

## THE JAPANESE TEA CEREMONY

*In the Spiritual World of the Japanese tea ceremony, water represents yin and fire in the hearth yang. These elements are combined in a ritual symbolic to the way humans' everyday life should be a harmonic blend of the senses, enabling us to live with renewed appreciation and gratitude for simple existence.*

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Gracefully, she treads the tatami mat floor and enters the tea room. Wordlessly, she dances with her hands the dance which has been learnt, not by mind, but by heart. Her fingers unfold the silken cloth; she prepares to purify the tea container and thin bamboo ladle.

Every inch of the change in her movements appears to be carefully meditated over. As she inspects the bowl and scoop carefully, the silence within and without brings my focus to the meaning of this ritual.

...Yet, it is more than just an elaborate ritual...

In this calm and undisturbed place, I am brought back in mind to the 15<sup>th</sup> century, when the tea ceremony was first introduced into traditional Japanese culture. With its roots in Zen Buddhism, it has been said that *"The Way of Tea cannot be taught in any book...It is a state of mind. Tea is a living tradition."*

Four fundamental Zen principles—harmony, respect, purity and tranquility—are that *"Way of Tea"*:

*Harmony*—with people and nature...

*Respect*—for without respect, one's relationships lack harmony...

*Purity*—a cleansing of the entire five senses through imbibing the ceremony...

And *Tranquility*—that state of mind and heart that all souls yearn for.

It seems there are many interludes in the dance; and as I watch, I try to attain a higher understanding of this foreign way. Yet Zen emphasizes *"direct, intuitive insight into transcendental truth beyond all intellectual conception."*

It is simply beyond me...and then...I understand that it is not in the mere perfection of tradition that this peace is achieved, but through the simplicity of spirit...Yes...to the pure and simple, to the unpretentious, it is given; to the humble, the modest, and the meek.

The Tea Ceremony was a social art form which combined many things--skill, art, and performance. Yet at the heart of this ritual was the objective to *live in the moment*...those Samurai warriors knew discipline, and they knew the harshness of life and death, enough to respect and be governed by the power of the tea ritual.

...Our silence and my reverie are broken only by the sound of swishing as she whisks the green paste to perfection...

After the rhythmic motions calm me, I am given the tea to sample and shown how to turn the teacup, admiring this work of art. Politeness and gratitude for others is the moment that has now come upon us. With the bow—a small gesture of gratitude, I find myself immersed in this minute, where distracting thoughts are absent. With the taste of the tea still on my lips, I walk

the gardens and take time to feed the fish. Admiring the flowers here, breathing the air around me...it has doubtless been a journey of spiritual refreshment. I am taking time in the *small* things now, and appreciating the beauty of life. And although I do not yet fully comprehend the hours spent inside the Tea House, I journey on with a sense of serenity.

For the Tea Ceremony--that simple, humble thing, which has transcended time and intellectual understanding, has inspired me...to truly live...*in this moment*.

--*Nyx Martinez*