

Introduction

Tea and Ceremony reveals the Way of Tea—*Chado*—as a living path. Like any true path, it is there for any person to take, without limits on who that person may be. Embarking on this path requires only sincerity and a willingness to understand that tea, in all its beautiful forms and with all our appreciations, can be a lifelong journey. This book begins by showing us tea’s global history and then explains how that rich history can inform our own attraction to tea. More important, it reveals how we can then use tea in our daily lives for removal and spiritual perception.

Chado is intimately connected with Zen, and Zen in turn is part of a living culture. It cannot be separated from the world. That’s good for two reasons. First, it means that its spirituality is an integral part of daily life. Second, it means that Zen can be entered from a variety of angles. Since it is an integral part of life, it cannot be alien to what we do each day. Since it is part of daily life, deep understanding in any number of activities can lead to spirituality. In the monasteries, the masters engage in many seemingly ordinary tasks—cooking, sweeping, repairing walls, gardening—all because they know that to declare some acts spiritual and others worldly is to make foolish distinctions.

Yet the work of a master can have a different quality than the work of someone who doesn’t care about what they do. Those who regard work as drudgery stay separate from all that surrounds them. They just want to “get it over with,” or they wish they were “anywhere but here.” The master does the task to the fullest degree necessary, and doesn’t wish to be anywhere but there.

So daily tasks may have spiritual potential, but there is evidently a difference in the *how* of doing it. In some Zen temples, for example, a student is told to do a certain housekeeping task but is not told how to do it. There is a reason for that, of course. The student must go out and talk to more experienced monks, and in so doing he must discover the method and meaning of the task. Not knowing how or

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what one must do to accomplish a certain goal may seem confusing, but it can also spur one to concentration and determination. Such focus is the beginning of the spiritual essence of what may seem to be an ordinary job.

At other times, the masters give us certain forms to follow. This is true in a variety of Asian traditions. For example, a painting student might spend ten years just painting plum flowers. A calligraphy student will copy the scrolls of masters repeatedly for years. A martial arts student is taught long series of movements derived from the battles of past champions. An ascetic may repeat the same mantra for decades on end. Even in legends and folk tales, plants, animals, and people will follow certain procedures for self-cultivation. In the famous Chinese story, “Journey to the West,” many characters, including the central one, Monkey, practice for centuries in order to develop supernatural skill and seek enlightenment.

Viewed from this perspective, *Chado*, the Way of Tea, is not just a formal method of drinking tea. It is a practice, with spirituality in the details. The rustic tea room, the carefully chosen scroll, the tea bowl, the quality of the water, and the actions of the server are crucial. True, it takes many years to practice the full Way of Tea, but this means it is a long path with many stages that will hold our attention. A journey can be more delightful if we know it will last. Knowing that should not be a barrier to taking the first few steps to begin our enjoyment.

The art of tea exists not to make the drinking of a delightful beverage complicated, but to show us the path taken by previous masters. We can find the same vistas they themselves glimpsed. In this case, the vistas in a small tea room and the vistas in a bowl of tea are equal to the view from a holy mountain or the visions of a hermit-poet.

A bowl of tea contains the whole world. It is round, reminding us of the cycles of life, the shape of our planet, the return of each day in the sunrise and the clouds. The bowl is forged from the Five Elements—metal, wood, water, fire, and earth—all are necessary to make it. The bowl may have a rustic feel, but it is undeniably a made thing: a piece of art with a practical function created by another human being. Tea represents life and death. We pick the best leaves, we save them, their green as intense as all the days of spring, and we whisk them with living water heated over a living fire.

After, though, we must discard what is left (tea left overnight will develop mold), and so there is an ending to our experience, and a need to let go of what we had.

Breath is at the center of our experience. We cannot live without air. We cannot do anything—sing, talk, work—without using our breath. The masters of breath—*qi* in Chinese, *ki* in Japanese—tell us that all life is energy, and all energy is of the breath. It so happens that *Chado* is also a way of the breath. The tea hut is ideally in a garden, close to the dewy breaths of the morning leaves. The sweep of the broom, the exhale of the host as she enters the room, the steam rising from the kettle, the air whisked into the tea, the fragrance from the surface, the breath of those who drink from the bowl—all these are ways that our individual breathing falls into harmony with others, with the garden, and with the greater world on the breezes that flow over the garden walls. Our breath is shaped in very much the same way that the exercises of the meditation masters shape our inhalations and exhalations.

Tea is also healthy for us. It refreshes us, awakens us, and cleanses us. It neither sedates us as wine might, nor over stimulates us as coffee might. There are antioxidants in teas, and scientists are discovering even potential anti-cancer benefits. Tea heals, and healing has always been part of the meaning of spirituality.

Yet what of tea outside of Asia? If Zen and tea are united in Japanese culture, what does that mean for those of us in the United States and other countries in the West? The answer to that question has led to a great deal of experimentation and, in some cases, mistaken attempts to bring Zen and tea to the West. It's absurd for non-Japanese to try to mirror Japanese culture. That only creates separation. We will not find the spirituality that is integral with daily life as long as we are trying to copy someone else.

Equally perplexing is to Westernize *Chado*. There are too many conflicts, too many different assumptions. In the modifications, we inevitably have to discard the Japanese identity of *Chado* and we end up diminishing what we originally valued.

The only possible solution to this paradox is long study and gradual absorption of *Chado*. Only then will it become a natural part of our lives and we a natural part of it. Through such a gentle process, spirituality will come as a natural outcome of our activities. If we can approach *Chado* in this way, then we honor both it and ourselves.

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Tea and Ceremony leads us into this process. Diana Saltoon begins by explaining her early exposure to tea as a young girl—a perfect introduction, innocent, but containing the essential elements of offering and sharing. Her overview of tea culture is not simply a concise description of tea’s history around the world, but it also shows that the wonders of tea as a beverage and an art are open to anyone around the globe. She then orients us to the authentic Way of Tea as it is practiced in Japan (a way she now teaches as a fully accredited teacher). Her “Practical Adaptations” section is where we can see ways in which *Chado* might be practiced in our own lives to bring us tranquility—even if we are used to tea in a mug or want to have a good drink of tea on a hiking trip.

There are two concepts here that are worth more discussion: ceremony and removal. A misunderstanding here would be tragic. It would mean that we might turn away from a wonderful art, fearing the dryness of rituals we might find meaningless. Similarly, a misunderstanding of removal might mean we miss the integration so important to rooting *Chado* in our own culture.

Ceremony must not be seen as valuable in itself. We are not looking for elaborate forms of etiquette or a way in which we might outperform other people in appearing cultivated. Unless ceremony can be seen as an art—perhaps even a choreography—we cannot enjoy it. It is a dance, a graceful and balanced set of movements that expresses our own thoughts and gives us access to the thoughts of the tea masters who created them. Like a dancer who appreciates the dance created by one of the teachers before her, engaging in ceremony means we give ourselves over to the wonders of making an art with our bodies, minds, and hearts. No intellectuality will help. No anxiety will make us more graceful. We need only do the ceremony to unlock its meaning, and in so doing we unlock self-cultivation.

Similarly, we must not see removal as meaning a removal from our lives. That would be separation, not the integration into the living way that is *Chado*. We are not trying to get into some exalted dimension. There is no life to be lived but this one. However, in giving ourselves over to art, we can create a wonderful confluence of the moment we find ourselves in, the tea we take into our bodies, the

sharing with others, and the appreciation of nature. That is a deeper, more mindful moment. If there is any removal, then, it is removal of the obstacles to tranquility.

Tea and Ceremony is an important book, the culmination of decades of study. The author has faced the same obstacles you and I have faced. She has had to balance her interest in tea with marriage, family, and work. Nevertheless, she has long pursued both Zen and tea, and her recognition as an experienced teacher is evidence of her accomplishment. Her message for all of us is that *Chado* is a way to be walked even as we are making our other necessary pursuits. It isn't necessary to leave this world to find tranquility. The author shows us how a simple bowl of tea brings us its own peace.

When one goes to see a teacher, it is common to bring a gift. When one goes to have tea with someone, a present might also be in order. Here, though, the teacher is giving us a lovely opening into the world of tea. If you accept that, just as you would accept a bowl of tea from her hands, the magic, the wonder, and the tranquility of this centuries-old practice can be yours. *Tea and Ceremony*, then, is Diana Saltoon's beautiful and precious gift to us all.

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March, 2004