

THE POWER OF PARTICIPATION

This article was written by our very own Kaiya the Great (and Merciful).

It's been a couple of months now and I hope that you have all been witnessing the growth of your inner trees, your tea wisdom. I'm amazed time after time at how long I can stay oblivious to big changes in myself, but there is no doubt we all have grown in infinite ways even in the little time since my last article, whether we noticed it or not. I had a similar moment recently, looking back at the growth of this center and realizing that a tree has sprung up right beneath my nose here as well. And as this tree's roots sink deeper, increasingly embracing more of the earth as each month passes, its trunk broadens and its branches reach out further still, beckoning an ever-increasing number of weary travelers to rest beneath its leaves, and even harvest a few into their bowls if they like. As a result, these past few weeks have seen more activity than ever before, meaning that more and more time and energy have been required of everyone, and as the need for participation in the care and growth of our as yet young tree has steadily risen, so too has my understanding of what participation really means and how powerful it can be.

As I mentioned in my last article, I don't live in the center now. This means that I don't just sweep, mop, wash dishes, empty the garbage, keep tea spaces clean and tend to altars at the center, I have all the same responsibilities all over again at "my" home as well. I have made this a bit easier on myself by working as few hours as I can in order to cover my expenses and such, but as more and more people begin coming to visit the center, it has grown more and more difficult to juggle the two. For a long time, I spent every bit of my free time serving or cleaning one place or the other, and I must admit that as this went on I occasionally developed a bit of an internal grumble. As I cleaned a floor at the center, I might think of the dirty floor in *my* house, and that if I didn't have to spend my precious time cleaning this floor, I could have some time to relax and drink tea after I clean *my own* floor. As more and more travelers have begun coming here, I've found that it has no longer been possible to keep both places in their best condition, and have also realized that there is no choice but to let go and accept a bit of messiness in my home. As it turns out, being completely wrung-out and unable to handle it all has been the best thing that could have happened.

The moment I let that "my" go, a whole new vista of reality has opened up before me. I have not only found joy in my daily tasks, but have started seeing the very same joy reflected in the faces of our visitors. I've also begun to more clearly witness the transformations and healing that has always been going on, in myself as well. But above all, I've found myself more deeply connecting to the people coming here, in absolutely everything that I do. And it wasn't that all this wasn't happening before, but in looking constantly at myself through my grumbling I was blinded to a beautiful garden that had been growing and flourishing all around me the whole time. In essence I was complaining that I was cultivating another tree instead of cultivating my own. Yet, to what end am I cultivating my tree in the first place?

Until quite recently, if asked what the purpose of meditation, drinking tea, and otherwise developing stillness and peace in myself (in other words, why am I growing this tree within myself), my first response would have been: "So that I can be still and peaceful and rest beneath it, of course." If this is really what I want, though, why am I doing all this work? And more importantly why am I drinking tea? Truly, it's a foolish choice of medicine for this dis-ease. After all, there are a huge variety of more powerful and direct medicines geared to just that kind of self-centered peace: tranquilizers, marijuana, a few beers even. But tea teaches us that this is no way to live. In fact, this was its very first teaching! It was this very teaching that motivated it to speak out to Shen Nong, as he sat blithely beneath its branches. And like any good teacher it led by example, reaching out to touch the Emperor and drop a few leaves into his bowl, in essence declaring: "Cease your solitary confinement, make an effort for someone else, share your fruits, and witness the power and beauty of connection!"

Now I hope that nobody misunderstands this and thinks that I am proposing that you are wasting your time and are selfish if you drink and enjoy your tea alone from time to time, or even most of the time. Actually, the one big relief of all this is that I realized that it's not that I wasn't connected to the joy all around me because it wasn't there before: I simply didn't have my eyes open to it! Similarly, you can't really hoard your tea and drink it alone and not share it with people even if you want to, because the

moment you drink it, the tea becomes you, and then everything you do and everyone you touch that day are also touched by your tea. If we don't participate in this process then it is we who miss out. And although that connection is of course always there, it can't do us much good if we aren't conscious of it.

This is the essence of this Hut we are building together; to increase global participation in our connection to each other through tea. Participation connects us to others, gets us out of our selves and into each other. We have a saying around here that there can be no understanding without involvement—no understanding of people without participating in their lives and of course no understanding of tea without actually getting involved in how it's grown, where it comes from and how it's prepared and drunk. One wonderful thing about this is that although so young, this tree has the strength to offer some shade and even a few leaves to those of you who are far away. And so many of you feel this and

want to care for this tree which gives of itself so freely. Visitors and distant friends alike are constantly asking us: "What else can I do? I want to help more!" And that is why I wanted to write this article. My life has been drastically changed by your participation, and I wanted you to be aware of that and thank you for it. I also want to encourage you all to try to step a little bit more out of yourselves, and participate more in the connections you are already a part of every day, some of which you might be unaware of.

Share your tea! Make the tea we send you each month with someone new, perhaps. Or make it for yourself with intention, absorbing what it has to say. And then you can say that same thing to everyone you meet and take heart in knowing that even if you can't see the differences you are making in the world, they are there—they are even there thousands of miles away on the other side of the world and beyond (Galactivation!). I raise my bowl and the universe spins...

The two incredible *Chatong* that made it all possible, and served with a grace and humility that we all could bow to.

