



## Chado — The Way of Tea

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### *Seven Cups of Green Tea*

*The first cup moistens my lips and throat.*

*The second cup breaks my loneliness.*

*The third cup searches my innermost being.*

*The fourth cup raises a slight perspiration and all the wrong of life  
passes away through my pores.*

*At the fifth cup I am purified.*

*The sixth cup calls to me to realms of the immortals.*

*The seventh cup — ah — but I can take no more — I only feel the breath  
of a cold wind that rises in my sleeves.*

— From Joan Yushin Derrick



On this early spring day in May at an aged Zen monastery set gently in the low mountains of New York State, we gather for a weekend to learn to make the perfect cup of Japanese green tea. The practice of drinking powdered green tea was brought to Japan by monks returning from their studies in Zen monasteries in twelfth century China. *Chado*, the way of tea, flowed from the principle that the act of making tea could be meditative. It was the Tea Master, Sen Rikyu (1522 – 91) who organized and blended various styles, philosophy and procedures of tea to form the basis of *chado*. At its best, the art of making tea bears eloquent witness to the spirit of *chado's* four principles: harmony, respect, purity and tranquility, which form the practical rules and highest ideals of tea.

As Quakers, we can take spiritual comfort, learning important life lessons from each stage of tea preparation. We are called to honor that of God in every person, to live in harmony with others and to avoid subtle and overt forms of violence. As Quakers we are called to respect and be good stewards of this precious Earth, knowing that it is a gift from God. We are reminded not to accumulate earthy treasures, while others have nothing. We

are called to examine our needs and wants with a pure tranquil heart, living in simplicity and restraint to promote ecological and spiritual renewal. We understand the interconnectedness of all things, and seek to walk gently and graciously on this Earth, consuming responsibly.

These general Quaker beliefs are reflected in the principles of tea preparation — harmony, respect, purity, and tranquility.

Just as in meeting for worship friends are invited to open to the presence of God, so too in tea preparation we open to the presence of gracious hospitality and purity of spirit through the simple act of offering a bowl of green tea. Not confined by speech or silence in the company of many or just a few gathered in stillness, in meeting we offer ourselves in communion with God. Meeting provides the structure for understanding Jesus' most basic teachings of faith, love, charity and honesty. Whether silent or vocal ministry, in meeting, we discern God's call in our lives and derive fresh insight and direction.

Similarly tea preparation is more than an opportunity to enjoy a pleasing cup of tea with guests; it is an invitation to

spacious awareness. We discover inner serenity of kindred spirits gathered together to appreciate the gracious simplicity of sharing green tea. Through the simplicity and purism of the tea room, for example, a tone is set to receive the profound serenity and peace in the careful craft of making green tea. In this state of peace and graciousness of host and guest, attending to every detail with Zen-like movements, we open the door of the mundane and step into the sacred. We allow the gentle participation in tea making and tea services to be an opportunity to awaken to our Christian principles of harmony and kindness. Just as in meeting for worship we wait in quiet alertness for the call of God's touch, in tea preparation, we await the presence of our guests with open-hearted joy. Even the act of entering a traditional tea house speaks to this principle. Those entering the tea house bend low entering through a very small, low opening, having removed their shoes and all jewelry. This simple act is a sign of harmony and respect for each other.

Tea preparation cultivates the act of awareness and reflection, focusing on the small details — warming utensils, swishing tea, serving a tea sweet — to make what could be mundane, sacred. It is a powerful

corporate opportunity to renew spirit through harmony with the elements of tea arranging flowers, serving tea.

As I deepened my understanding of Quaker values, especially as it relates to consumption habits, I gradually came to the realization that to live fully in harmony and peacefully with the Earth, I needed to change my diet from meat consumption to vegetarian. This led me to let go of white flour, white sugar and coffee, for example. Gradually, I began experimenting with herbal teas and found I truly enjoyed green tea. For many years, like most people, in making green tea, I simply boiled water in a kettle on the stove, dropped a tea bag in a cup, poured in hot water, let it steep and drank it down. After studying the high art of making *matcha* (Japanese green tea), I have totally different perspective on what was an almost unconscious act. The making of green tea requires total focus and attention to details. It is the archetypal difference between Eastern and Western cultures. In making *matcha*, I feel myself living my Quaker values. I focus on one thing at a time. I take pleasure in color, taste and texture of the tea. I am touched by the simplicity of serving tea and perhaps the tea sweet. I concentrate on serving others with simple gracious hospitality and

take comfort in the minimal requirements for the perfect cup of tea. The tools of tea making — the teacup, bowls, vase of simple flowers — reinforce the great liberation in living simply and with restraint that we value as Quakers.

The notion that less can be more at first glance seems counterintuitive. *Chado*, however, reminds us, especially in the American culture that glorifies material possessions and unrestrained consumption, that there is beauty in a simple bowl of green tea. Here, the whole universe is present. Without the sun, rain and Earth, the tea would not be possible. We can take great comfort in holding a cup of green tea between our two hands and know that in it the whole universe is present. We can live fully our Christian values — kindness, harmony and gratitude — in this simple act.

The heart of the tea ceremony is silence and spaciousness much like that of a Quaker meeting. In the spaciousness of

time and the silence that punctuates the tea preparation, words seem unnecessary. Exquisite attention to each detail speaks of caring, nurturance, reverence and integrity of heart. A harmonious environment opens in this path of tranquility. The essence of the tea ceremony is simplicity; it is acknowledging all that has made the tea gathering possible — the growers of the tea, the sun, wind and rain, the guests and the host. We give thanks for all. The silence of the tea ceremony is punctuated by the wind in the tree or the sound of a bird overhead.

Whether tea is held in a mountainside teahouse, a Zen monastery or in your own backyard, it is a path to harmony, respect, purity and tranquility. It is a path to inner peace and humility. As Quakers, we can embrace the lessons of *chado* in our daily lives.

In this intimate setting, the spirit, joy and community of *chado* lives forever in one small bowl of tea.

