

WILLING TO DO, HAPPY TO BEAR

Article by Shane Marrs

It is said that as a student of this tradition, one does not simply learn how to make tea, but how to serve it. In one sense, this is meant literally, as in the learning of how to prepare and serve tea to guests who frequent our wayside hut. (Wonderful, beautiful guests from near and far. Please know that we are learning to serve you tea!) We are intimately working with water, teaware, tea and heat sources to better communicate with this Leaf so that it may seamlessly convey its messages of Truth and Nature to us. In developing the skills to prepare tea with grace and gongfu, it is not so much us serving you as it is the Leaf serving you through us. Dearest Camellia has so much wisdom to offer and the avenue of Tea has been chosen to drive that wisdom home to us. In service, we are the road-keepers, sweeping the dust that inevitably settles from the many vehicles of truth that pass.

There is so much more to consider, directly pertaining to serving tea, both functional and aesthetic, seasonal and logistical, musical and spiritual, but I would like to consider the many other faces that tea-service takes indirectly: For this is not a pompous place; we are not here to simply serve tea and offer some sort of escape or bliss-out experience. We are not just here to brew and imbibe tea blind to the problems that the world faces today—in fact it is just the opposite. Tea brewed and consumed in the manner conducted here can open our eyes to the underlying reality that is. This is a thriving and dynamic tradition, very much alive, with a great purpose in mind: one that seeks to promote self-cultivation, meditation, sustainability, community, and a greater sense of connection with ourselves, one another, and Nature. Tea is the Great Connector. This sort of mission requires a lot, to say the least.

As a relatively new student learning the very basics, serving tea, for me, much more often means fetching water, buying groceries, doing the dishes, preparing meals, taking out the trash, watering plants and cleaning doggy doo-doo. What has this to do with the service of tea? What have these menial responsibilities to do with the art of serving tea, and in a greater sense, with the art of living? Lucky for all of us, we have a lively, beautiful, and functional center, in large part due to a small group of people (including all of you!), and in particular, a teacher within that group who can allow Tea to serve through him. Therefore, in order for that opportunity of service to arise, simple daily tasks and everyday errands must be carried out. That's where we, the students, come in. That's very often our role in serving tea. For while it may seem silly, not a drop of tea could be had, had the bills not been paid; the dishes not been cleaned; the bedding not been bought; and the physical space that makes so much of this possible not been duly tended to and made available to all of you at any time for free. All of the grandeur to be found at this center is not without the smallest detail: never negligible, but often unnoticed. To answer the questions I posed before, then, it becomes a little clearer that learning to serve tea means learning to carry out the responsibilities that make the literal service of tea possible. (Yes, that includes cleaning dog poop. It's in the fine print.)

Naturally, my answer to the question, "What are you doing in Taiwan?" is that I am a student of the Leaf: a student of Tea. After all, I've moved halfway across the world and committed my time to some wayside joint called the Tea Sage Hut! What I'm learning is that being a student of tea means to be a student of serving tea, and to be a student of serving tea, within





the realm of Cha Dao, ultimately means to be a student of service. Tea is the medium through which we serve, and it's a very conductive medium at that. But is an act of service carried out with ill-will the same as an act of service carried out with Love? Am I fetching water because I have to, or because I love to? Does it make a difference? On the surface level, fetching water might look like fetching water, and two different water samples might look the same, but from where they were sourced is paramount. So too, it is worth asking where our service is sourced from. An inner Spring nestled within the Heart of compassion, or a rusty tap spouting from the ego? From where you source your intention makes all the difference in the energy that radiates from you out to the world. Just like the koans of Zen; anything you say or do in the right frame of mind is the right answer, and anything you say or do outside of that mind is the wrong answer, even if it's the right answer! Spirituality has nothing to do with what you believe in and everything to do with your state of being.

There is a role of service to be played here, and it's not so much the corporeal act of carrying it out as it is the intention with which you perform it. This is no simple task either. If actions speak louder than words, then intentions break the sound barrier. I am inspired

by Dharma Master Cheng Yen who said, "We must be willing to do and be happy to bear." There is a lot to do as a student of the Leaf and that can be challenging, but where will growth and development come if not from somewhere outside our comfort zone. Surely, there is little room for growth when you're having a good time! Let us be happy to bear, and let that happiness overflow into what must be done, in the form of pure intention.

Again, we must reflect; to be a student of tea within the realm of this tradition means to be a student of tea through service, and to truly perform that service, a particular frame of mind must be achieved (a state of presence, in other words). Therefore, a student of tea must also be a student of mastery of mind.

Let us not get carried away though, nor get caught up in the role of a student or server; it's not about that. I don't want to portray this life as something too serious. Life is pretty simple here: we drink tea, meditate, eat well, sleep and work. The idea is to be willing to do whatever is required of you in any situation with great intention and presence, and be happy to bear that responsibility. Easier said than done, but it's a challenge worth accepting...