

## “Repair

Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Stony Brook, NY, September 2013

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### **Opening Words:** Making Good (Philip Ball)

The 16th-century Japanese tea master Sen no Rikyū is said to have ignored his host’s fine Song Dynasty Chinese tea jar until the owner smashed it in despair at his indifference. After the shards had been painstakingly reassembled by the man’s friends, Rikyū declared: ‘Now, the piece is magnificent.’ So it went in old Japan: when a treasured bowl fell to the floor, one didn’t just sigh and reach for the glue. The old item was gone, but its fracture created the opportunity to make a new one.

Smashed ceramics would be stuck back together with a strong adhesive made from lacquer and rice glue, the web of cracks emphasized with colored lacquer. Sometimes the coating was mixed or sprinkled with powdered silver or gold and polished with silk so that the joins gleamed. A bowl or container repaired in this way would typically be valued more highly than the original.... The repair, like that of an old teddy bear, [patched and repatched and worn bald and blind in service to a child] is a testament to the affection in which the object is held.

## **Chalice Lighting and Silence**

### **[Covenant Review]**

**Check-in:** Share a highlight of your summer experiences.

### **Story**

I have heard tell—who knows whether it is true or not; if it is not, it should be—that when a woman of a certain African tribe knows she is pregnant, she goes to the jungle with other women, and together they wait in prayer to discover the “song of the child.” As the child is being born, those who surround the mother sing the child’s song to him or her. At important junctures as the child grows, he or she will hear that song sung: when he comes of age, when she gets married, when he dies. And if, at some point a person does something that breaks a community agreement, he is taken to the center of town and the people of the community form a circle around him and they sing his song to him and they remind him of all the good he has done over all the years, of all the people who love him, of all the beautiful things he has made, of the ways he has been generous, forgiving, supportive, and courageous. In this way, what is disconnected in him is reconnected and what is broken is made whole.

### **Topic Introduction**

Repair: from the Middle English *reparen*, *reparen*, from Old French *reparer*, from Latin *reparāre* : *re*, *again* + *parāre*, *to prepare, put in order. To put back in order.*

Things have a tendency to break: thin ice, hearts, the antique porcelain lamp, promises, connections, bones and fingernails, windows and mirrors, silence. Things that are supposed to run break down too, or fall apart, usually when you need them most: the car, the

lawnmower, the garage door opener, the dryer, the furnace, the plan, the line of communication, the relationship, your composure.

Sometimes it is easier to replace them than repair them. More and more, we toss broken things out. When the electric kettle breaks, you are likely to buy a new one, unless you are particularly thrifty or handy. An international movement called “Restart” aims to increase the likelihood that we will repair a broken item instead of adding it to the landfill. At Restart “parties” around the world, experts gather to teach people how to fix broken items.

For the most part, though, these days, we depend on expert repair-people to fix what breaks. Confidantes, ministers, counselors, psychiatrists—they are the fixers of broken hearts and spirits and relationships that are falling apart. They encourage us not to throw our broken selves away and help us decide whether to mend important relationships or cut unhealthy ties. Doctors, physical therapists, nurses, vets and other medical professionals collaborate in the treatment of broken bodies. Mechanics, small engine repairmen, IT specialists, company linemen, carpenters—they and others like them fix the mechanical and structural stuff we depend on in our day to day lives.

Life is a vast and fluid community of things and beings that function and fail to function. And you are one of them and also an agent of repair.

## Quotations

### **Story:** The Tire Iron and the Tamale (Justin Horner)

During this past year I’ve had three instances of car trouble: a blowout on a freeway, a bunch of blown fuses and an out-of-gas situation. They all happened while I was driving other people’s cars, which for some reason makes it worse on an emotional level. And on a practical level as well, what with the fact that I carry things like a jack and extra fuses in my own car, and know enough not to park on a steep incline with less than a gallon of fuel.

Each time, when these things happened, I was disgusted with the way people didn’t bother to help. I was stuck on the side of the freeway hoping my friend’s roadside service would show, just watching tow trucks cruise past me. The people at the gas stations where I asked for a gas can told me that they couldn’t lend them out “for safety reasons,” but that I could buy a really crappy one-gallon can, with no cap, for \$15. It was enough to make me say stuff like “this country is going to hell in a handbasket,” which I actually said.

But you know who came to my rescue all three times? Immigrants. Mexican immigrants. None of them spoke any English.

One of those guys stopped to help me with the blowout even though he had his whole family of four in tow. I was on the side of the road for close to three hours with my friend’s big Jeep. I put signs in the windows, big signs that said, “NEED A JACK,” and offered money. Nothing. Right as I was about to give up and start hitching, a van pulled over, and the guy bounded out.

He sized up the situation and called for his daughter, who spoke English. He conveyed through her that he had a jack but that it was too small for the Jeep, so we would need to

brace it. Then he got a saw from the van and cut a section out of a big log on the side of the road. We rolled it over, put his jack on top and we were in business.

I started taking the wheel off, and then, if you can believe it, I broke his tire iron. It was one of those collapsible ones, and I wasn't careful, and I snapped the head clean off. Damn.

No worries: he ran to the van and handed it to his wife, and she was gone in a flash down the road to buy a new tire iron. She was back in 15 minutes. We finished the job with a little sweat and cussing (the log started to give), and I was a very happy man.

The two of us were filthy and sweaty. His wife produced a large water jug for us to wash our hands in. I tried to put a 20 in the man's hand, but he wouldn't take it, so instead I went up to the van and gave it to his wife as quietly as I could. I thanked them up one side and down the other. I asked the little girl where they lived, thinking maybe I'd send them a gift for being so awesome. She said they lived in Mexico. They were in Oregon so Mommy and Daddy could pick cherries for the next few weeks. Then they were going to pick peaches, then go back home.

After I said my goodbyes and started walking back to the Jeep, the girl called out and asked if I'd had lunch. When I told her no, she ran up and handed me a tamale.

This family, undoubtedly poorer than just about everyone else on that stretch of highway, working on a seasonal basis where time is money, took a couple of hours out of their day to help a strange guy on the side of the road while people in tow trucks were just passing him by.

But we weren't done yet. I thanked them again and walked back to my car and opened the foil on the tamale (I was starving by this point), and what did I find inside? My \$20 bill! I whirled around and ran to the van and the guy rolled down his window. He saw the \$20 in my hand and just started shaking his head no. All I could think to say was, "*Por favor, por favor, por favor,*" with my hands out. The guy just smiled and, with what looked like great concentration, said in English: "Today you, tomorrow me."

Then he rolled up his window and drove away, with his daughter waving to me from the back. I sat in my car eating the best tamale I've ever had, and I just started to cry.

## Questions for Group Reflection

1. There are individuals in our lives who love to figure out how things work, to take things apart and put them back together again. Fixing things for them is good fun, an interesting challenge, and success a real pleasure. Does this describe you or someone you know?
2. Have you ever been profoundly moved by someone's effort to repair something for you? Have you ever been the person who made such a repair for someone else?
3. Breaking and repairing are words we apply to human relationships. We "break up." Lines of communication "break down." Our hearts get "broken." What have you learned, over the years, about repairing damaged relationships?

4. Tell us a story of a time when you had to decide whether to throw away something that had broken, fallen apart or stopped working or make an effort to repair it. The broken thing could be a toaster or another such object, but also an idea, a dream, or a relationship. How did you decide? In retrospect, did you make the best decision?
5. Have you yourself ever "broken" or fallen apart and needed repair? How did you assist in the process? How did you resist?
6. **Tikkun olam**, תיקון עולם, is a Hebrew phrase that means "repairing the world" (or "healing the world") which suggests humanity's shared responsibility to heal, repair and transform the world. How important is that responsibility to you? In what ways do you participate in *tikkun olam*?

**Likes and Wishes** (Likes: celebrations, gratitudes, appreciations for needs met; and Wishes: mournings, requests, acknowledgements of needs not met)

### **Closing Words and Chalice Extinguishing:**

Prayer for the Small Engine Repairman (Charles W. Pratt)

Our Sundays are given voice  
 By the small engine repairman,  
 Whose fingers, stubby and black,  
 Know our mowers and tractors,  
 Chainsaws, rototillers,  
 Each plug, gasket and valve  
 And all the vital fluids.  
 Thanks to him our lawns  
 Are even, our gardens vibrant,  
 Our maples pruned for swings,  
 The underbrush whacked away.  
 "What's broke can always be fixed  
 If I can find the parts,"  
 He says as he loosens a nut,  
 Exposes the carburetor,  
 Tinkers and tunes until  
 To the slightest pull on the cord  
 The engine at once concurs.  
 Let him come into our homes,  
 Let him discipline our children,  
 Console and counsel our mates,  
 Adjust the gap of our passions,  
 The mix of our humors: lay hands  
 On the small engine of our days.

1. SNAFU = **S**ituation **N**ormal **A**ll **F**\*\*\*ed **U**p
2. “Broken Things” (David Byrne)  
There are broken things/ In my house  
Some are twisted/ Some are cracked  
Some been bended/ Till they snapped  
There are broken/ Things in here  
Things in pieces/ Things in knots  
Things that crumble/ In tiny parts  
I am fixing broken things/ I am fixing broken things  
Everyone could use some help  
Will you help me fix myself?
3. The major difference between a thing that might go wrong and a thing that cannot possibly go wrong is that when a thing that cannot possibly go wrong goes wrong it usually turns out to be impossible to get at or repair ~Douglas Adams
4. No change of circumstances can repair a defect of character.” ~ Ralph Waldo Emerson
5. It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men. ~Frederick Douglass
6. The time to repair the roof is when the sun is shining. ~John F. Kennedy
7. No change of circumstances can repair a defect of character. ~Ralph Waldo Emerson
8. The greatness of America lies not in being more enlightened than any other nation, but rather in her ability to repair her faults. ~Alexis de Tocqueville
9. You don't repair that relationship by sitting down and talking about trust or making promises. Actually, what rebuilds it is living it and doing things differently. ~Patricia Hewitt
10. It is the neglect of timely repair that makes rebuilding necessary. ~Richard Whately
11. The damage done in one year can sometimes take ten or twenty years to repair.  
~Chinua Achebe
12. If it ain't broke, don't fix it.
13. I see my trees repair their boughs. ~Ralph Waldo Emerson
14. “Octerfluberon” is a word that means totally messed up beyond repair. ~Steve Tysinger

15. An elderly couple was asked how they managed to stay together for 65 years. The woman replied, “We were born in a time when if something was broken we would fix it, not throw it away.”

16. [When all those city folks try to fix up my talking, all they do is mess me up. ~Loretta Lynn](#)

17. Everybody talks about wanting to change things and help and fix, but ultimately all you can do is fix yourself. And that's a lot. Because if you can fix yourself, it has a ripple effect.  
~Rob Reiner