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TEA WITH FAIRIES

-Steve Kokker

Don't let the title, or Steve's casual tone fool you: this article touches on some very profound topics! How and in what ways are we connected to the important people in our lives when they aren't present? Do our thoughts, or even prayers, influence their lives? Beneath these depths there are actually darker waters below: How and in what way are we connected to everything in the Universe?

We all had imaginary friends as children: Beings to speak to before falling asleep, or while feeling nervous at school. Losing them is a bittersweet lesson in growing up: in “knowing better”. Maybe we all know too much. Sure, these companions never existed in the reality we call “real”, but perhaps logical, linear thinking like that killed some of the magic and joy those fantasies brought us. Maybe, just maybe, it's high time to revive them in our lives. We in this tea tradition are used to talking about shamans, fairies and spirits, about goddesses, Qi and other beings which cannot be thoroughly touched, seen or smelled. So, it's just a short step away from beginning once again to interact with them.

Most of us have set out bowls or cups in honor of those who are not physically present. This is a lovely gesture which expands our tea space, sometimes setting a theme to our sessions, which sends a deep bow of gratitude, love or tribute to those who could not for whatever reason be there with us.

I have in the past set tea out for my dear departed Dad, to Wu De as a thanks for everything he has transmitted to me, to a distant friend whose birthday it was or who had wanted but couldn't attend, and to someone dear to my heart on that particular day.

This morning I had a transcendent tea session with my pals Timo and Jasper, neither of whom were actually here. I found that there are

many unexpected ways to expand the already lovely gesture of setting a cup for an absent friend, so as to truly engage with loved ones in unique ways. As we know, most communication goes on in non-verbal ways, and so why couldn't connections between persons be deepened even in their absence from one another?

I set up a simple *chaxi*, played some delicate, non-obtrusive Kip Mazuy music, and steeped some mystery sheng I was presented by Mr. Liang on last year's Global Tea Hut trip to Yunnan. I started to vividly imagine that both Timo and Jasper were there in front of me as I poured tea into their cups, and spoke their names softly like a whispered incantation, as I passed the



cups towards them. On this day it was Timo's birthday (he was celebrating in his hometown several hours away), and Jasper was having a momentous day serving tea to a large group of people at a *sangha* meeting in Amsterdam. I closed my eyes and wished them well as I let the wild mountain nectar drift down my throat.

I'm certain it had nothing to do with the Autumn sun streaming through my open windows at the time, but when I closed my eyes, I had distinct impressions of both of these fellow tea lovers and fine friends sitting there, in their effortless cross-legged levitation poses, smiling and glowing as if bathed in soft light. I didn't actually see them reach for and raise their cups, and

I was secretly glad of that, as I was using those 100 year old ceramic ones I paid half a fortune for and wouldn't have cared much for mishaps, even imaginary ones...

I continued for a few moments to sit with this rather peaceful, still image of those two sitting/floating there with me, in a rather harmonious silence. After only a very brief moment, I began to feel as if there was some form of connection occurring between us. Something along the lines of the times when I am able, from a space of an opened or softened heart, for example, to see beyond their personalities and towards the more fragile, loving and in-need-of-love beings behind them. I imagined simply sharing this space with them for a few moments.

I can't say that I continued for very long with this. I didn't later stand up and offer them a piece of cake, or wait to brew another steeping as they returned from the toilet. Nor did I ask them if they detected a note of copper in the tea's after-taste or offer them a hug at the session's closure. Yet it was incredible how even this brief meditative sharing of space with my imaginary friends opened up a tender heart-space to them and reminded me that they (as with everyone I know) are far more than mere personalities with their quirks and perks. I felt like I had spent some time looking at them soul to soul, all masks laid aside. What a lovely feeling that permeated the space around me. And I got to eat the cake all by myself!

Osho, cranky old philosopher that he was, liked to suggest that instead of bothering others with our problems, we try speaking to the wall. We upset no one that way, let others get on with their lives, start no drama, fuel no ego, and still get whatever rubbish we have in our minds off our 'chests'. In a parallel way, we can practice opening our hearts to those we love (and, perhaps even more beneficially, to those we do not love so much) without taking up any of their time. This is our homework, after all, not necessarily theirs.

I heartily suggest opening up your tea space to "imaginary beings": your higher self, departed loved ones, friends you have just had an argument with, persons you

wish you were with at the moment, people to whom you neglected to say the right thing when you had a chance; people with whom regular communication is complicated by roles, masks, or other forms of unconscious behavior. Imprinting our consciousness with this kind of feeling-based acknowledgment of another's beingness may hopefully continue through to our next so-called "real-life" encounter with them when, despite any automated forms of behavior or conversation, a connection with that image of their light, beautiful, fragile and searching-for-love selves will infuse your words and deeds with greater compassion. And, of course, this Global Tea Hut is the perfect demonstration of all we're discussing, since it

affords us all the change to drink tea with another around the world, connected in spirit!

At the very least, it reconnects you with some childhood creativity you likely have lost!

Until the next time we meet in Fairie-land, be well...



A cup for all of you...

