



KINTSUGI WELLNESS

THE JAPANESE ART OF
NOURISHING MIND,
BODY, AND SPIRIT

CANDICE
KUMAI

キャンディス 熊井

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Introduction

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IT'S TAKEN ME THIRTY-PLUS YEARS TO WRITE THIS BOOK. Not because I didn't want to write it—the truth is, I've always wanted to write it—but I was very afraid of putting words on the page. After all, the prospect was intimidating. Japanese culture is largely focused on intricate detail, precision, and preparation. I never felt like I was “good enough” or “ready enough” to write a book about the cultural traditions I grew up with and the philosophies that have shaped my life and career.

I decided that the only way I would ever feel ready, or qualified, to write on this topic was to go back to my mother's ancestral home in Japan. To spend time visiting with all the family members whom I don't see often enough, to taste the flavors of Japan, to observe its traditions and rituals, to feel a part of its rhythms and its pulse. And so, a few years ago, I bought a ticket, packed my bags, and headed east.

I've explored Japan many times since I was five, but I knew from the moment I arrived that this trip would be different. From the moment the wheels of the plane touched down, I felt like I was home. I told myself to be brave, to open myself up to this opportunity, and to learn all that could be learned. Truth be told, I was fresh off a breakup and my heart was hurting. My mind felt foggy. My body was tired. I felt broken, and I secretly hoped that this journey would help to heal me.

Over the course of ten trips over the past few years, I experienced Japan during all four seasons. In the spring, I

explored *hanami* (flower viewing) during the cherry blossom festival, and studied matcha tea ceremony with my great-aunt Takuko in Southern Japan. During the summer, I cooked homemade Japanese meals with my cousins in Tokyo and stayed with the monks in the mountains of Kōyasan. During the fall, I hiked the holy temples of Shikoku Island and learned how to cook with a Japanese *washoku* teacher back in Tokyo. In the winter, I drank sake with my friends in Niigata, ate delicious *nabe* hot pots in Matsuyama, and visited my favorite *onsen* baths in the Iya Valley. Japan experiences all four seasons, and the Japanese adapt to and appreciate all of them—the rain, the snow, the storms—whatever nature brings.

One day, I was in Kyoto, observing a *kintsugi* master, Tsuyoshi-san, at work in his home studio. He reminded me of my grandfather (an Impressionist painter), with his wisdom, artistic character, and massive amount of talent. Carefully, he sealed the pieces of broken pottery until they were whole again and painted the cracks with gold. As I watched this talented man put his energy and soul into bringing shattered vessels back to life, it hit me: *kintsugi* is the self-care we all need and deserve.

Kintsugi is applied to vessels that are not just broken, but beloved. The gold that seals the cracks is applied with an artist's care and devotion. The finished product is more beautiful than it was before. We deserve this too! And we

shouldn't have to wait until we feel broken to give ourselves this gift.

It is through a process of self-care and self-acceptance that we can heal, flourish, and grow. My journey taught me so much, and, in the end, I left Japan feeling healed in mind, body, and spirit. My experience of learning how to put myself back together made me stronger, tougher, and more resilient.

As I was writing this book, I talked to my girlfriends and heard so many similar stories. I realized that too many of us feel broken or damaged—or simply not good enough—too much of the time. We're so busy being hard on ourselves that it's easy to lose sight of the fact that we are also deserving of the self-care it takes to maintain our health and our happiness. *Golden repair* celebrates our imperfections. It teaches us that we are more beautiful for our flaws, our battle scars, our lessons learned.

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Kōyasan, Japan: We can learn so much from the monks, admiring their tenacity, poise, and devotion.

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My grandfather's self portrait: Jun Kumai's artwork is the lifeline to our family's artistry. He was a rebel before his time and a pioneer in his field. He traveled the world painting from the 1970s to the 1980s. He had a deep and profound love for Europe. A true *shokunin*.

The philosophies of Japanese life are the guiding force of this book. I've organized them into four parts: Strengthen, Nourish, Lifestyle, and Heart. In each of these sections, you will find some of the simple rituals that helped heal me. In Japan, rituals are an important part of everyday life. These practices are prompts that remind you of what's important, and ground you in the present while honoring the past.

It is my hope that this book will offer you the golden repair you need to feel whole, vibrant, happy, and healthy. I'm excited to share my heritage, my family's traditions, and my heart.

体に気をつけてください!

Karada ni ki o tsukete kudasai! Please take care of yourself,

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Jōbunisuru

丈夫にする, じょうぶにする/

Genkizukeru

元気づける, げんきづける

1


Kintsugi

金継ぎ, きんつぎ

(keen tsu gee)

the japanese art of golden repair

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KINTSUGI, 金継ぎ, きんつぎ (keen tsu gee), translated from Japanese kanji meaning:

金—gold

継—repair, inherit, succeed, continue

KINTSUGI IS MY HEART. It is my life's anthem.

Kintsugi made me who I am today.

The practice of kintsugi—repairing broken vessels by sealing the cracks with lacquer and carefully dusting them with gold powder—is a remarkable art. The Japanese believe the golden cracks make the pieces even more precious and valuable.

It's beautiful to think of this practice as a metaphor for your life, to see the broken, difficult, or painful parts of you as radiating light, gold, and beauty. Kintsugi teaches you that your broken places make you stronger and better than ever before. When you think you are broken, you can pick up the pieces, put them back together, and learn to embrace the cracks.

Many of us are struggling to be better, to recharge, or to keep up. We're constantly searching for the secret to self-improvement. But we know, on some deep level, that there is

no secret. In order to heal and feel whole, we have to do the work.

For many years, I went through life with parts of my heart broken. I wasn't aware of it then, but I wasn't taking proper care of myself. I constantly felt as if I needed to keep going. I was very hard on myself. Inside, I carried a lot of lingering anger, sometimes sadness, and, almost always, a feeling of needing to belong. I never, ever felt quite "good enough," and was always seeking validation from outside.

When we were growing up, Mom and Dad were extremely tough on my older sister Jenni and me. They expected the very best from us, always. I would later come to realize that their philosophy was rooted in the traditional Japanese practices of *kaizen* (continuous improvement), *ganbatte* (do your best), *ki o tsukete* (take great care), and *kansha* (gratitude). Jenni and I were shown these practices at an early age, and we always carried them with us. When challenges inevitably arose, we used them as opportunities to heal, to work harder, to do better, to improve, and, ultimately, to be resilient through tough times.

The Japanese have a saying: *Oyano se wo mite ko wa sodatsu.*

“親の背を見て、子は育つ。おやのせをみて、こはそだつ。”

It means “Children learn by watching what their parents do, not by hearing what they say.” My parents did not tell us about these Japanese practices. Instead, they showed us,

always leading by example. They taught Jenni and me that if we followed these teachings, they would help us to become exactly who we are, and to find what we are looking for.

These practices will do the same for you. But the path I'm talking about is not the path of least resistance. It is more like a pavement that is slowly being laid before us as we take the next steps on our journey. Your journey is your story, unlike anyone else's. What makes you so special is the path that you are in the process of forging right now. Your story contains everything that makes you individually precious, and your story is a gift to the world.

On the surface, it may seem as if I am confident, and perhaps even strong. But the truth is, I am still working to fill my cracks. Across my heart you will find cracks caused by heartbreak, not feeling accepted by society, feeling "different," and childhood memories of never feeling good enough. For many years, living with these cracks made me feel incomplete.

For the first twelve years of my career, I never took a break. In perfect Japanese form, I worked hard and gave only my very best (known as *ganbatte*, which you'll learn more about in chapter 6). But I wasn't taking good care of myself. I never took breaks, other than the times when I would travel to see family during the holidays, and even then I never stopped working. I was afraid that if I stopped, others would catch up to me.

Then I began to study my heritage and piece together my past. It took a lot of hard work, but slowly, the cracks began to mend . . .

I have been traveling to Japan since I was in kindergarten. In recent years, Mom and I would meet up in Japan to visit family. Each time, she would note, “Don’t forget to take a few of Baachan’s (my Japanese grandmother’s) things.” Inevitably, after a few trips around the globe, some of the items broke. But I never threw them away. I worked on saving the pieces, so I could seal them with lacquer and dust them with gold.

I began painting on quiet weekends, sealing all the cracks with golden repair. The teacups you see here are my grandmother’s, which have been repaired by kintsugi. This was a therapeutic practice for me, and a way to connect with an art form that has become reflective of my life.

In Japan, we honor our elders and treasure those who have passed. During the writing of this book, my sweet and loving Baachan passed away peacefully at age ninety-six. It was time to pay homage to the matriarch in our family, who raised four daughters just after World War II ended. Baachan was absolutely radiant, warm, and loving, and could always light up a room.