

Repaired with Gold

In fifteenth century Japan, Ashikaga Yoshimasa ran into some trouble with his favorite tea cup. His favorite piece of ceramic was shattered beneath him, and he wanted to fix it desperately. After assigning the repair to some Japanese craftsmen, something unexpected happened. Instead of gluing the cracks of the cup together with a transparent adhesive, the Japanese craftsmen decided to fill the cracks with gold. Ashikaga was extremely impressed with how the cup highlighted its own mistakes and began a cultural movement with this new style of ceramic repair. Thus began the Japanese technique of Kintsugi, which roughly translates to repaired with gold (Carnazzi). I believe that Benjamin Franklin would have been fond of Kintsugi if he ever was introduced to the concept, as Franklin was known for his refreshing awareness of his own shortcomings and his impressive attempts at bettering himself.

Franklin's famous quotation, "Love your Enemies, for they tell you your faults," and Kintsugi both express a similar idea: flaws are not the worst thing in the world. Whether in a teacup or in a person, they serve as opportunities for self-improvement. This is why one's enemies deserve love. Enemies can let one know of their weaknesses, which provides a valuable insight.

No person is without fault. We must put the magnifying glass up to ourselves and our own actions to find areas of improvement. This self-reflection is not always as easy as it seems, however. The average person has a significant amount of personal bias that makes their faults invidious. This bias makes enemies a beneficial resource when it comes to self-improvement. For example, I regularly participate in organized debate competitions at my high school. My skills in debate are a constant area for improvement in life, and as anyone with any skill in debate can concur, the only way to get better is to practice against good opponents. After a round of debate, the flaws in one's logic and evidential links become clear. A good opponent can give me knowledge of what I need to work on for next time.

Once one becomes aware of their faults they have two options. The first, and most popular, route is to shroud one's mistakes so heavily that they become unapparent. This route is far easier than genuine self-improvement, but I do not think this is what Franklin would do. Franklin famously developed a list of 13 virtues which he obsessively tracked for a major portion of his life. These virtues included life-long areas of improvement, such as temperance, sincerity, and order(Hamm). Franklin was always on a path of getting better, and this is only possible if one is first knowledgeable of their own faults. Returning back to the modern example of organized debate, we can see a similar theme. The strength of a debater is evident in their post-debate behavior. The novices and amateurs will storm off after a loss or giddily jump and frolic after a win. They rarely converse with their opponents. The veterans, however, act in a different manner. They stay in the same corridor conversing with their adversaries. They treat their enemies like ripe lemons, extracting every drop of precious juice, or in this case constructive criticism. They understand the idea that Franklin was touching upon with this quotation. Franklin's message is extremely applicable to modern day life. In any sport or competition, one looks back upon previous matches to find missed opportunities. Enemies can enable this as well, but with one's entire life.

When it comes down to it, the amount of faults one has does not really matter. What matters is what one does about these faults. Instead of shrouding one's mistakes, people must do like the Japanese masters of Kintsugi and beautifully highlight the weaknesses that they transformed into strengths. I believe Franklin would resent the thought of hiding or not improving on areas of weakness. Instead, we must rejoice at our knowledge of our own faults. Because once we know where our cracks lie, we can repair them with gold.

Works Cited

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