

The Shape of Human Hearts

BY RABBI DAVID WOLPE

The human heart is not a sculpture. It is a mosaic.

Our hearts resemble stained-glass windows. You can see where the pieces are joined, the cracks and fissures. But soldered together they let in light and cast radiant images. There is a composite beauty.

Life offers great joy alongside overwhelming sadness. At times we are moved to neglect one or the other, to speak only of enjoying God's blessings, or to shake our fists at the sky in fury for all the pain.

To hold joy or sorrow alone oversimplifies the stained glass, multi-hued heart. Hearts that are too defended in this world, that avoid being hurt or broken, end up worn and wasted, in the way that an old, rusted clock, unpolished, unwound, uncherished, will no longer run. When the Talmudic Rabbi Alexandri defined the difference between God and human beings he did not speak in terms of power, or creativity or eternity. People, he said, are ashamed to use broken vessels. God cares only for broken vessels.

We are those broken vessels. Our promise is in that brokenness, that beauty. The light shines through the fragments of each shattered, treasured heart.