִשְׁמֵשׁ הוּא בְּכֵלִים שְׂבוּרִים גְּנָאֵי הוּא לוֹ, אָבַל הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא כְּלֵי תַשְׁמִישׁוֹ שְׂבוּרִים, שְׁנַאֲמַר: קְרוֹב ה' לְנִשְׁבְּרֵי לֵב, (תהלים לד:יט)	<b>Rabbi Alexandrai said:</b> An ordinary person, if he uses broken tools in his work, shame on him, but the Blessed Holy One his tools are broken, as it is written: <b>God is close to the brokenhearted;</b> (Psalm 34:19) <b>God heals the brokenhearted</b>
---	---

הַרְפָּא לְשׁוּבְרֵי לֵב, (תהלים קמז:א) וְאֵת דָּפָא וְשִׁפְלֵי רוּחַ. (ישעיה נז:טו) ויקרא רבה ז:ב	(Psalm 147:3) <b>and with the <i>contrite</i></b> <b>and the <i>lowly in spirit</i></b> (Isa. 57:15) Lev. Rabbah 7:2
---	--

This remarkable teaching develops the theme further through the use of the metaphor that human beings are vessels, instruments, or tools of God. God uses human beings as tools to build or fix the world the way that an ordinary person uses a tool to build things or to fix things. While a broken hammer is a disgrace to a carpenter, a

broken-hearted human being elicits God's compassion and is a source of pride to God. As human beings, we are vessels of godliness. We have a divine spark within us, and our job in the world is to magnify that spark through acts of decency, kindness, generosity, compassion, and justice. As Jews, our role is to be vessels of God's name. But we are imperfect, flawed, and broken vessels. Yet that's just fine with God. While the ordinary carpenter needs a perfect hammer to complete a project, God is fine with a broken human to magnify God's presence and bring God's name into the world, and to be God's partner in completing creation.

*A Little Liturgiology: A Very Short Study of this Beautiful Litany*

מי שְׁעָנָה לְאַבְרָהָם אָבִינוּ בְּהַר הַמֹּרְיָה הוּא יַעֲנֵנוּ:	Abraham our father on Mount Moriah...
מי שְׁעָנָה לְיִצְחָק בְּנוֹ כְּשֶׁנֶּעֱקֵד עַל גְּבִי הַמִּזְבֵּחַ הוּא יַעֲנֵנוּ:	Isaac his son when he was bound on the altar...
מי שְׁעָנָה לְיַעֲקֹב בְּבֵית אֵל הוּא יַעֲנֵנוּ:	Jacob in Beit El...
מי שְׁעָנָה לְיוֹסֵף בְּבֵית הָאֲסוּרִים הוּא יַעֲנֵנוּ:	Joseph in the dungeon...
מי שְׁעָנָה לְאַבוֹתֵינוּ עַל יַם סוּף הוּא יַעֲנֵנוּ:	Our ancestors at the Sea of Reeds...
מי שְׁעָנָה לְמֹשֶׁה בְּחֹרֵב הוּא יַעֲנֵנוּ:	Moses in Horev...
מי שְׁעָנָה לְאַהֲרֹן בְּמִחְתָּה הוּא יַעֲנֵנוּ:	Aaron offering incense...
מי שְׁעָנָה לְפִינְחָס בְּקוֹמוֹ מִתּוֹךְ הָעֵדָה הוּא יַעֲנֵנוּ:	Pinhas when he got up from the crowd...
מי שְׁעָנָה לְיְהוֹשֻׁעַ בְּגִלְגָל הוּא יַעֲנֵנוּ:	Joshua at Gilgal...
מי שְׁעָנָה לְשַׁמוּאֵל בְּמִצְפָּה הוּא יַעֲנֵנוּ:	Samuel at Mitzpah...
מי שְׁעָנָה לְדָוִד וּשְׁלֹמֹה בְּנוֹ בִּירוּשָׁלַיִם הוּא יַעֲנֵנוּ:	David and Solomon his son in Jerusalem...
מי שְׁעָנָה לְאֵלִיָּהוּ בְּהַר הַכַּרְמֶל הוּא יַעֲנֵנוּ:	Elijah at Mount Carmel...
מי שְׁעָנָה לְאֵלִישָׁע בִּירִיחוֹ הוּא יַעֲנֵנוּ:	Elisha in Jericho...
מי שְׁעָנָה לְיוֹנָה בְּמִעֵי הַדָּגָה הוּא יַעֲנֵנוּ:	Jonah in the belly of the whale...
מי שְׁעָנָה לְחִזְקִיָּהוּ מֶלֶךְ יְהוּדָה בְּחִלּוֹ, הוּא יַעֲנֵנוּ:	Hizkiah king of Judah in his illness...
מי שְׁעָנָה לְחַנְנִיָּה מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל וְעֲזַרְיָה בְּתוֹךְ כְּבֹשֶׁן הָאֵשׁ הוּא יַעֲנֵנוּ:	Hananya, Mishael, Azariah, in the fiery furnace...
מי שְׁעָנָה לְדַנְיָאֵל בְּגוֹב הָאֲרִיּוֹת הוּא יַעֲנֵנוּ:	Daniel in the lion's den...
מי שְׁעָנָה לְמֹרְדֵכַי וְאֶסְתֵּר בְּשׁוּשַׁן הַבִּירָה הוּא יַעֲנֵנוּ:	Mordecai and Esther in the capital Shushan...
מי שְׁעָנָה לְעֲזָרָא בְּגוֹלְתָהּ הוּא יַעֲנֵנוּ:	Ezra in the diaspora...
מי שְׁעָנָה לְכָל הַצְדִּיקִים וְהַחֲסִידִים וְהַתְּמִימִים וְהַיֹּשְׁרִים הוּא יַעֲנֵנוּ:	All the righteous, pious, blameless, upright...

This litany is part of the Maariv service of Yom Kippur, but is also found in the pre-High Holiday Selichot service. An early version of it is found in the Mishnah, tractate Ta'anit 2:4, and was included as part of prayers on court-decreed fast days during droughts and famines. It most likely originated in the Second Temple period and circulated in synagogues during that era. Originally, it consisted of only seven similar lines. In this order: 1. Abraham, 2. Our ancestors at the Sea of Reeds, 3. Joshua at Gilgal, 4. Samuel at Mitzpah, 5. Elijah on Mount Carmel, 6. Jonah in the belly of the whale, and 7. David and Solomon in Jerusalem. The classic version above has 20 lines; the one in our Mahzor has 17; the editors added several female biblical personalities (Sarah, Rebekah, Leah, Rachel, the Hebrew Midwives, Yocheved, Miriam, and the Daughters of Tzelofhad) and deleted several male personalities from the version above. The intent of the earliest version of this prayer was to get God to answer us, most likely, with the miracle of rainfall to prevent famine, similar to all the miraculous interventions that God had performed in the past:

intervening in the Akedah, splitting the Sea of Reeds, the splitting the Jordan River, etc. But as this prayer evolved, with its additional biblical personalities, its intent evolved as well. We are no longer calling for a specific miracle, but on the Days of Awe we are simply calling to be heard and to be forgiven. As we recite this litany, we are rapidly filing through the entire biblical story of Israel from Abraham all the way to Ezra, pretty much in chronological order, and then making the leap to the rest of Jewish history with the last line, "all the righteous, pious, blameless, upright souls who have been answered." They are, of course, too numerous to name. But that line serves as a springboard for own imaginative leaps to consider historical figures that are important to us, as well as people in our own lives who may have experienced some kind of deliverance or extraordinary fortune. The power of a litany lies in the constant repetition. The satisfaction we get from reciting this prayer is feeling that we have surveyed 4000 years of our history in about two minutes, which is how it elapsed for God! We hope that God will be attentive to us for the next 4000 years!