

Mending with gold.

It is known as Kintsugi. And its origin is based on legend, centuries old, Japanese. It's the technique of mending broken items – especially pottery – with gold. And in this way, the broken thing becomes something transformed – a work of art.

Kintsugi causes the brokenness and scars of an item, its cracks and missing bits, to become its points of focus and value, its visible vulnerability and history and eloquence.

Although I had read about and heard of and even seen Kintsugi art, I think it caught at my heart again recently as we all seem to be trying so very hard to hold the pieces together – pieces of ourselves as well as of our rather broken nation and world. Shattered and scattered around us, I suspect we stare at the shards with a sad and mixed sense of fear and shame, anger and loss, perhaps guilt, perhaps hope, perhaps envisioning the future. And I suspect most of us may be torn between wanting to carefully retrieve and save the pieces and just kicking it all as far away from ourselves as possible.

But then I learned more about the actual process of Kintsugi, the art of it. And I was intrigued. And I was encouraged.

In Kintsugi, the preparation is as important as the doing. The balance of the epoxy resin with the gold (whether liquid or powder or leaf) must be just so. The broken pieces must be claimed and cleaned with care, arranged with intention. And the repair must be done steadily and with mindfulness.

Sometimes, bits from another broken item may be used to fill in where an original section has been lost or crushed beyond saving, and these often-contrasting segments also add to the unique beauty of the finished piece.

While the item is being reassembled and seamed with gold, it must be supported well – often in a tray of the earth's sand, or in softly wrapped bands of cloth, or by the hands of a human helper. This support must stay with the item until it is ready to stand on its own. Gently held, without pressure.

When the repairs have been completed, the gold itself used to rejoin the piece may have slightly reshaped it in the process. But this, too, adds to its originality, its reemergence, its beauty.

I greatly appreciate Kintsugi art and artifacts. But I suspect now I appreciate its philosophy and symbolism as much as the finished works.

Because of Kintsugi, we can see that broken doesn't have to mean gone or lost or destroyed. We can learn to be mindful of the importance of all the individual pieces – their significance to survival and restoration, renewal and possibility. And that the diversity of the pieces are what make the whole stronger, more textured with interest and loveliness. With Kintsugi we know to take great care of what is being used to bring everything together – that it is real and pure and balanced, understanding that it is precious and valuable. And we can appreciate the significance of partnership, with the earth and with each other, offering support without pressure, with gentle hands and patience. In the end, Kintsugi is a true celebration of a thing's inherent and bestowed value, an enhancement of its very being.

Surveying all of our crumbling bits and rubble lying around and within us today, perhaps they will become our pieces with possibility. Perhaps our world can be an ongoing work of Kintsugi art. Perhaps each one of us can be as well.

Or, perhaps, we are meant to be the gold.