

# TATAGATA – STYLE TEA CEREMONY

A "California" Version of the  
Traditional Cha-no-yu Japanese Tea  
Ceremony

by Edrid

SPECIAL ACKNOWLEDGMENT

To Forest, who brought  
Tatagata-Style Tea Ceremony  
to life.

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508 Pope Street  
Menlo Park, CA 94025  
(415) 328-4941  
edrid@sandoth.com

## TATAGATA-STYLE TEA CEREMONY

Tatagata Tea Ceremony is similar to Japanese Tea Ceremony. A group of friends gets together, sits down around a tea mat, and makes a bowl of green tea in a focused and artful way. The tea is shared and there is some pleasant conversation.

The Japanese style of Tea Ceremony tends to be very formal. The great tea academies teach every position and movement based on insights of the great tea masters of antiquity. Students study a long time to make tea with perfection. Consequently, it is very beautiful and precise.

In Tatagata Tea Ceremony, we do not necessarily study the intricate forms of the Japanese tradition. We just do it.

Tatagata Tea is a grass-roots kind of thing. When we make tea, it comes out the way it comes out. We often say, "Go ahead, try it. You can't do it wrong as long as tea actually gets made."

In Japan, there are a number of formal ceremonies. Which one you do depends on the season, the day of the week, and so forth. It is all pretty much circumscribed by tradition.

It's not that there is any rejection of the formalized Japanese ceremony, but our style is just to make it the way that emerges naturally.

Actually, there is a little more to it than that. Otherwise there might not be a Tea Ceremony at all. The difference lies in how you attend to the process. When you make tea, you *just* make tea. All of your awareness is focused on what you are doing. As a result of this focused attention, you can attain a marvelous state of being.

Once I was talking to someone about Tea Ceremony. She said, "I suppose there is great meaning and significance to every motion you make in the ceremony."

"As a matter of fact," I said, "it's just the opposite. As you make tea, most of the significances and meanings seem to subside from your mind and you are left with just the simple process making the tea and sharing it with friends."

Making tea with a quiet and focused mind follows the essence of the Japanese tradition. In a poem on the essence of Tea, the most famous Japanese tea master, Rikyu, said this about making tea:

*Tea is nothing but this:*

*First you heat the water,*

*Then you make the tea.*

*Then you drink it properly.*

*That is all you need to know.*

So we just heat some water, make some tea, and drink it.

At the core, the Tea Ceremony invites a certain kind of mindfulness. In the process of doing the Tea Ceremony with the unique and beautiful Japanese tea implements, and with full attention, we are calmed and

centered. It leaves us with a clean, clear, simple feeling — nothing complicated or cluttered. Somehow things get sorted out and take on their true significance.

Over time, the state you get from doing the Tea Ceremony becomes more available to you in your day-to-day living. It shows up in the Washing Dishes Ceremony, in the Doing the Bills Ceremony, in the Folding the Bed Sheets Ceremony, in the Living Life Ceremony.

After a while, tea produces a kind of refinement and sensitivity that enhances all of life.

There is a kind of knack to it. Some of us will get the knack. We'll see the essence, we will share it among our friends, and we will transmit this essence to others of like mind. They will sense the delight and enthusiastically continue on their own.

## THE IMPLEMENTS

In the Tatagata-style Tea Ceremony, we usually use the traditional Japanese implements. Japanese tea implements are beautiful, functional, and simple. They impart a wonderful Zen simplicity.

Long ago in Japan there were periods when the tea implements became very fancy and the owners were very proud of them. They would use fine tea implements to gain social status. Later it was popular to have "wabi" tea things. These had to be very common looking. After awhile, if the things were very very common looking, they would show them off!

Wabi tea things have a distinctive esthetic. Generally, they are simple and made of natural material, like bamboo and clay. In Tatagata tea, there is no wrong look, but

there seems to be an emphasis on simplicity, creativity, and beauty. You can, however, use any implements you want.

## The Tea

Tea Ceremony tea is called "macha" (ma-cha). It comes in little canisters, about an ounce at a time. It is green tea that has been powdered by a fine-grained grinding wheel. They put bunches of steamed and dried tea leaves in a hole in the center of a pair of horizontal stone grinding wheels, and as the wheels are turned, the tea slowly makes its way between the stones to the edge, where it falls off and drifts into a catch trough. It is as fine as baby powder.

It's instant tea. You don't steep it like leaf tea. You just mix some up with water. It is normally drunk plain, without milk or sugar.

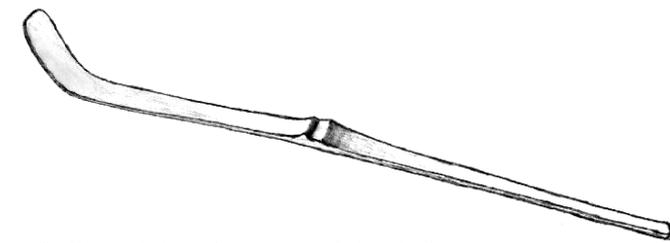
Fresh tea is emerald green. It is beautiful and has a wonderful fresh aroma. Old tea turns gray-green. It smells like dust. Fresh tea is indeed better. I store my tea in the freezer to keep it fresh. It should be sealed tight so it won't lose its flavor.

Some people do not want any caffeine in their diet. This can present a problem because macha has some, though I have been told that it is not very much. Nevertheless, if one does not want any caffeine, he should not drink the tea.

Macha became popular in Japan with Zen monks. It would help them stay alert when they were meditating for long periods of time. We've experimented with non-caffeine herb teas. Some of them are very pleasant, but it is tricky to grind them fine enough so they behave properly when they're mixed with the water.

### The Scoop (CHA-SHA-KU)

This is a simple little piece of bamboo, tapered at the handle end, and wide and thin at the scoop end and bent up.



You scoop some tea up from the tea container with the flat portion and drop it into the tea bowl.

Japanese tea masters regarded the tea scoops highly. They would have their students make their own to teach them tea esthetics.

Some are made with the bamboo joint in the middle, some with it at the end of the handle, and some with no joint at all.

### The Whisk (CHA-SEN)

This is a wonderful little thing. Everyone gets delighted when they see one. It looks a lot like a shaving brush made out of a single piece of bamboo. They come in various sizes, some chubby, some thin.

You swish the whisk rapidly in the bowl to mix the tea and water. Done right, the tea ends up with a creamy foam on top. There is a knack



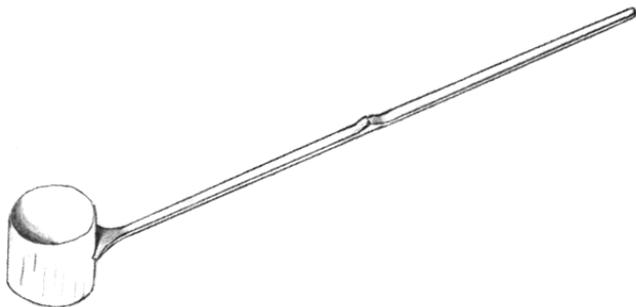
to it. You have to swish it fast enough to beat out the natural sloshing rate of the tea or the tea will jump out of the bowl.

In Japan, it is considered polite to use a brand-new whisk for the session, to honor the guests. In the Tatagata style, we usually keep whisks until they are "old and venerable". This is partly because they take on an artful patina with age.

If you plan to keep one a long time, it's important to clean it well each time after you use it. I've seen some grow a bit of black mold. Every once in a while, I carefully scrub mine in the sink with a toothbrush and dry it in the sun. Avoid using smelly chemicals.

### The Dipper (HI-SHA-KU)

The dipper is a long-handled water ladle made of bamboo.



A long, thin handle is inserted into a segment of bamboo at one end. This segment has been sanded down thin to make a delicate water bowl.

A couple of dippers-full of hot water are used to make a bowl of tea. Pouring the steaming water out of the dipper into the tea bowl always seems to charm us.

### The Bowl (CHA-WAN)

We've been using bowls shaped like the traditional Japanese tea bowls. Any handy bowl will do. It should be the right size for picking up and drinking out of, like a small rice bowl. It has to be wide enough to allow you to mix up the tea with the whisk.

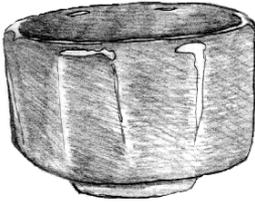


A "summer bowl" is wide and shallow; it lets the tea cool quickly. A "winter bowl" is thicker and more vertical; it holds the heat longer.





At first you can use any attractive bowl you find in your kitchen. Later you may be lucky to find a nice handmade pottery one that especially appeals to you.



Many Japanese seem to like dark colored bowls. I like the way the tea looks in light colored ones too.

### The Caddy (CHA-IRE or U-SU-CHA-KI)

The caddy is a little decorative container for the tea, sometimes made of ceramic, lacquered wood, or stone.

It usually has a lid, and holds enough tea for a tea session, which is typically from one to seven bowls. Some people just use the plastic or tin canister the tea comes in from the store. Some of them look nice enough. (The canisters, not the people. Of course the people look nice enough too.)

Like favorite tea bowls and venerable old whisks, you can become quite attached to an exactly right-on caddy.

## Other Useful Things

There are a few other things you will need.

You need a container for your hot tea water, one that has an opening in the top big enough to get the dipper in so you can get the water. I use an old copper tea kettle that has a wide top. Some people use a pottery urn of some kind.

You also need a "catcher bowl". This is a tea bowl or larger bowl that you use to catch the water left over from washing the tea bowl at the end of the ceremony.

It is also good to have one or more cloth or paper napkins. One can be used to dry the bowl after washing it. You can use the same one or a fresh one to wipe off the tea dust left on the scoop. Some people use a small wet one to wipe out the bowl. It's good to have a nice thick one to place under the bowl to insulate it when you hand it to someone when the bowl is very hot.

We often serve a little pastry or delicacy with the tea as well. After the bowl makes the rounds, a dish of goodies is passed around. Sweet things are a nice complement to the earthy taste of the tea. Something salty is also nice. The Japanese

make all sorts of tea crackers, cookies, and confections. Many are like little works of art.

### Acquiring Tea Implements

Finding the traditional tea implements might present a bit of a challenge, especially if you live where there are no Japanese.

If you know where there are traditional Japanese shops or restaurants, just go there and ask. In my experience, there is usually someone who would be especially pleased to meet someone who is interested in Tea Ceremony. This is especially true of older people who adhere to Japanese traditional values. If all else fails, call a Japanese consulate and ask.

Ask for the implements by their Japanese names. The Tea Ceremony, by the way, is called "CHA-NO-YU". I doubt if it would do you any good to mention "Tatagata Style". (They probably never heard of it. )

## THE TEA CEREMONY

*[Gurdjieff: If you can serve a cup of tea right, you can do anything.]*

### Set and Setting

The traditional Japanese tea hut is situated in a garden. The tea hut is a small house built especially for Tea Ceremony. A simple stepping stone path winds through a sweet natural setting to the tea hut door.

You can make tea indoors or outdoors. In either case, select a secluded place where you will not be in the thick of things. Generally we prefer a comfortable place with plenty of light. Since one becomes very aware by doing Tea Ceremony, a beautiful setting is very much appreciated.

You can make tea by yourself, or have some friends join you. Everyone sits around the

tea mat. This can be a little rug or a woven mat. You don't want to be too crowded, but I've done it with as many as 15 people so I know it can be done. But that's a bit much. I think one to five guests is about optimum. You usually do the Tea Ceremony with everyone sitting in a circle on the floor or ground.

Set up the tea implements in a nice arrangement on the mat in front of you. Make sure that things are easy to reach and not too crowded. Take your time, it is a part of the ceremony.

Traditionally, the esthetics of Tea Ceremony lean toward the arrangement being simple and sparse. As Shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu said, "The insufficient is better than the superfluous."

### Making the Tea

*[First: Every rule must eventually be broken. The real key is HOW it is broken.]*

Making tea is really quite simple.

Sit quietly for a moment, until you are ready to be *with* what you do.

Get some tea from the caddy using the scoop and put it in the bowl. Using the dipper, get some water from the hot water pot and pour it over the tea. Whisk it up with the whisk until it is thoroughly mixed.

After you finish making the tea, pass the bowl to one of the others sitting to your right or left. They take a sip and pass it to the next in the circle, and so on. It finally makes its way back to you. You finish it off. If some thirsty friend finishes the bowl before it completes its rounds, you just make another one and start from there. The whole thing is very permissive.

To complete the "ceremony", wash the bowl using the whisk and a bit of fresh hot water, and then pour the wash water into the catcher bowl. Using a little cloth, wipe the bowl dry, and then wipe the scoop.

There, it is done.

### Some Practical Hints

Sometimes you will want to make the tea thin. That is, not much tea in the water. At other times you will like it thick, with lots of tea and a strong taste. It all depends upon the mood of you and your guests.

A variation in making the tea is to add just a little hot water to the tea at the beginning and mix it up into a gooey paste until it is well dissolved. This is especially good when you notice the tea tending to be lumpy and hard to mix. Once it is a smooth green paste, you add the remaining water and mix again with the whisk.

Made right, the tea will have a wonderful foamy top and there won't be any ugly lumps of undissolved tea floating around in the bowl. (It should look appetizing at least.) Getting the foam on top requires that the water be pretty hot and that you have a knack with the whisk.

Anyone can make the first bowl. If it is not clear otherwise, the host makes the first bowl. Afterwards, the one who has just made tea invites another to make the next bowl. Someone just volunteers. There should be no pressure to make tea, of course, but sometimes newcomers are gently urged to give it a try, as actually making a bowl of tea is quite a different experience from just watching.

Sometimes one gets a "tea rush" just after drinking. It takes you right up. You can just close your eyes and go with it. After several

slow bowls it is common for us to want to close our eyes and meditate — to go deeply within. This should be allowed, for it seems like the natural result of the concentration.

## SOME NOTES ON THE ESSENCE

### Ceremony

We call this way of making tea a "Tea Ceremony". Having it be a ceremony creates a special aura about the process. It is as if the Tea Ceremony were happening in its own time and space, separate from the world at large.

Our lives often seem to be full of distracting energies that assault the senses. We end up thinking all sorts of things. We are often so tangled up in these complexities we need something like a Tea Ceremony to help us detach from the tangle.

When you sit down to do tea, you leave your attitudes, your current hassles, your goals, your personality, and your social status behind. You bring just your true

nature to share. Everyone is equivalent in the tea room.

In the Tea Ceremony we make a bubble of clarity exist around us. Tea takes place in a special realm that seems not of this world and beyond time. This is the purpose and result of making Tatagata tea a "ceremony".

It is usually best not to talk during the first bowl or two. If you talk incessantly, you will block the effect. In fact, one of the chief benefits of making tea is that it quiets the part of the mind that always wants to talk and analyze things.

Talking seems to work out fine after the peaceful oceanic "tea state" is well established. Almost anything can be shared from within the tea state.

### Cycles

A cycle has a beginning, middle, and end. The end leaves you at a new beginning. When doing Tatagata-style Tea Ceremony, do just one cycle at a time.

It's a mental thing, to be sure. But, by consciously completing each cycle in the Tea Ceremony, a state of focused attention

builds up that establishes the rarefied state of mind that makes making tea such a joy.

The cycle begins when everyone is ready. There is a momentary pause and then it begins. Some people like to mark the beginning and ending of the cycle with a bow, Japanese style, or by ringing a small bell or gong. The one who is making tea will often do it in a way that makes the cycle-nature of the activity apparent to the others. The Tea Ceremony cycle is complete when the bowl is washed and you're back at the starting place.

Actually, the cycle is not ended until everyone has had a chance to sit for a moment or two to notice the shift in their awareness, and, perhaps, to look around at each other. If you take your time, more and more rich detail becomes apparent.

As your focus deepens, sometimes each thing you do reveals its cyclic nature. When you open the tea caddy, for instance, you may experience it as a microcosm of subtle activity, starting with reaching to grab it, picking it up, removing the lid, putting the lid down on the mat, and so forth. Each movement can be breathtakingly clear.

## Passing the Bowl

An important element in making tea is dropping one's denial of others. Tea Ceremony happens in the space between individuals. There is you, and there is the other. And then there is the Tea Ceremony between you. This is a shift from the ordinary view that "I am making tea and there are others out there watching" to "the Tea Ceremony is shared as a common experience by the group."

Passing the bowl is a chance to make real contact with another. In fact, you open to the possibility of deeply and directly realizing the nature of the other, that another actually exists, and is equivalent to you. Don't be afraid to make being-to-being contact with the others in the Tea Ceremony. Open to a direct experience of the other.

As the bowl is passed, you are giving and the other is receiving, and later someone gives to you and you receive. It should be done consciously, one being to another.

Often, at the beginning, people are shy with each other, so they don't openly present the bowl to the other. It helps to face the other fully and present the bowl fully,

thoroughly, and completely, letting yourself show. Everyone does the best he can — there should be no blame.

When you receive the bowl, the idea is to receive it *from* the other. One's attention does not just go on the tea, but on the one who gives you the tea as well. You extend your hands to grasp the bowl, and, at the moment the bowl is passed, you try to become fully conscious of the act. Sometimes it helps to do the whole thing in slow motion since there is so much going on there.

Passing the bowl is also a cycle. You contact the other, offer the bowl, pass it, and acknowledge the act, ending the cycle. There is a brief gap at the end.

### Drinking the Tea

Take a moment to look at the tea. Take another to smell it. Listen to it and hear the bubbles breaking. Look at the bowl. Turn it around to see it all. Holding it in both hands, feel its mass. Feel its warmth. Slosh it around a little. Take a sip. Make a slurping sound if you want. Let it turn your teeth green. Swallow it slowly. Close your eyes and

go with it. Sense it hitting your stomach. Feel heat rise in your ears. Listen to the tones coming out of your tongue. Fall into a cosmic dream, way out there. Circle the universe. Evaporate. Condense back down into your body and open your eyes. Grin.

### Suchness

One of the keys to Tatagata-style Tea Ceremony is called "suchness". The term "Tatagata" refers to someone who lives this suchness. It's a simple concept, but some people find it is very elusive. Then again, others find it completely natural.

"Tatagata" was one of Buddha's names, like a title. It means "The thus come one".

The "thus" means "just like *that*". It is so much just the way it is. It is experienced directly.

The "come" in this context is the "come" that doesn't come from anywhere, like something emerging out of nothing. The soul is like that, the front end in the world and the back end coupling into infinity.

The "one" is the individual — you or me or the Buddha.

So altogether it means something like, "He comes and goes — just like *that*."

In the Tea Ceremony, you become a Tatagata. You evoke suchness in each action. When you pick something up, you just purely pick it up. When you set it down, you just purely set it down. You *just do it*. You do all of it. But you don't add anything to it and you don't take anything away. You just make tea.

Also, in that moment of activity you remain *with* what you are doing. You pay attention, investing all of your awareness in what you are doing. And this being *with* what you do is continuous as each motion of making tea unfolds.

For instance, when you get a dipper of hot water, your attention seamlessly follows each motion, as you dip the dipper in the water, as you pause a moment to let it drip a little, as you glide it, steaming, across to the bowl, as you tip it to let the water cascade out, and as you return the dipper to its resting place on the mat. There are no parts or pieces to the act — it is all one conscious motion, and you are with every moment of it.

When drinking: you pick up the bowl. You drink. Your direct contact with the act is like the purest consuming fire. Like they say in Zen stories, "burning completely — leaving no ash." Nothing else happens in one's awareness. Nothing else needs to happen. You just do it.

The Tea Ceremony can be done with this suchness. You invest your awareness in what you are doing in the moment you are doing it. There is a kind of union there.

Many people instantly get what suchness is when they see a tea master demonstrating it. It's like a transmission of this special state of consciousness. Then they set out to develop this peaceful focus in their own ceremony. When they finally get it going, they begin to discover that they can get great satisfaction doing whatever they are doing, tea or any other activity, from this highly attentive state.

If suchness doesn't happen, the Tea Ceremony really didn't happen, at least in my estimation.

The most common pitfalls are that you show off or are self-conscious. You may feel you are being judged or you may judge

others. This kind of stuff is added-on mental or emotional activity and is not actually a part of making tea. It shows that there is some stress in the interpersonal relationships. Always remember that you are just making tea. It's a big deal about nothing! Try to keep it simple.

Also, the focused attention should not be forced or it becomes a burden. There should be no pressure to achieve some state. Just let it happen.

At first, the suchness is often forced and dramatized. Later it is noticed and emphasized. Still later, you may find yourself playing with it. Eventually, this suchness appears automatically, with no intent to impress. You don't notice it because it is so familiar, but it can be apparent to others. Someone will volunteer, "I love watching you do things. There is a wonderful magic quality about the way you make tea. You seem to do everything so well."

Great Japanese masters of tea realized how handling the tea implements with suchness looks and taught these motions to their students. By carefully learning the external forms, tea students hope they might share

in the master's bright and lively conscious state.

If they only learn the externals, however, they would miss it. Tatagata tea has no definite form because suchness does not depend on external forms. An understanding of suchness is transmitted directly from the tea master to the others at the Tea Ceremony.

### Grace

What do you think should happen if there is an accident and the tea is spilled? Or what if you find you are becoming critical when someone does something "dumb"?

Well, we've found that it is best to make whatever happens a part of the Tea Ceremony — to openly marvel at all of it.

I recall a delightful experience when we were all gathered together for one of our annual Tea Festivals. The water was being dipped out of the hot water jug. We were all following the path of the dipper to the bowl. Suddenly the dipper fell apart and the cup part fell right into the tea bowl, splashing tea and water all over the place. It

was a scream. We got a fond memory from that, not an embarrassing failure.

We are not trying to do a rigidly perfect Tea Ceremony. We are trying to contact the essence. There are no rules to that, just sensitivity to what makes the nectar flow.

### Perfect Form

A funny thing happens when you become very aware of what you are doing. You become conscious of a perfect form. This perfect form is not put on the Tea Ceremony from others; it is your own.

Years ago, I was introduced to a curious counseling exercise designed to clear up problems. You would pick out something that was bothering you, such as an upset, a misunderstanding, or even some pain in your body. Then you'd be instructed to make up a story that would include this element. Just make it up, without worrying if it was a reasonable story or not. In fact, one of the rules was to make the story "not of this time or place".

What was fascinating about this process was how particular we were about exactly how our story should go. It had to be precisely

this way or that way. We'd even halt in the middle and say, "No, no! That isn't right. The shoulder hurts from a green ray gun zap, not a white one! It has to be that way!" What was so unusual about this was that the story was supposed to be completely made up. It didn't have to be any way, yet we had this feeling that it wouldn't be right unless it was expressed just so.

In a similar vein, how you set up the tea implements on the mat and the actual motions and flow of the Tea Ceremony can feel right or feel wrong to you. When your concentration is very pure, the act of picking up the scoop, for instance, will be filled with rich detail. How the fingers are placed, the precise course the scoop takes to the tea caddy, the scooping motion — all will reveal their perfect form. One will soon realize that he will be guided almost magically by this sense of what is "right" at each moment.

Another person will also have this sense of their Tea Ceremony, but the choices might be different. We allow that every one's pure form is their own.

## Wabi

Wabi means "quiet taste". You see, if you begin to hold lavish Tea Ceremonies, people end up putting all their attention on the display of your fancy possessions, or begin making a lot of comparisons, like, "Are my tea things as good as yours?" Or, "I need to get more money so I can buy the finest tea fixtures." It goes off the mark.

Wabi tea is simple, natural, and appropriate, done with a quiet mind.

Japanese Tea Ceremony books, like those mentioned in the bibliography, have fine examples of the Japanese wabi esthetic style that has evolved over the centuries. Just looking at pictures of Tea House architecture, garden design, and Tea Ceremony arrangements clears the mind.

They say that your external environment matches your inner environment. If you are living in a sloppy mess, it reflects a sloppy mess in your mind.

It works in reverse too. If you consciously create a setting of beauty and simplicity to be in, your mind will tend to move into a comparable state. I have a friend, a Tatagata tea master, who has developed a natural

wabi style and a quality of suchness in his life. Even when he makes a mess, it is somehow a neat and appealing mess.

### Tea Enlightenment

If the Tea Ceremony did nothing but quiet your mind and entertain you for the short time you were doing it, it would still be a fine thing to cultivate. But, in addition, one may also experience "tea enlightenment", or "tea mind".

It is as if some barrier dissolves and you see, visible before you, what you can do to make life better for yourself and others. One is not burdened by a compulsion to do this — it is not experienced as an obligation. It is effortless and a delight, and something you've always wanted. It is like some sort of awakening to the simple principle of being consciously *in* Life.

I have seen it happen many times. Sometimes it happens on the first bowl one makes. Sometimes it happens after weeks or months of practice. Some people never get it. It need not be a dramatic or emotional experience, but it can be. In whatever form the awakening occurs, it is deeply satisfying.

Once this new realm is experienced, one naturally feels that Tea Ceremony holds a special promise of personal development. Tea students hope that by continuing to practice making tea, this state will deepen and be more available during their everyday lives.

It is like an initiation. They remark about their new awareness with great joy and excitement. They may even glow.

It would not be appropriate to try to achieve this state by dogged persistence or by wanting it desperately or by making vows or a fervent inner commitment or by using other such willful means.

One does not even set out to get into this state, as to do so usually results in only making a fake copy of the real thing (and then experiencing that). And who needs to pick up yet another thing he feels he must do?

And certainly, one should not try to get this state in a competitive way. There is no virtue in saying, "I got into tea mind before you did!" If you think in this way, you aren't even close.

Instead, tea mind sneaks up on you. It dawns on you that you are in the state only after you've been in it for a while — like waking up to something.

Tea enlightenment is a gift that you may or may not get after you have forgotten about such matters and are just enjoying the Tea Ceremony. It's a side effect that comes from one's deep surrender in the moment.

I think it is best not to talk too much about getting into this state, but it is all right to know about it so if it does occur, you can enjoy knowing that you have shared this quintessential state with others of tea.

## TEA STORIES and POEMS

### Tea in Bali

Anatta and I were in Bali, a small island east of Java. We were surprised to find a Japanese cultural troupe staying at the same group of bungalows we were. The leader, a proud tea master in black Zen robes, and a couple of beautiful kimono-clad women, invited us to a public Tea Ceremony demonstration the next day in a grassy area in the center of the grounds.

The Japanese troupe sat bolt upright and went through their formal demonstration of Cha-no-yu, the Tea Ceremony. There were about eight of them and a crowd of about twenty onlookers. At the end of their demonstration, they politely asked if

anyone in the audience wanted to try making a bowl, so I volunteered.

I sat on my knees at the center and began to carefully make a bowl. When it was time to whisk up the mixture, I picked up the tea bowl in my left hand and the whisk in my right.

From the side I heard a polite but firm command, "Put the bowl down!" It was the tea master.

".. er.. ah .. this is the way we do it in California," I mumbled.

"Put the bowl down!", he commanded again.

"Heh, heh, sure," I said, putting down the bowl and continuing to whisk. After all, it was his bowl.

I passed the tea to the others and the master said, "Wonderful!"

### The Ramona House Commune

A friend, Forest, and I were roommates in a nice little cottage in Atherton, California. Forest had the idea that we should start a

tea school and I went along with it.  
Tatagata's Tea School!

Nearby, in Palo Alto, there was an Ananda Marga commune on Ramona Street. Once we invited the entire Ramona House commune, about a dozen people, to do tea with us. It was a big circle.

At about the third or fourth bowl, the participants began to laugh like crazy. A couple of them actually fell over laughing, though nothing was said.

### The Flowering Branch School

Lady K. and Wendy were making tea every day. They just loved to do it. In their Tea Ceremonies they balanced playfulness with beauty. Just a hint of coquettishness gave it a certain appeal.

### Sky's Poem

Sky was living with us in Ben Lomond in the Santa Cruz Mountains of California. She loved to do tea and she was often inspired to write poems about her Tea Ceremony experiences.

Here's one:

— *Hey!*  
*i caught you*  
*spying*  
*on your own*  
*Tea Ceremony!*

*you are invited,*  
*you know.*

*you do not need*  
*to peer*  
*at this instant*  
*from the other*  
*side of your*  
*green bubbles....*  
*you reside on its inside too.*

*Whoops - you just missed it again*  
*just missed it again*

### Tea Like Dust

After the eruption of Mt. St. Helens, the volcano, a friend gave us some dust he had gathered when he visited the mountain. Anatta kept it in an old tea can. One day, while cleaning, she saw the tea can, looked inside, and decided that it was very old tea.

Thinking it was the oldest tea she had ever seen, she emptied it over the balcony into the flowers before realizing it was the ash of that great mountain.

### Steve Forgets

Steve was getting into tea heavily. He liked to travel a lot, and on one journey he took his basket of brand new tea implements to the ocean and, with a sense of ceremony, washed in the sparkling surf. Later, on one of his sojourns into the Sierra Mountains, he found a sweet mountain stream and anointed them again and then did a special ceremony.

Then, while on another trip, he placed his tea basket on the roof of his car and forgot to stash it in the trunk when he drove off. Later, after a long search for his missing treasures, he returned to the place and there in the road was his thoroughly smashed tea basket. Hundreds of trucks had run over it, leaving almost nothing but splinters and shards.

After a while, he realized he no longer had to care for those tea things.

## Roga Roshi Brings Tea to Arizona

When Roga Roshi moved to Cornville, he wanted to start a tea school. He thought he could attract a little attention by putting up some posters. He put this announcement on the bulletin board of a local market:

### **TEA MEDITATION**

#### **Simplicity Tea Ceremony**

"Tea Meditation" is the simple act of making a bowl of tea with concentrated attention and respect. The action of making tea is the action of moving through the experiences of life. Tea Ceremony is meditation in action. It centers the mind and quiets the body and the emotions.

Concentration on the process leads to contemplation; contemplation leads to meditation and to awakening to the true meaning of life.

The Tatagata Tea School provides training in expanded True-Self awareness, an integrated enlightened state of great clarity and stability.

Every once in awhile, this would irritate someone and they would deface it or tear it down. But he would eventually come by and put up another one.

### Seven Bowls of Tea

Here is a great poem, attributed to a poet of the Tang dynasty, Lotung:

*The first bowl moistens my lips and throat.*

*The second bowl breaks my loneliness.*

*The third bowl searches my barren entrails but to find therein some 5000 volumes of odd ideographs.*

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

*At the fifth bowl I am purified.*

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

*The seventh bowl — ah, but I could take no more! I only feel the breath of cool wind that rises in my sleeves. Let me rise on this sweet breeze and waft away thither!*

## Why Roga Changed His Mind

*[Roga wrote this one. He sent it to me when he heard I was writing this book.]*

He had invited me to an evening Tea Ceremony. Although I had been angry with him all day, I decided to go anyway.

I knew the visit could be boring, but here I was anyway.

He was a new student, enthusiastic and misguided. What did he know about the subtleties of evening tea? As I approached his garden gate, my mind feared for the worst.

I put my ego in my pocket and noticed the neatly kept combinations of trees, rocks, and moss in the garden. All seemed extremely natural. Perhaps I had misjudged the man.

As I climbed the steps to the porch of the tea room, I noticed another sign of his understanding. On the railing he had not swept away one large spider web, which now glistened brightly in the last rays of the evening sun.

## Toasted Whisk

Roger decided to dry his whisk after washing it, so it wouldn't get moldy in the box. He held it over the gas flame of his stove, and it instantly burst into flame, like a roasted marshmallow. He blew it out quickly. "That really got my attention!", he said.

## THE LINEAGE

Alan Watts took a group to Japan to tap into Zen. This was in the early sixties. They visited a few great tea masters. The word was, "One of these guys could make you a bowl of tea — just so — and you'd get enlightened."

Forest went with him on the trip. When Forest got back, he showed a few people how to do it, from his memory of just a few Tea Ceremonies he witnessed. Joshua Wu Sorens and Kathleen both were excited by what they saw and soon got into it.

Joshua and Kathleen lived in Berkeley. Joshua would make his way up into their attic by climbing on a doorknob and pulling himself through a trapdoor in the ceiling. He'd stay for hours each day doing Tea Ceremony alone. Kathleen did tea every day for years. She loved it, and brought the tea consciousness into her life. She could bring

you to enlightenment watching her cut vegetables.

Wendy also got into it. Wendy and Kathleen formed the Flowering Branch Tea School in Berkeley.

I was living in the Santa Cruz Mountains. One day Forest asked, "Want to do Tea Ceremony?" I shrugged and said, "Sure, I guess so," having never heard of it before.

It was irresistible. Soon all our friends were doing it and it seemed like we lived a little "golden age" of Tea Ceremony for a while.

Forest instigated "Tatagata's Incredible Tea Festival", a yearly gathering that usually takes place on the Saturday before Mother's Day in May. Each year it is different. We send out invitations to our old tea friends. We make tea and hang out and talk. Potluck food at a tea festival tends to be award-winning. Fine wines are also appropriate. Old friends arrive throughout the day to sit and have a bowl of tea. We talk and have fun visiting with each other. The Tea Ceremony seems to bring out the best in us.

One year we didn't make tea at the tea festival. We fried fish.

Forest and I lived in Atherton, CA, in a beautiful little Wisteria-covered cottage in a woody area, surrounded in the Spring by wild daffodils.

On his suggestion, we invited people over to our "Tea School". He and I made tea a lot and many of the Tatagata Tea Ceremony concepts came out during this period.

Forest would invite society ladies over for tea and fine wines. We'd make tea and get them to make bowls themselves. They seemed to like it, though I don't recall any of them taking it up seriously.

I invited the whole Ramona House commune over for tea one night. There I met my future wife, Anatta.

When Anatta and I were living in Menlo Park and later in Palo Alto on Hamilton Avenue, I invited people for tea regularly on Sunday mornings. Usually three or four people would come, sometimes more. We'd make tea for several hours, often doing the "Seven Bowl Ceremony".

Roga Roshi had been doing tea with us since the Santa Cruz mountains days. He moved to Arizona and became the Cornville Tea Master. He introduced "Oriental Tea

Meditation" there. He has done much to spread this style of tea.

## SELECTED READING

Here are a few books that I recommend for learning about Tea Ceremony and Japanese culture that produced it.

THE BOOK OF TEA, Okakura-Kakuzo, Kenkyusha, Tokyo. (The poem by Lotung, printed in the Tea Stories section, came from this book.)

TEA LIFE, TEA MIND, Soshitsu Sen, Grand Master XV, Urasenke School of Tea, John Weatherhill, 149 Madison Avenue, NY, and Tokyo, Japan, ISBN 0-8348-0142-6

STORIES FROM A TEAROOM WINDOW, Shigenori Chikamatsu, edited by Toshiko Mori, translated by Kozaburo Mori, Charles E. Tuttle Company, Rutland, Vermont and Tokyo, Japan, ISBN 0-8048-1385-x

THE WAY OF TEA, Rand Castile, with a forward by Sen no Soshitsu, John Weatherhill, 149 Madison Avenue, NY, and Tokyo, Japan, ISBN 0-8348- 0059-4

THE TEA CEREMONY, Sen'o Tanaka, Harmony Books, a division of Crown Publishers, Inc., One Park Avenue, New York, NY, 10016, ISBN 0-517-530392

CHADO, Soshitsu Sen, Grand Master XV, Urasenke School of Tea, John Weatherhill, 149 Madison Avenue, NY 10016, and Tokyo, Japan, ISBN 0-8348- 1518-4

CHA-NO-YU, A.L. Sadler, Charles Tuttle Company, Inc., of Rutland, Vermont and Tokyo, Japan, ISBN 8048-0085-5

UNRAVELING ZEN'S RED THREAD, IKKYU'S CONTROVERSIAL WAY, Jon Carter Covell, Hollym International Corp., 18 Donald Place, Elizabeth, NJ 07208, ISBN 0-930878-19-1 (This one is about Ikkyu, an early Zen Patriarch. It's more about the culture than Tea Ceremony.)

HIZAKURIGE or SHANK'S MARE, Ikku  
Jippensha, translated by Thomas Satchell,  
Charles E. Tuttle Company, Inc., Rutland  
Vermont and Tokyo, Japan, ISBN 0-8048-0524-  
5 (This one is also more about the culture  
than Tea Ceremony. It is a great  
introduction to the "Zen Crazyies" tradition.)