

# FETCHING WATER

*Article by Shane Marrs*

The last drop glides off the silver-tipped spout and fills the side handle teapot. The iron kettle stands empty. Steam is rising, tea infusing, fire bound coals basking in the brazier. In the Daoist tearoom, sunset orange themes the decor: quiet, dim, and gentle on the eyes. Purple Buddha, our setting sun; jarred tea, our sacred sand; bowl tea, our ebbing and flowing ocean. It's late morning. We sit around the table in silent repose. Silent as we sleep; as we meditate; as we drink tea. Outside, the city bombs with noise, but we make room for the space in which no sound exists. Shoulders draw down, gently, hands join near the hara, and eyelids glide slowly like silk over polished marble. The faintest smile, often visibly without, wets our lips. If it's fine tea—and it is—sweetness sails back on our breath, after first coating the mouth, then effortlessly rolling down the back of the throat like morning dew down a curved blade of spring grass. Awareness increases. The breath becomes more noticeable. The air is still and through that stillness the iron kettle gestures in my direction. A simple exchange is made. Bowl tea is set before each guest and it's time for me to fetch water.

Wherever I go, there I am: from the Daoist tearoom to the Zen Temple—two great traditions manifest in adjacent rooms. The distance is short but the energy shift is great as soon as I pass from room to room, a movement marked by the gentle sound of clanging beads that drape the doorway. The beaded curtain sways like a heavy cape in my careful wake. The path before me now: an arching mosaic of simple wooden steps embedded in a sea of coconut-white rocks. I step dutifully on the wooden path leading to the meditation hall. I hold the iron kettle in my left hand as I touch foot onto bamboo tatami mats. The room is clean and shaded, refined and simple. Here, in this spiritual chamber, this place of purity, this sanctity, a few major players reside: First and foremost, Lord Buddha on the altar, always providing us the opportunity to take refuge in and bow to our Higher Self. Adjacent to the Awakened One sits our one hundred year-old statue of Baisao, the Old Japanese Tea Seller. And in the opposite corner, we find our water, stored in the womb of a Purple-sand jar. Inside, a reef of crystals, charcoal, a broken teapot and other water-enhancing materials decorate its basin. By its side I kneel, moving with the center of my body. I relax the kettle from my hand. Bamboo meets iron. I clasp both hands on the bosom of the jar, close my eyes, and breathe...

We meditate here. We take a seated position, close our eyes, and observe the breath. We sit for the sake of sitting and we vow to attain the unattainable. We generate a particular energy. A blend of frequencies akin to love, gratitude, perseverance, determination, forgiveness, harmony, grace, friendship, liberation, peace, happiness and warming embrace to name but a few of the ingredients that flavor this hall. And who (or what rather) can taste that medley of peaceful vibrations which permeates this space if not the receptive medium of water?

Immediately, I thank the water. Hands still clasping the vessel, through the pores I pour my heart. Sometimes I feel an ocean delicately nudging the inside walls of the jar. Other times, a placid pond in a wild forest. I might sit there for ten or twenty seconds before making a request, often for nothing more than Love and Gratitude at the tea table. What I request of the water is often dependant on the texture of the tea session. In the way that tea, teaware, and hanging scrolls complement the seasons, my askings complement accordingly.

Unsure as to why, the next action is my favorite. A ladle hangs from the wall above the clay vessel. Its handle: a cut of bamboo nodes roughly spaced every half inch; its head: a gourd the shape of an exaggerated pear; its belly: coarsely shattered revealing the womb in which water will enter. This ladle hangs not from some simple hook, but from a jagged curving branch jutting out from the wall. I love reaching up towards the ladle the way plants grow towards the light, slowly and earnestly, avoiding all obstacles. With single-mindedness, I release the ladle from its branchy perch and rest it by my side. I hear tea being drunk back at the table. Bowls being lifted, bowls being lowered.

I remove the lids, first from the clay jar and then from the iron kettle. Everything is open. Steam rises. Raising the kettle, the ladle, and my body in unison, I begin to draw water. The water in the jar is calm and quiet and I intend to keep it that way. It's not so much me drawing the water as it is the water filling the empty space of the gourd. I simply guide the gourd, holding its handle like a long pencil. Ever so carefully, so as not to spill a droplet, the empty kettle and the full gourd unite. With each ladle, water takes on the interior shape of the iron kettle; water laden with gratitude, reflective of consciousness and imbued with loving-kindness. At the correct angle, with just the right

pouring motion, I draw and ladle... draw and ladle... Once appropriately full, I carefully return the ladle to its abode, fasten the lid back on the jar, cap the kettle and rise from my kneeled position.

It's a celebratory ritual: a deep reverence; a slow dance—an honor. It's one of the few things I can honestly say I perform without trying to speed up or make more efficient. If ever I draw slightly faster, *gulp* and *drip* are the indicative sounds pointing to my state of mind. If ever I ladle apace, spilt water is tattooed on the outside of the kettle. If ever I lack presence, uncertainty stains my movements. But when I regulate speed and employ patience, there is no sound, no trace. When I am present, I become *fetching water*. There is so much Joy. In those moments, I learn about myself and I learn to Love.

Exiting the room, kettle in hand, I walk the wooden path and wade through the beaded curtain once again. A simple exchange is made and I rejoin the rhythm of the tea ceremony. All that I can do for the

water has been done—until the next kettle empties. Like a calligraphic *Enso*, the circle is never complete yet always starting. From here, the water will go through countless other influences until reaching our guests in the form of tea. What traces remain from the process of fetching can only be experienced by each individual in each individual brew.

Even if this reverence towards water is just poetic heritage, there's something special about it and that changes people. Moreover, if when I finish fetching water and I myself have become more grateful and loving as a result, that's going to have an affect on everyone in the tearoom. Whether my consciousness changes the water or not doesn't really matter; through it all I am changing myself in a way that benefits others—that's what really matters.

