

## **CBT Library Highlights – Blessings of Broken Heart 5/10**

The Blessings of a Broken Heart by Sherri Mandell

Toby Press 2003

Sherri Mandell has done and is doing something that most of us cannot imagine and should never have to image. She is struggling to heal herself and move back into life after the murder of her first-born child. Her son, Koby, was killed along with his friend, Yosef, in the *wadi* near her home in Tekoa, Israel on May 8, 2001. The boys were bludgeoned to death by Palestinians who found them in a cave which they were exploring while cutting school one day. Sherri, her husband Seth, and their other three children were plunged into a nightmare of darkness and grief. Yet, the Mandells have moved through their shock, anger, and grief and are channeling their energy into helping others.

Sherri, a writer by profession, chose to share her emotional struggle as a way to move through her darkness into some kind of continuity of life. Her honest religious questions, her longing for omens and ‘signs’ from her departed son, her unbelievable courage in the face of deep pain are depicted in beautiful and memorable prose. She has a tremendous ability to step aside from her own catastrophe, directing her insights outward so that we, the readers, who still inhabit a world that seems stable and reliable, can share some of the ‘gifts of a broken heart’ that she has discovered. For example, in the following passage, she invokes the imagery of two halves of a heart which are rejoined but still bear the jagged marks of having been torn asunder:

Sometimes I feel as if I’m trying to weave all this loss into something beautiful. To make his absence a presence...I know that my broken heart will never be the same. I will always long for Koby and feel the pain of his absence. But it is possible to build a new heart....That’s what I hope this book will do for you, because many of us live with broken hearts. But when you touch broken hearts together, a new heart emerges, one that is more open and compassionate, able to touch others, a heart that seeks God. That is the blessing of a broken heart.

Seth Mandell found his outlet in the Koby Mandell Foundation, an organization dedicated to helping other bereaved families. The foundation runs camps and healing retreats for families in Israel who have lost members to terrorism. Both Seth and Sherri have toured the world fund-raising and speaking on behalf of their organization.

This captivatingly beautiful and heart-rending book is a gem. As John Podhoretz states in his jacket blurb, “Sherri Mandell’s wrenching, soulful and beautiful book is more than an act of remembrance. It is an act of grace.” A three hanky read but well worth the tears.