

THE SCATTERED SEEDS OF CHA DAO

Germinating our Inner Trees

Article by Colin Hudon

The Way of Tea begins with a seed. This small seed contains more than we can imagine or understand. In truth, it contains the All and Everything, the Alpha and Omega, the Entirety of what is available in the human experience. One might ask, “Well, how can you make such an audacious claim unless you’ve experienced this entirety?” My response is that “I don’t know, but day after day, month after month, the spirit of the Leaf demonstrates it. During the tea ceremony, we have access to a rare space of connection to the entirety of life by way of Nature. It is one of the gifts offered by the Leaf.”

The 13th Century Zen monk Dogen Zenji describes this experience in saying, “To study the way is to study the self, to study the self is to forget the self, to forget the self is to be enlightened by all things of the universe. To be enlightened by all things of the universe is to cast off the body and mind of the self as well as those of others. Even the traces of enlightenment are wiped out, and life with traceless enlightenment goes on forever and ever.” The practice of Cha Dao and enlightenment are one and the same, just as there is no gap between Zazen and daily life. Cha Dao is the great bridge between the numinous and prosaic. In this way, it contains the Entirety.

For those of us willing to listen with our whole being, this plant tells the story of how everything is interconnected, interdependent and continually transforming. When tea enters our body, where does it end and we begin? It is the great bridge between the plant and human kingdom, between Heaven and Earth, and between one another. It is the roadside nectar that revives us during our long walk home, reminding us to enjoy the views along the way.

From the first fateful bowl to this present moment, tea has travelled side-by-side with humans through the most harrowing, heroic and sublime experiences. In many ways, it is man’s greatest ally in the plant world; and it all begins with a small, mossy seed.

Some people arrive at the tea ceremony and see only the shell of the seed, the subtle veneer of ordinary beauty and aesthetic simplicity. It is easy to miss the elements contained within the seed. The extraordinary depth of the tea ceremony is missed unless we can quiet our busy minds enough to hear the language of the trees, to allow the infinite expansiveness of the moment to take us. In this space, our presence becomes water and light to the seed, stirring it to germination—inviting it skyward to the heavens. We have to give tea space to tell its story and to share itself, just as we must give





one another this space. Through the practice of the tea ceremony, especially in the company of others, these elements of the seed become more accessible in our humdrum lives. This celebration of the ordinary unites the duality of sacred and profane. Through the experience of this simple, ancient ritual, we remember that life is nothing but a celebration and that everything is sacred: the wistful falling of a leaf, the afternoon light cascading across the wooden floor, our lover's raised eyebrow, the steam rising from our favorite bowl...

When we drink tea, we drink of Nature and we remember where we came from. It is our roots that give us strength and stability. We access our gratitude by remembering our roots, by feeling grounded in an awareness of the gift of life. We too started as a seed of awareness in the field of Consciousness. Connecting to our deepest roots is connecting to the offering of life given to us. Human beings emerged out of Nature and it is to Her we owe infinite gratitude for all that is bestowed to us. When we treat the drinking of tea as a prayer to Gaia for these gifts, She opens her mystery to us more fully. There is a sacred dialogue that occurs in the form of a prayer. She teaches us that to contemplate her mystery is to contemplate our own mystery. There are fewer expressions of the human spirit better suited to such contemplation and prayer than the tea ceremony. In the words of Osho, "It is called a tea cer-

emony, not tea drinking. It is not a teashop or a tea stall, it is a temple: here, ceremonies happen. This is only symbolic. In the whole of life, around the clock, you have to remember that wherever you are it is a holy land and whatever you are doing it is divine."

With constant care, attention, practice, service and love, this seed grows into a deep-rooted tree that gives unconditionally. In this way, tea teaches us how to love. When we give without wanting anything in return, we are expressing pure love. In fact, we never know how far our giving extends. Every person we touch with a moment of peace, stillness, love, compassion and openness will carry this gift with them and offer it to the people in their lives, and so on... This is the ultimate source of individual and planetary transformation, the way by which the Leaf teaches us the art of unconditional and selfless giving. The more we give, the more we burn up the ego. This is the true wisdom of Cha Dao, the lesson of giving. Life is an offering given to us freely at birth, and thus it's a blessed opportunity to make an offering of our lives. Just as the goddess, Mother of all Herbs, gives so freely of Her leaves, Her shade and Her wisdom, so might we learn to give freely of the honey and nectar we gather in ourselves through our practice of Cha Dao, which is as much in the drinking as it is in the sharing...