

PEACE THROUGH A BOWL of TEA



I washed my hands, rinsed my mouth with water and removed my shoes. Entering the tea room, its bare walls guiding my attention to a scroll displaying Japanese calligraphy hanging in an alcove. Next to it was a vase holding several wild flowers still wet with morning dew. I paused and looked with appreciation on this simple way the host was using to welcome me. I took my place along the wall and sat in the silence the room offered to me.

The host entered, holding a small round tray containing the utensils for making a bowl of tea. On it was a covered container of powdered green tea, a tea bowl holding a small white linen napkin, a whisk made of bamboo and a slender scoop also made of bamboo. He placed the tray next to a cast iron kettle, a wisp of hot water vapor escaping from its spout.

Using a deftly folded silk napkin and an economy of simple movements a ritual cleaning of the tea container and the bamboo tea scoop followed. To warm the the bowl some hot water was poured into it and then emptied into a nearby wastewater bowl. The tea bowl was wiped with the small white linen napkin. The host picked up the bamboo tea scoop, paused, and invited me to enjoy the sweet that had been placed in front of me.

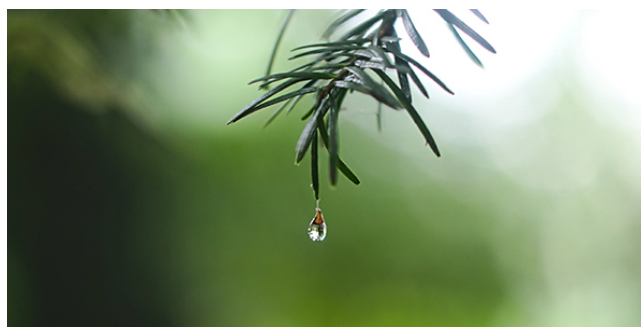
Adding several small scoops of powdered tea to the tea bowl, he added hot water and using the bamboo whisk, vigorously stirred the mixture until a frothy foam formed on its surface. The bowl of tea was then presented to me with a respectful bow. Having been instructed beforehand to carefully turn the bowl before drinking so that its front would face away from me and toward the host, I drank the flavorful tea in several sips. I then paused to more closely examine the tea bowl appreciating its simple, rustic beauty.

Knowing I could not read the Japanese script displayed on the scroll, the host called my attention to it, translating it to mean,

"Each time, a unique meeting with unrepeatable memories to cherish."

This, the simplest form of the tea ceremony remains memorable among others that have more complex yet equally graceful and refined characteristics. With every gesture and movement done with mindfulness one's attention is brought to the present moment, to savor its transitory quality — a simple lesson to apply to the rest of one's life.

Pausing briefly to appreciate again the scroll and flower arrangement, I quietly left the room holding this unforgettable memory to cherish.





Sen no Rikyū, 1522 -1591

The Acknowledged Originator of the Tea Ceremony



Dr Sen Genshitsu, Daisosho (Former Grand Master XV of Chado Urasenke),



CHADO -

The “Way of Tea” has a lineage dating back to 9th century China and includes a folklore account of Japanese monks traveling to China and discovering green tea, a beverage with medicinal properties that also helps one to stay awake during hours of meditation and spiritual practice. As a cultural practice its use in China spread among the aristocratic class with the arts providing highly developed expressions in poetry, theatre and ceramic tea ware.

However, the simple rustic utensils valued and used by Rikyu, who history names as the originator of the ceremony remains a style valued today by practitioners of CHADO, also referred to as CHANOYU or, “hot water for tea.” A lineage of tea masters of this, “DO” or “way,” dates from the 16th century and is honored with respect and high esteem by students and followers.

Noteworthy are the 9th century monastic beginnings of the “Way of Tea” that that remain woven into its history and practice today. The xxx’4th Generation Grand-Master Daisosho, Dr. Genshitsu Sen XV has at times been invited into the sanctuary of sacred places such as St. Patrick’s Cathedral in New York City as well as other Catholic churches to conduct the tea ceremony in the sanctuary of these churches. This is no small happening as the sanctuary in a Catholic church is a liturgical space used only for this purpose. The sense of the sacred is clearly being acknowledged here by the church.

Harmony - Respect - Purity - Tranquility
Four Principles of Chado, The Way of Tea

The character '和' (Wa) is written in a bold, expressive cursive style. It consists of a vertical stroke on the left, a curved stroke on the right, and a horizontal stroke at the top.

Wa – harmony, a congruity that includes guests, utensils, nature and perspective.

The character '敬' (Kei) is written in a bold, expressive cursive style. It features a vertical stroke on the left, a curved stroke on the right, and a horizontal stroke at the top.

Kei – respect, profound reverence toward all things, a characteristic of humility.

The character '清' (Sei) is written in a bold, expressive cursive style. It has a vertical stroke on the left, a curved stroke on the right, and a horizontal stroke at the top.

Sei – purity, orderliness, cleanliness.

The character '寂' (Jaku) is written in a bold, expressive cursive style. It has a vertical stroke on the left, a curved stroke on the right, and a horizontal stroke at the top.

Jaku – tranquility, calm even amid chaos.

These four principles invite reflection and guide one into the practice of mindfulness. It is much like the long history of care and use of each article of the tea ceremony.

WABI SABI

While difficult to capture in words, this Japanese term suggests qualities of aesthetic asymmetry, irregularity and rustic simplicity. It is found in objects that are weathered and worn from use and valued for the “story” they hold. A quiet refinement hints at and invites spiritual awakening which is valued by SHO-SHIN, another Japanese term that can be translated as, “beginner’s mind.”



— Joseph Kilikevici

The Tea Ceremony is practiced at Shem Center and is brought to other locations upon request.

