

The Japanese have a term Kintsugi it means *golden repair* and it is the [Japanese art](#) of fixing broken [pottery](#) with [lacquer](#) resin dusted or mixed with powdered [gold](#), [silver](#), or [platinum](#) a method similar to the *maki-e* technique. As a [philosophy](#) it speaks to breakage and repair becoming part of the history of an object, rather than something to disguise. (wikipedia)

—Christy Bartlett, in her book on “The Aesthetics of Mended Japanese Ceramics” writes:

“Not only is there no attempt to hide the damage, but the repair is literally illuminated... a kind of physical expression of the spirit of [mushin](#)....Mushin is often literally translated as “no mind,” but carries connotations of fully existing within the moment, of non-attachment, of equanimity amid changing conditions. ...The vicissitudes of existence over time, to which all humans are susceptible, could not be clearer than in the breaks, the knocks, and the shattering to which ceramic ware too is subject. This poignancy or aesthetic of existence has been known in Japan as ... a compassionate sensitivity, or perhaps identification with, [things] outside oneself.”

We live in an era where it much easier to replace than repair - a suitcase handle loses one little screw that cannot be bought separately and the whole suitcase is no longer usable. at least as a carryeable item. I lived in a town once where A Burger King bought the McDonalds's tore the building down and built a new BK because I guess it was easier to get their BK look to the building that way.

We live in a society that tells many of us that we do not really need to age we can have surgeries or take drugs or whatever to avoid aging. We can be faster smarter live longer - better living through bionics and pharmaceuticals. And I am not simply throwing

out medicine. Many many folks are helped immensely by joint replacements, or medicine that manages their pain, or cures their cancer. But no matter what medicine attempts there is a relentless moving forward of the clock. Time, at least for our bodies moves in one direction only.

There are messages all over from marketing campaigns that tell us we are not enough. It is kind of the lynchpin of marketing nowadays. Advertisers have figured out that we each have a sense of emptiness and there is a way to fill that - buy something. And churches and religions are not above that. There are many many religions that tell us that each of us is not enough. that we can cure our imperfections by following their way.

I think our first principle tells each of us something else.

We affirm the inherent worth and dignity of each person. You know that sounds really sweet. Everyone is worthy and has dignity. In its simplicity it sounds like something so simple you could teach a kindergartner this - and we do in our Religious Education classes here. This one is easy to teach and hard to live because I don't know if we often enough start from a place where we affirm our own dignity and worth.

We, as a denomination, probably have more folks who either were raised in another church experience or who were raised without a church experience. Often times those experiences were not affirming and worse than that experiences that caused pain and tore people down.

We have a different message for folks and it starts with our first principle, We affirm the inherent worth and dignity of every person

As many of you know my uncle, Gene Navias, recently passed away and my family was in Boston last weekend for his memorial service. He was a life long UU and it is humorous really how many of us think about those older than ourselves as having it together. One of the blessings of his service was that many amy folks shared stores of him with me. I met him late into his UU ministry and so do not know some of the more personal details of his story. He did not always have it together and he struggled to find himself and his faith while working in the UU ministry.

He was a lifelong UU born and raised in Schenectady in the UU church there even earning a 100% attendance pin one year. Rev. Sara Gibb Millspaugh shared a transcript of an interview that she had done with him in 1993. When he went into the ministry in the late 1940s. In that interview he said "I discovered I was gay in 1953, in the dark ages, when we were considered demented and perverted. Being already a minister I was terrified of being discovered, for I knew there was no way I could be openly gay in the UU ministry."

He goes on to describe some of his grappling with his sexuality and his ministry. He even found some like himself describing it this way: " As a Unitarian, I went to the old May meetings held yearly in Boston. I cruised the watering spots and discovered my colleagues at the Napoleon and the Punch Bowl. What a relief. There was a little band of us, all living double lives. We met, shared stories and gave one another needed support and advice on how to cope. We were all we had and we needed one another. We knew that the Unitarian Department of Ministry was death on gays."

But it was finally at at a Religious educators conference in 1967 where it was decided, because parents were asking for it, that there needed to be new comprehensive curriculum about sexuality one that affirmed the human being and the important and positive role that sex played in our lives as humans. At that time he had a position in the UUA where he was working on a national level supporting the RE programs and

ministries of congregations, and districts. His broad knowledge of folks throughout the UUA allowed him to gather together a collaboration of folks who produced the About Your Sexuality or AYS curriculum. And through the process of writing and working collaboratively with others he came to view himself and his sexuality differently. He said "The program was wonderful for me. As the person in charge of all the training and demonstration I became liberalized and liberated myself. AYS helped me become comfortable with my own sexuality and that of others. I believe that AYS has been important not only for all the teens who have taken it and all their parents and other adults, but for the liberalizing impact it has had on the whole UUA."

As a side note AYS was published in 1971 - it was revolutionary in its time and really helped to move the UUA into a place where LGBTQ issues were openly discussed and folks were openly welcomed. The UUA moved from a place where the Department of Ministries considered being gay as the end of one's career to a place where we were leaders in open and affirming education. Once again Religious Education led the way to a prophetic stance of our denomination.

This UU faith saved my uncle's life. I hear that fairly often. For a faith that does not think that people need saving there are an awful lot of people who seemed to get saved - and that is a wonderful thing.

But that saving does not happen from the outside it is not a transcendent spirit who reaches into me and saves me from myself. No it is something completely different than that it is that the message of this faith is that I am inherently worthy and have dignity. When I internalize that message I find that I have been saved all along.

No one of us is perfect. And our first principle in effect says that we do not need to be. Like the kinsugi bowls, those cracked pots, we are cracked too. Life shapes us breaks

us heals us, there are scars, and moles, and limps and aches. We can choose to think of those things as making us less than - we can choose to think of those things as making us imperfect. But our First principle tells us That our bumps and bruises do not make us less human but actually more beautiful.

My uncle started out doing his job of helping to create the AYS curriculum - because of an outcry from parents for a reliable, well written, informative curriculum on human sexuality based in our values. I don't think he expected it to change his life. But it led him to start a collaborative effort to write that curriculum for others so that they would be affirmed. And in the process he found the affirmation that he needed. He learned he had worth and dignity and that he was worthy of love and belonging.

Brene Brown is a social scientist and researcher. She has done a lot of work researching shame. In her work she thought it wise to also research the opposite of shame. And she found a pretty simple truth. She talked to a number of people who one could describe as whole hearted. Folks who were loving, generative and who were able to make the risk to be intimate. And she found that "people who have a strong sense of love and belonging believe that they are worthy of love and belonging." That is a profoundly simple truth. If you believe you are worthy of the gift of love and belonging you will accept the gift of love and belonging. And you have to be offered the gift of love and belonging.

Gene Navias was such a wonderful example of this he could have ended up being a bitter man stuck in all the hurts of his past. He was raised up in a time when being Gay was so bad. All the hate in the world directed toward him could have twisted him into a mean stunted person. I cannot impagine the micro and macro aggressions that he suffered each and every day. But those aggressions did not stunt him because in his being raised up as a UU he knew what it meant to be affirmed what it meant to have dignity. He was offered the gift of love and belonging. He learned how important it is for

each of us to know first that we each have inherent worth and dignity. We don't have to earn it, no one else has to confer it on us.

Imagine if each of us really really understood that we are each full of worth and dignity. Imagine if each person in the world really knew that they were full of worth and dignity. That first principle sounds so sweet and kind like something that you might teach a group of kindergartners because it is so simple. But it is deceptive because it is life changing. Valuing yourself, knowing that you are worthy, knowing that you have dignity it changes you and from there you can change the world.

My uncle taught me that.