

Mending Attitudes of Inferiority with Purpose and Gold—Lessons from Kintsugi



In Japanese, the word *kintsugi* means “golden rejoining.” It describes the traditional art of repairing pottery. When pottery breaks or shatters, the pieces are rejoined. Yet, as the name reveals, the pieces are not merely glued together with the intent of making the fractures seamless and invisible. Rather, lacquered gold is used to fill the seams and bind the broken pieces together. The broken pottery is once more whole—but with a golden vibrancy that tells the story of its past.

There is much we can learn from the practice of *kintsugi* when we suffer from an inward mindset, especially when that mindset inflates our perception that we are worse than others.

Seeing Ourselves as Worse than Others

With an inward mindset, we focus on ourselves. Sometimes that focus might be dominated by an attention to our own flaws. We only notice our failings or how we might not match others in certain capabilities or prominence.

We then might allow these perceived flaws to influence how we see others and our circumstances. We might fail to see others as people. Instead, our inward mindset might cause us to only see the glaring way we think they are better than us. We might also feel our circumstances are beyond our control and excuse ourselves from trying to improve our situation.

In some regards, we might even fail to fully see ourselves as people. We might only see our flaws, mistakes, and regrets and fail to recognize that we're more than that.

However, the practice of *kintsugi* reminds us that we are, indeed, more than our flaws.

Step 1: Seeing Our Value Despite Our Flaws

With *kintsugi*, there is a resolute hope in the future. Although a bowl may be shattered, it is not to be thrown away—its broken pieces don't divest it of its value. Instead, there is the expectation that the bowl can still serve its purpose once it is mended.

Drawing from *kintsugi*, we can also hold hope for the future. Even though we may feel flawed, we can remember that we still have value. Likewise, others possess value despite their weaknesses. Our imperfections—in our lives, personal character, or relationships—do not automatically divest us of value.

Nor do they forecast an end to our purpose. There is hope that we can still be helpful.

Step 2: Restoring Purpose, Not Just

Beauty

In the practice of *kintsugi*, the placement of the gold lacquer is guided by the purpose of the pottery. The broken pieces aren't rejoined to take a new shape, but to return purpose to the pottery—and enhance it with greater depth and meaning.

Similarly, we mend our flaws not by glittering ourselves in gold, but by remembering our purpose. For all of us, purpose can be found in helping others.

When we shift from our inward mindset to an outward mindset, we begin to see others as people. We recognize their hopes, desires, and need for help at times. We also begin to see that there is more to us than our flaws. We might recognize ways that we can be that source of help.

We begin to see how we can be vessels of hope, help, cheer, empathy, guidance, compassion, and more, not unlike a piece of mended pottery.

Step 3: Celebrating Our Strengths

Kintsugi, however, isn't merely an artistry of redemption. It is also one of transformation.

There is no attempt to mask the injuries. Each repair is illuminated by the gold lacquer.

The overall aesthetic reminds us that there is beauty in what is mended—in our imperfections. Our flaws, our mistakes, the weaknesses in us all can be transformed into strengths—and celebrated when they are.

When we suffer from an inward mindset, we might only see our flaws. When we shift to an outward mindset, we begin to see that we are more than our flaws. We see that we are someone with a purpose.

An outward mindset does not erase our flaws. We still have certain capabilities and strengths...and tasks that prove challenging for us. However, an outward mindset gives perspective to our strengths and weaknesses.

We see that our flaws give us dimension in our personal character, our stories, and how we are able to relate to others. We can empathize with others. We can be more patient. We can be more humble.

Our flaws, like lacquered gold, can be the means to transforming ourselves into better people.

Lessons from *Kintsugi*

Kintsugi reminds us that flaws need not be final. It reminds us that our transformation should be guided by purpose. Finally, it reminds us that our flaws can even be a source of beauty and depth.

The next time we feel inferior to those around us, may we remember the lessons of *kintsugi*, and that we are not unlike pottery laced with gold.