

Broken Hearts Made Whole
Rev. Catie Scudera
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Ten years ago, my first year living in Greater Boston, I went out to the movies with some friends. We were seeing *The Darjeeling Limited*, which appealed to me because it was about a train journey across India. At the time, it had only been a short while since I had volunteered at a small orphanage outside of New Delhi, and indeed had traveled by train to see architectural wonders in Jaipur and Agra, and to visit the holy cities of Dharamsala, Varanasi, and Amritsar.

In the film, three grown-up brothers are traveling on the Darjeeling Limited train, lugging around their deceased father's literal baggage and trying to "find themselves," as is a popular trope of Western art about voyages to India. At one point, they get into a physical fight with one another — they're not particularly *mature* grown-up brothers — and they are thrown off the train.

They're still arguing, but one notices three young boys attempting to cross a river on a rickety platform tied to a rope... And then the platform tips over, hurling the boys into the rapids. The three brothers stop fighting and dive into the river, each of them swimming toward a different drowning boy. Two of the boys are successfully rescued, but the third one doesn't make it. The brother who pulled the third from the river asks what his name was, and one friend says, "Mukesh."

At which point, I burst into tears.

Now, as many of you know, I very rarely cry in any public setting. But, that summer I had volunteered in India, I knew a little boy named Mukesh at the orphanage. He was a wiry kid and an amazing climber, with a sweet disposition and smile. Sobbing in this movie theater, I knew that "my" Mukesh was fine, living with his friends under the watchful eyes of the aunties and nuns. (I even knew the Mukesh in the movie was fine, as it was fiction and the little boy an actor.) But, I was so far away from "my" Mukesh and the other great children I grew to love at that orphanage...

I grieved that distance from all those I care for halfway around the world. This silly, pretentious film had broken open my heart in all the little real cracks that had developed since I left those children to return home to the United States.

Has this ever happened to you, that you've been surprised by a hurt or loss you forgot you carried?

Euro-American Unitarian Universalist minister Rev. Erika Hewitt writes, "No one [hearing] these words is a stranger to pain, or the knowledge that things break, or break down: promises, friendship, sobriety, hope, communication... this breaking happens because our human hearts and our very institutions are frail and imperfect. We make mistakes. Life is messy. Brokenness happens.

"We're intimately acquainted with brokenness, then, even as we believe that no matter how fractured we are or once were, we can make whole people of ourselves. We are whole at our core, because of the great, unnameable, sometimes inconceivable Love in which we live.

"As UUs, we believe that paying attention to something is an act of love; witnessing and naming brokenness is how we begin to heal it. Some sorrows demand to be named out loud:

*"My sister died.
My body is fragile.
I'm scared that I won't be able to pay my rent this month.
The streets in my city are filled with violence.*

Hewitt concludes, "Healing begins when we examine what's in pain, wonder how it occurred, and allow it to teach us."

Sometimes, people in our lives tell us not to cry or feel sad, but to buck up, pipe down, to "swallow" our feelings. Sometimes, we're stuck encountering these anti-feelers regularly, and sometimes we can avoid them, and sometimes, we have to share holiday dinners with them. But, we know that if we stuff down or ignore the pain we feel, the hurt will surface again in a cry at a movie theater or perhaps a loud burst of anger. All of us have little cracks in our hearts, because we do each experience hurts, regrets, and losses. Allowing ourselves to feel our grief, brokenheartedness, and sadness is healthy. I never want to forget the children at that orphanage near Delhi, I never want to regret learning to love them.

What we give thanks for and work to create is a church that is truly a sacred place of comfort and courage, as Rev. Javier-Duval wrote:

“Here
here is where healing begins
where burdens are set down .”

Here is the Unitarian Universalist congregation, full of family, friends, and neighbors who are covenanted to offer comfort and encouragement to one another. When something in the world or in our personal lives cracks open our hearts, we are supported in mindfully responding to our pain, seeking care for ourselves, and perhaps even healing up an old wound.

In a centuries’ old East Asian method of repairing broken pottery, *kintsugi*, dishware and other ceramics that have cracked or broken apart entirely are patched back together, often with golden lacquer. You can see an example of this on your order of service, a bowl that has been made whole again with golden seams. What I find fascinating about this technique is that the broken history of the dish is preserved, even highlighted, instead of hiding the old breaks. It’s like the phrase of finding the “silver lining” of a difficult situation.

Though there are cracks in my heart missing the children I know in India, there is gold that sparkles in the cracks in my commitment to my personal relationship with them across time and geography and in my dedication to improve our world for all children already born and yet to come. Perhaps some of you have experienced this, too, that when your heart has broken open, a light and love has poured out into the world, pushing you toward being more kind, more caring, more engaged with bettering your community. In this way, a broken heart made whole can be quite beautiful. It is like the old poem from nineteenth-century British poet Alfred, Lord Tennyson, written for his friend who had just died:

“I hold it true, whate’er befall;
I feel it when I sorrow most;
’Tis better to have loved and lost
Than never to have loved at all.”

Of course, the practice of *kintsugi* is a metaphor — and it’s not a perfect one. A broken heart is much harder to repair than even a fragile bowl. Sometimes, there isn’t something gold to learn from especially deep tragedy and trauma, except perhaps gentleness with ourselves and compassion for others who have suffered. And, sometimes we feel like we can’t even find all the pieces of our broken hearts, and we’re not sure if we can trust the replacement parts offered

to us from a close loved one, neighbor, or helper. We don't need to feel badly about ourselves if our broken hearts have produced some sharp edges or feel impossible to repair.

My prayer for all of us here today is that we can hold our broken hearts tenderly and without judgment. I hope we can lean on and learn from each other, that we can each be a reliable healing presence to our neighbors in our pews or in the next seat. I hope that as we attempt to stitch or glue or lacquer our hearts back together after the innumerable personal and global tragedies we each face, that we can help each other make those golden seams shine.

May this be so. Blessed be, and amen.