



A BARCELONA WORLD RETREAT

Steve Kokker

There was a beyond-belief ten countries represented at our three-day retreat in the hills outside Barcelona! In his friendly way, Steve makes us feel like we are there, sharing in the peace, insights, laughter and fellowship. And, as he says, we were there!

茶禪

At some point during our recent three-day Zen and Tea retreat held just outside central Barcelona, Wu De reminded us that in all our endeavors, we need to do our part to help the Universe along. We all might want to be struck by lightning (enlightenment), for example, but if we do little to encourage this from happening, we can hope and wish all we want to little effect. If, however, we went to the trouble of climbing to the top of a mountain during a thunderstorm wearing a copper helmet, we would surely increase our chances of being struck. In contrast, sitting locked in a room whining about how years of meditation in this same room has not yet produced enlightenment is not a terribly effective strategy of partnership with the Universe.

A Unique Gathering

The weekend of October 10th, we gathered high up in the hills outside Barcelona in the Collserola Natural Park, all of us in our figurative copper hats, receptive, open. For many of us, lightning struck.

This was the Zen and Tea Weekend Retreat that Antonio had organized, part of the Sky/Heaven/Dao

component of the series of Barcelona tea events. It was held at a hostel in the park; a series of buildings placed along a winding path leading ever higher into the hills, completely embraced by thick, lush vegetation which bathed us in sweet smells by day and sweet sounds of bugs and insect nightlife after sunset.

The core staff of Tallinn-based Chado teashop—Triin, Siim, and I—had flown there to take part in this, to tickle Wu De and reaffirm our commitment to Tea as our main vehicle on the never-ending path towards lightning strikes. Our brother Alexei was also there, making the “Estonian contingent” one fourth of the entire group. Two Finnish sisters showed up unexpectedly in a show of Baltic solidarity, Jasper, the Thor of GTH, also came to take part, as well as yet another northern GTH sister, the gorgeous Karen from northern Scotland. Not to be outdone by this Viking-inspired preponderance of blond hair, pagan attitudes and ancient, wise-sounding accents, there was a scattering of southerners too for counterbalance. Hailing from fabulous Nice, the lovely Sabine (who had just recently hosted Wu De in a series of sun-drenched, windswept events) also made her way to these sweetened,

forested hills. Still others travelled from various corners of Spain, and of course, our beloved Antonio held court in a beautiful way that would make King Felipe VI proud.

Ok, perhaps it's better to put the carbon footprint calculator aside for the moment and stop calculating the tens of thousands of kilometers traversed by everyone to be together, and concentrate instead on the further-reaching consequences that the gathering likely has led to. There surely are other ways of measuring net benefits for a gathering such as this...?

The Dao of Cha

As the emphasis here was on the Dao part of Cha Dao, there was a considerable amount of meditation time; some brave ones even left the rhythmic, often creative snoring patterns of their roommates to join Wu De for a 6am session of listening to chanting as part of the self-discipline and practice of cultivating an appropriate mind-space for the teachings during the day. On our schedule were other meditation times through the day and evening, thematic teaching sessions, *sangha*, time for questions, meals and even swimming

pool breaks, and so much transformational, stunning tea. Some transcendent magic can happen when an atmosphere of openness, safety and warmth is created, and then filled with living, liquid Nature energy, and finally bathed in nourishing, loving wisdom in the form of teachings/discourses. It is a holistic bath for the mind, body and spirit that opens a person to exploring one's own depths and allows the heart to soften.

Have no doubt; there was also time for frolicking, laughing, recounting ribald jokes, and of course discussing my kitchen table.

A Circle of Insights

As opposed to delving too deeply into the precise teachings that emerged on that weekend, I feel that by summarizing what the participants themselves felt they learned, you, dear reader, will have a better sense of the value of those happy days and nights. On the last day, a few hours before the hoop was to

break and we were all to part on our own ways, we sat in a circle, hearts rather mushy, eyes a bit watery, and shared some of the insights and feelings inspired by the previous days.

One person had been reminded of the importance of being at your best in every moment as you never

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know when someone is watching you and ready to be inspired by you. You can set a powerful example at times when you least expect it, and so being still within oneself is important as often as you can man-

age it. Their challenge was in remaining “with” the tea throughout the entire tea session—even with people watching, and even with the mind pulling in different directions.

Another was touched to be in a circle of other humans dedicated to their personal growth and indirectly helping her with hers. She felt inspired to commit to meditation, both for her benefit and for others' around her.

Still another felt her sensitivity was fine-tuned by the experiences, able to sense different kinds of energies in different surroundings. One of our topics of discussion, about what great teachers annoying people can be in our lives, also touched her deeply. The annoyance is, of course, in ourselves, not existing independently and fixed in the other. That we can learn so much from those who piss us off was one deep lesson for her.

Yet another sister found that the idea of bowl tea and how it returns us to simplicity, to our roots, resonated strongly for her. She was also



reminded to continue the path of self-discipline, towards mastery of the self, and the need to settle the self-doubts which come creeping up so often, trying to destabilize this

the principles she had been trying to live by. Feeling a part of a larger community of others struggling with the same issues gave her great strength to continue, for example,

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process. Oh, how plagued most of us are by self-doubt!

Still another felt more certain than ever about the path she was on, feeling a renewed commitment to

acting in accordance with her heart and intuition.

For one brother, simply the peace and quiet afforded by the weekend was such a rare gem for him, some-

thing so sadly uncommon in his life, that this aspect alone had been a profound gift.

One other brother felt stronger to continue his ongoing process of removing self-doubts, of flushing out confusions in order to be clearer about where to go in his development, and also that the ultimate goal of any personal development can only be measured by how effectively we bring this beyond ourselves, to share with others.

Another brother's big lesson was of the importance of showing one's heart without fear. To show up, in the big way.

We drank tea and meditated all day...





An amazing international tea family from ten countries!



For another lovely soul, this weekend had been the first time she had been with a group of strangers in a very long time, and the courage she managed to find to do this, and to share this very intimate space without fear, was deeply significant. She felt that the safety created by the group, as well as the realizations she had about herself, will set the stage for her next phase of life.

Humility, in the End

In humility, Wu De closed with some words that we would all do well to remember in the future. For we are not only students (of the Leaf, of the Dao, of Wu De, of the books and YouTube lectures we devour), we are also teachers. And always have been, even when we have not been aware of it. Even if we are not always teachers in an open sense, we offer teachings, in our very ways of being. We can never know what long-term effects the most casual of acts might have on others in the distant future. So his words are best remembered by us all:

“I look at you and see the smiles of the people you will later serve to. I thank you all for helping to make me a better teacher. All of the mistakes that you have been patient with and borne have helped me get better and be there for future students.”

The time we live out this Dao of Tea is now, and the effects we can have on others is now, not later, so let’s fearlessly show our hearts, make our mistakes publicly, try out this brave mode of being regardless of consequences, now that we can. Regardless of whether our deeds are met with judgment, derision or a lack of comprehension. Now that we are ready, we need to act according to what has already been struck by lightning within us. And we are, believe it or not, ready.

