

Have you ever heard of Kintsugi? It is the Japanese art of breaking or taking a piece of pottery which has broken and putting it back together. Instead of using clear glue and trying to hide the fact that it was shattered, the glue is mixed with gold and when the piece is reconstructed the gold, highlights all the cracks, and makes the piece look even more beautiful. Kintsugi treats breakage and repair as part of the history of an object, rather than something to disguise.<sup>[5]</sup>

As Jews, we are the living embodiment of the Japanese art of Kintsugi. We are experts at reconstructing the broken pieces - which are often caused by exile and antisemitism - and fashioning a new kind of Judaism, or a new world view, that makes us stronger than before.

Right now, all of us, the world, the country, are all feeling shattered and broken. We have wildfires and drought and hurricanes and flooding, in places that have never experienced these things before. We have laws being passed in Texas that that make it impossible for a woman to have an abortion.

After a 20 year war, we have Afghani refugees to help. And that is just this month. And just when we begin to hope that there might be an end to COVID 19 we are knocked down by the Delta variant. We are living in catastrophic times.

This is where the Jewish genius for Kintsugi comes in. The Jewish people have a knack for how to respond to utter destruction and desolation.

To turn catastrophe into creativity. To turn ruin into resilience.

Last night I spoke about the gifts we as individuals leave as our legacy. Today I'd like to focus on the gift Judaism can give to the world, to help us through this difficult time. We can give hope to the world by looking at what has worked for us in the past. The gift of reinvention and of adapting to new circumstances. The legacy of the Jewish people.

Most of us have heard stories of victims of the Shoah re-inventing themselves and even thriving after the war. And of the Jews being expelled from Spain in 1492 and finding new ways to stay connected to each other by creating business networks. But you might not have heard the story of the Jews of Baghdad who were also threatened and had to flee for their lives after living like virtual royalty for 800 yrs and changing the world. (Last Kings of Shanghai by Jonathan Kaufman )

In 1829, 200 years ago, 37 year old David Sassoon escapes from Baghdad in the middle of the night. David, the heir apparent to run the family, is thrown in jail and threatened with hanging if his family doesn't pay an exorbitant tax bill. His father sees the writing on the wall, ransoms David from jail and arranges for a boat to take him to safety in the middle of the night.

David goes to India where after a period of depression, he re-creates himself and builds an Empire. He begins by setting up a textile factory. Employs local Indians and also sets up a technical school to train workers for the business. As this creates jobs it also creates loyalty as the welfare

of his employees and their neighborhoods are looked after. He has 8 sons and sends them to Europe and the Far East and creates his own family network, he can trust, as his business expands. They correspond with each other in Judeo Arabic, helping to ensure that their letters cannot be intercepted. Eventually they get into the opium trade, which is controversial, even back then, and the business expands to Shanghai. 45 years later Elly Kadoorie at age 15, has to leave Baghdad as well. He goes to his cousin's in India and then is sent to Shanghai to work for the family and then he branches out on his own.

Often through competition, the two families build up Shanghai making it a cosmopolitan, progressive city and open China up to the west. Later they will do the same with Hong Kong. Elly Kadoorie marries a British aristocrat named Laura. As Laura adapts to Shanghai, she sees the need to help the women and girls in the area and sets up the Kadoorie School for Girls which enrolls 700 Chinese girls changing the landscape of the city. Over the years these families help lots of local Indians and Chinese, providing schools and social services and amazing job opportunities. As the times change, their descendants, in particular Victor Sassoon, are responsible for saving 18,000 Jews from the Nazi ovens and persuading the occupying, anti-semitic Japanese military ruler to help. They do something that no other country, not even the US, is able to do - they save the lives of every Jew that arrives in Shanghai. They become uber rich but never stop helping other people.

A riches to rags, back to unbelievable riches story that literally changes the world.

While we might not be able to build cities we do have control over how we react to crisis.

- We can feel that we are the victim and hide away.
- We can get angry and frustrated and allow a sense of helplessness to overcome us.

Or

- we can shift and take responsibility- asking, What can I do?
- We can move from focusing on ourselves to asking - how can I help those around me?
- And we can look at the opportunity to create something new. -

Kintsugi

Looking at the situation and trying to see it as an opportunity, is how rabbinic Judaism is created.

The Judaism you and I practice today is based on the Talmud. Not so much on the Torah. Actions such as Keeping kosher, lighting the chanukiyah, observing Shabbat, having a ketubah to signify your marriage or a “get” for a divorce. All of these well-known Jewish practices are Talmudic.

So you would think the Talmud dates back to the beginning of Jewish history. But it doesn't. It was written between 200 and 600 CE. That is less than 2000 years ago. But wait a minute, we've been taught that Judaism is 3500 years old. What happened? Why aren't we practicing the Judaism of Abraham and Sarah or of Moses and Aaron and Miriam?

Because we adapted and changed to meet the new circumstances.

When the temple was destroyed in 70 CE and the priesthood collapsed the people of that time mourned the demise of Judaism. We returned to an earlier destruction and sang, “By the waters of Babylon, we laid down and wept, for thee Zion”

Ironically, many Jews remained Babylon and didn't return to Israel, even when they could. The Jewish population in Babylon, modern day Baghdad, Iraq, recreated itself and flourished until the 1800's, the time of the Sassoons and Kadoories.

In Babylonia and Palestine, Rabbinic Judaism is created. Instead of seeing only the broken pieces of Judaism, brilliant thinkers, rabbis, put the pieces back together with gold glue and expanded on what Judaism could be.

This story happens over and over again. We leave Israel and change our focus to thriving in other lands. Zion becomes a tikvah- a hope. Then we are rejected by other nations and Zionism is created.

Then a new darkness comes- the Holocaust creeps in and it feels like the whole world is bent on eradicating the Jewish people.

Once again we recreate ourselves and the nation state of Israel emerges from the ashes of the Shoah.

We know we can't bring back the 6 million Jews who perished and the generations of their offspring who were never born, but we can celebrate a

revival of Jewish learning and living that has taken place in the last 73 years in the land of Israel.- We have seen adaptability, innovation, chutzpah and the joy of Jewish life. We pride ourselves on Israel being a start up nation. One, that grows out of the ugly necessity to have a strong military that leads to the creation of a thriving technological center which transforms modern life all over the world.

More often than not we, the Jewish people, don't play the victim and hide for too long. We take responsibility - and ask "What can I do?" "What can I do to help others?" We look for the opportunities - "How can I put the pieces back together and create new and even better ways than before?"

We are 10th day of Av Jews.

Rabbi Ed Feinstein, in a teaching on Tisha B'av, the holiday during the summer which commemorates the destruction of the first and second Temples, teaches that something special occurs right after these moments of desolation.

"It is not the 9th of Av, Tisha B'av, but it is the 10th of Av when our creativity and survival instincts emerge. We are resurrected from within. This is the greatest miracle of the Jewish people."

What seems like an end point/the destruction of the world as we know it can be| a new beginning

This revitalization is not a given. There are many nations which have been wiped off the face of the earth- the Aztecs, the Tasmanians, the Nabatians.

Think of the Navajo people. When they lost their land and their ability to forage and live on the land, they lost their identity. They are a shadow of the great Navajo nation that roamed North America.

When the Jews lose their land, this leads to a reshaping of identity, into a new, vibrant transportable one. Not the same as before, but built on the pieces of the before.

The Dali Lama sees that the Jews have something special, a secret ingredient, a gold glue, that holds the Jewish people together. In 1990, after 30 years in exile, he arranges to meet with a group of Jewish teachers to find “the secret to spiritual survival in exile.” (NYT 7/24/94 Book Review of *The Jew and the Lotus*, Rodger

Kamenetz )

A big idea that emerges is remembering - Kintsugi, again - keeping the broken pieces along with the new designs.

I imagine one of the Rabbis who met with the Dali Lama might have told him this story:

Moses goes up the mountain twice to get the ten commandments. The first time after Moses receives the tablets on which he inscribes G!d’s wisdom, he descends the mountain only to see that the people have become so impatient they have built a golden calf, an idol. When Moses sees it he becomes so angry- he smashes the tablets and they shatter to a million pieces. All seems lost. Miraculously, G!d allows Moses to climb back up the mountain and receive the tablets again. Not to replace the

broken ones. No, we keep them as a reminder. The Midrash teaches - the Israelites are told to put into the Mishkan, not only the perfect, whole tablets but all the broken pieces as well. To carry both sets with us wherever we go.

We don't try to hide the traumas and the expulsions- we remember them, we ritualize them so that they don't overwhelm us, we learn from them and then we pick ourselves up and recreate. We turn ruin into resilience.

We are coming out of a time of darkness, COVID as upended of so much that we take for granted - going into the office, attending school, meeting in person, traveling wherever we want to go, whenever we want to go there. Adaptability. The repeated re-creation of the Jewish people can be our guide as we re-emerge. You have businesses that have pivoted and look nothing like they did before.

An eyewear Company making PPE,  
a set design company making masks.

A food truck company first becomes mobile testing sites and then pivots again to become mobile vaccination trucks.

Remote food shopping and services like insta-cart take off. People say, "I'm never going back to food shopping in person again. This is so easy." Already we have seen so much innovation and there is more to come.

We have explored some of the specific lessons we can learn from our Jewish past. We can learn from those who innovated before us- who

remember, who care for those around us, who are not afraid to innovate- who turn catastrophe into creativity.

But more than a technique we can take hope from the fact that we are still here. You are sitting in this sanctuary or joining us virtually- glued to your screen so you don't miss a word!, this gives me hope.

It helps me when I realize that this is not the first time the world has gone through a crisis. What we are feeling today, overwhelmed, scared, uncertain, are not new feelings. Of course the specific combination of factors is unique to this moment and we will have to innovate in a way that is a response to this place and time. But we will be guided by 3500 years of Jewish innovation.

As we figure out our next step we have to pick up all the pieces, the broken ones, the slightly chipped ones and work them into our new reality. We need to put them back together with gold, and build on their foundation to create a new, hopefully better world, for all of us.

Ken yehi ratzon- Be it G!d's will and ours.