INTERRELIGIOUS HOSPITALITY
Múdese todo muy enhorabuena, Señor Dios,
por que hagamos asiento en ti.
“Let all things change, Lord God,—all to the good!—
so long as we find in you our dwelling place!”

Saint John of the Cross, *Dichos de luz y amor*, 34
Contents

Foreword ix

Introduction xiii

PART ONE Receiving Hospitality 1

Chapter 1
Chado (The Way of Tea) 3

Chapter 2
Sesshin (Meditation) 29

Chapter 3
Sodo (The Monastery) 62

PART TWO Offering Hospitality 89

Chapter 1
Monastic Encounters 91

Chapter 2
Dialogue and Hospitality 100

Chapter 3
Questions 111

Chapter 4
The Requirements of Hospitality 120
Chapter 5
At the Heart of the Gospel 127

Chapter 6
Christian Identity 145

Lexicon 160
Here is a book that goes to the heart of interreligious dialogue. Genuine interreligious dialogue does not concern doctrine but rather the meaning that life has for each of us when we live out our religion. That is why I prefer to refer to this initiative as intra-religious dialogue since it concerns not only doctrine but also the very heart of the religious person.

I want to stress the point that intrareligious dialogue is in itself a religious act. This implies that the way in which we experience our own religion opens us up to a mystery over which we do not have exclusive property rights. Even if we are convinced that we are touching upon the truth, we are incapable of plumbing its depths.

To put it yet another way, I would say that in order to know a religion (and therefore be in a position to talk about it), it is necessary to share in the lives of those who believe in it. It so happens that another word to describe this sharing of life is hospitality. The practice of hospitality is one of the basic Christian values. It is not, however, unique to Christianity; it is part of virtually all cultures, from Babylon to China, India, and Australia.

Interreligious dialogue and hospitality always go together. Without such a dialogue, we turn inward, gasp for air, and tend to attribute absolute values to our beliefs. It is not possible to know another religion without practicing hospitality, not the way its believers live it out. If we fail to experience hospitality, we only have our own impression of that religion to go by, not what it really is.
Hospitality is more than a coming together under one roof. It requires that we eat together, and this partaking of the same food is, broadly speaking, eucharistic in nature. To quote an Afghani saying, it consists of “a sharing of bread and salt.” It is therefore significant that, in some instances, the act of partaking at the same table should have been subjected to certain constraints; the reason being that, if taken seriously, this form of sharing implies a form of communion, actual or potential. Hesitancy surrounding the act of partaking at the same table—a hesitancy present within classical Hinduism—is explainable by reason of the fact that in order to fully share in such a sacred act, it is necessary to believe in it.

To invite a stranger to partake in a meal is the essence of hospitality. Traditionally the stranger was a pilgrim; he could well have been an angel, but in any case he was to be treated with due respect. Today, unhappily, there is reason to fear that the stranger might turn out to be a thief or a terrorist. Such a regrettable trend is probably attributable to the individualism that characterizes the modern world and is accompanied by a desacralization of the human person. To counter this tendency, it would be necessary to recall that the cosmotheandric vision of which I have spoken elsewhere stands for the proposition that all reality is mysterious, human and material, in other words, Silence, Word, and Bread. (See Raimon Panikkar, The Cosmotheandric Experience: Emerging Religious Consciousness [Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993].)

Hospitality cannot be reduced to mere theory. It invariably demands practice, action, and, unequivocally, love—love that is a precondition to knowledge: thus the importance of hospitality not only for dialogue but also for there to be peace among humans.

At the beginning hospitality was initiated at a personal level (not individually), but later it was institutionalized by the Church and then by the state. Would a destitute modern-day pilgrim find food and shelter wherever he went? Would a penniless stranger knocking on the door of a monastery be welcomed as if he were Christ? The question remains: how do we reconcile
this prophetic vision with institutionalism? Bismarck once said that it would not be possible to use the Sermon on the Mount to build an empire. This is a very significant challenge. If all works of mercy are institutionalized, then we run a real risk of feeling that we are thereby freed from the obligation of practicing hospitality.

In any case, the practice of hospitality is essential to anyone who harbors feelings that are fully human; feelings, I might go so far as to say, that are indicative of a good state of health. The law of nature is not based on the principle of *homo homini lupus*, which seems to be the basis of contemporary culture, but rather on friendship—as taught by Christ. (See John 15:15.)

Pierre-François de Béthune has practiced hospitality, and he knows whereof he speaks, which is why his words carry weight, and not just within the monastic world, for, as he himself puts it, hospitality is among the most basic of human virtues. Thus, when monks practice hospitality, they do so in communion with all of mankind.

There is such a thing as a monastic archetype. Even if monks and nuns are, in an institutional sense, few in number, the monastic ideal dwells within the heart of every human being. There lies within every human heart the monastic archetype that could be defined as being a focus on the “one thing [that] is needful.” (See Luke 10:42.)

In a word: interreligious dialogue is a process involving hospitality, and hospitality is a universal experience, just as monasticism is also a universal phenomenon. We are therefore at the heart of the matter, a matter of vital importance to the modern world—encounter among religions. Monks have a significant part to play within that process.

I am convinced that this book will open up many new perspectives. I am honored that its author should have asked me to write a foreword for it, for I am one who thinks of the whole world as being his monastery.

Raimon Panikkar
Christmas Eve 2006
Introduction

Whoever makes a commitment to engage in interreligious dialogue is led farther afield than had been imagined at the outset. Assuming that the experience goes beyond gleaning from other traditions a few disparate elements that might be of use, and if a genuine desire to encounter those who are living witnesses of another religious tradition is present, there will then be a gradual awareness of inner change. Does this not imply that there is a real risk of loss of personal identity? For a long time I thought as much. But with experience I came to realize that, on the contrary, the journey led me to rediscover my own tradition. I did shed on the way a few of my cherished beliefs, but I also came to understand that, as far as Christians are concerned, the most valuable aspect of interreligious dialogue is that it leads to the poverty of the Beatitudes, and that this stripping away of all that is superfluous is a source of much joy. This book is an account of this journey of discovery, at the school of Buddhist masters.

It describes a path taken within the contextual framework of the interreligious dialogue inspired by the Second Vatican Council. It would be difficult to overstate the significance of the revolutionary change that came about within the heart of the Christian tradition, thanks to the openness toward other religions reflected in the council’s document Nostra Aetate. The council’s action was tantamount to endorsing a complete about-face in regard to the behavior required of Christians desirous of remaining true to the Gospel. This new awareness was of vital importance. I do not, however, believe that we should be
satisfied with what has already been achieved. The fact is that
over the past forty years enormous changes have taken place
within our world, and in particular with regard to the practice
of Christianity. We must therefore be steadfast in undertaking
the next stage of the journey.

It is true that today Christians are among those who are the
most convinced by and committed to interreligious dialogue.
Interreligious encounters have increased in frequency and great
strides have been made in the arena of theological reflection.
Christians should not, however, grow complacent. They are
often tempted to forget their all-too-recent past that was charac-
terized by intolerance and by an attitude of hardheaded exclu-
sivity. It is not because they have come to understand the need
for dialogue that they are yet capable of practicing it! The shoots
that sprouted feelings of superiority toward others have yet to
wither away. They have in fact negatively influenced both their
mindset and their traditional teachings in this area.

This is the reason why I want to stress the importance of de-
veloping, together with others, fresh approaches to establishing
interreligious contacts in the hope of discovering yet new ap-
proaches, and doing so in a spirit of humility. We would there-
fore do well to take into account the reactions of those from other
religions with whom we are in discussions, and who often greet
the attempts of Christians to initiate dialogue with a degree of
skepticism. They ask themselves whether our sudden change
in attitude might not have opportunistic underpinnings. And
so they challenge us by asking what is the true meaning of our
sudden reconversion.

I want to clarify at the outset that it is not possible to initi-
ate dialogue in the absence of conversion: a renewed conver-
sion committed to in the name of the Gospel. This is the kind
of conversion that requires a radical interior transformation, a
profound change in religious attitude. The Christian religion
will not emerge unscathed from the process of interreligious
encounter.

I am, however, convinced that a wholehearted commitment
to make this particular journey, without seeking to avoid the
interior upheavals that it will surely bring about, will lead to a significant deepening of faith. The fundamental question of Christian identity cannot be sidestepped. How can a Christian go further and engage, in the name of the Christian faith itself, in an encounter with another faith, without placing that Christian faith at risk? Christ does in fact require of his disciples that they pledge themselves unequivocally to him and to his Gospel; how then can a Christian welcome unreservedly other believers, and fully respect their most fundamental beliefs? Or, to put it more succinctly: how is a Christian to reconcile an exclusive allegiance to Christ with extending an unconditional welcome to others in his name?

Stated in such terms, the dilemma gives the appearance of being insurmountable. Interreligious dialogue is from now on an absolute necessity, and yet, taken to its logical conclusion, is it not also impossible? It is no less impossible for being indispensable, and no less indispensable because it is impossible. So, what is the way out of such a conundrum?

One of the ways out of this trap is from the upside, through a more daring spiritual quest or, better still, by the downside, by way of a more radical practice of the kind of humility called for by the Gospel. It is a fact that among those who contributed the most to interreligious dialogue, many were monks, including Thomas Merton,1* Henri Le Saux,* and Christian de Chergé,* men who dedicated their entire lives to this spiritual quest and who reached a degree of spiritual maturity allowing them to go beyond those apparent contradictions. Monks do not, of course, have a monopoly when it comes to dialogue concerning interreligious dialogue, but they do have the means to practice it in a way that is compellingly coherent. They are witnesses to the fact that what may, at first, seem impossible, even absurd, can be lived out within a spiritual environment and indeed bear fruit. We will

1. Names and terms marked by asterisks are included and explained in an appendix (lexicon) at the end of this book.
see just how, at the school of these great witnesses, the process of conversion to dialogue can, in fact, be brought about.

It is, in any event, a process that is lived out within the intimacy of a person’s spirituality; it is, above all, a process involving hospitality. That is why I will speak mostly of welcome at the interreligious level, and more specifically of interreligious hospitality that consists not only of welcoming the other within one’s own spiritual home but also entering into his own home, when invited to do so.

The experiences described in the chapters that follow are not out of the ordinary. I know of many others who have had similar experiences, some even more intense. I have simply attempted to analyze as faithfully as possible the changes that such experiences have gradually brought about within a Christian monk; a monk formed very much within the traditional mold but who, when it came to meeting the challenges inherent in the encounter, had the desire to persevere to the very end.

The journey I describe in this book was made possible thanks to my Benedictine monastic formation, and to the trust placed in me by my brother monks of Clerlande. However, were it not for my meeting Miss Michiko Somei Nojiri, my tea master, it would never have had a beginning, and without her counsel and support over many years, would not have taken the form of an apprenticeship in the practice of hospitality. I want to take this opportunity to express my sincere thanks to her. This writing project would not have been brought to a successful conclusion without the encouragement and advice of Mrs. Thérèse Barrea. Her contribution has added immeasurably to the quality of the manuscript and I also want to record my indebtedness and gratitude to her for her efforts.
PART ONE

Receiving Hospitality

At birth my parents received me. They introduced me into a family and made me part of a tradition. I was also welcomed into a Christian community that brought me to the knowledge of Jesus Christ.

It was then that everything could begin. What happened to me from then on has been made possible thanks to this first, undeserved, hospitality.

Later, Buddhist friends also welcomed me into their tradition. They received me such as I was, a stranger and a needy seeker. They did it without intending to make me one of them but rather for the sheer pleasure of the encounter. This unexpected hospitality has touched me to the core.

And then everything could begin anew.
I discovered the importance and the beauty that comes from dialoging among cultures and religions, neither through reading nor from conversations but rather as a result of experiencing something tangible and practical, namely, the skills required to master a spiritual discipline, specifically the way of tea.

**Discoveries**

Within the space of a few days, I had occasion to participate in two ceremonies and became acutely aware of how markedly different they were one from the other.

The first was held at the Basilica of Saint Peter’s in Rome. The pope was celebrating a Mass in honor of Catholic missions, and the organizers had planned a highly colorful offertory procession: representatives from the many nations present, each wearing their finest traditional dress as they brought the gifts up to the altar. Koreans in white, Congolese in radiant traditional
garments, Indian women in graceful saris, Mexicans in brightly colored ponchos, Incas, an Italian deacon, and many more came forward in a most dignified way bearing gifts that in one way or another symbolized the richness present in the world’s many nations, races, and languages. This was a literal interpretation of Isaiah’s prophecy: “Lift up your eyes round about, and see; they all gather together, they come to you . . . the abundance of the sea shall be turned to you, the wealth of the nations shall come to you . . . all those from Sheba shall come. They shall bring gold and frankincense . . .” (Isaiah 60:4-6). In accordance with the missionary mindset, all cultures and religions are seen as converging on Rome, thus enriching the Church, which is also the symbol through which salvation is brought to the far ends of the earth. The intent of the organizers was no doubt a good deal more subtle and respectful: I am simply referring to the view this image, in fact, projected.

It so happened that a few days later, a friend invited me to a “tea ceremony” that was held at the Centro Urasenke of Rome, not far from the Vatican. There were only three of us in the small, softly lit tea room: Miss Michiko Nojiri (the tea master), my friend, and me. As we sat around the single tatami mat, the master offered each of us a bowl of green tea, in accordance with the very precise ritual I will have occasion to describe later. What really impressed me that day was the very humble way in which everything was done, as well as the extreme simplicity of the setting. The manner of offering the bowl was so very natural, and yet, because it was stripped down to its essentials, it was expressive of the essence of what it is to be welcoming. I had never, until that moment, realized that such an act of hospitable welcome was capable of encompassing within itself the sum total of all the different ways in which people relate to each other.

It is not strictly possible to compare two such disparate “ceremonies.” I really only want to speak about my own experience of them. In striking contrast to the Baroque show put on at Saint Peter’s and of its grandiose message, the purpose of the liturgy I had experienced in the tea room was solely to bring about an authentic encounter and to do so in a spirit of true humility. The
two ceremonies were orchestrated with very different mindsets: there was on the one hand the purpose of promoting a strong sense of universality based on a single truth and, on the other, a witnessing through simple gestures—bereft of any desire to persuade or even impart some kind of benefit—the essence of what it is to offer hospitality.

Be that as it may, my chance discovery of the spiritual way that is *chado* (the way of tea) had a profound effect on me, because it made me aware of a truth that I hitherto sensed only imperfectly: the Gospel’s sole requirement is that we live out in concrete terms the commandment that we be welcoming of one another. The other ways of proclaiming the Gospel invariably carry with them the risk of being seen as part of a power play, or of a plan to co-opt the beliefs of others. Much depends on the manner in which the act of welcome is carried out in practice: that is, made incarnate. It requires great purity of heart, and a complete absence of any ulterior motive based on self-interest. The paradox is that when I discovered this expression, so characteristic of Zen Buddhism, I began to have a deeper understanding of the meaning of the incarnation. I began to understand that what is “spiritual” is capable of becoming fully incarnate within the actions of a person, and, in the Christian sense of incarnation, within the gestures of a woman. I came to realize the truth that something “spiritual” only exists to the extent it becomes incarnate.

Thus, from the time of my first encounter with Zen, I felt as if I had received an invitation to rethink my own faith: a process that involved an inner dialogue between two ways of approaching truth, so different and yet, because both are rooted in the human person, so similar. It was perhaps more of a challenge to me rather than an invitation. In Zen, I discovered a form of Buddhism that was very concrete: a school, or a way, that stressed being in the moment. For example, and to quote Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki,* “the way of tea” is something of a summary of Zen Buddhism.

A host offering an arriving guest a drink is a sign of welcome in all cultures. The drink being offered can be a simple one. All of us have, at one time or another, been privileged to have
received from people who owed us nothing either a cup of tea or a simple glass of fresh water. That has led us to the realization that this act of giving is symbolic of how human beings relate to one another. It is the Japanese who came up with the idea of transforming this simple gesture into an art form. The Zen tradition provided an ideal environment within which to allow this particular art form to develop. Cha zen ichimi is a proverbial expression meaning “Zen and tea have the same flavor.”

The tea drinking habit was brought to Japan by the early Buddhist missionaries in the sixth century. The idea, however, of transforming the offering of tea into a spiritual discipline is attributable to Japanese masters who imported chan from China during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. After that, chado began to grow and evolve within Zen monasteries, and then spread into all segments of the population. Finally, during the course of the sixteenth century, a layman by the name of Sen no Rikyu*(d. 1591), who was schooled in Zen and became grand tea master to Shogun Hideyoshi,* gave chado its present form. This is the form in which it is taught by the Urasenke tradition.

During the twentieth century, Sen Soshitsu, the fifteenth successor of Sen no Rikyu, founded a number of centers outside Japan, including one in Rome. Thanks to the Centro Urasenke, all those who live in the Eternal city have the opportunity to “taste the flavor” of Zen Buddhism in a most concrete way.

**Apprenticeship**

Following my first visit, I was able to attend several more tea “ceremonies”—the name cha no yu (hot water for tea) is really more correct since, strictly speaking, no ceremony is involved. I have read a lot about Zen, but it was through observation that I was able to grasp intuitively a number of concepts that until then I found to be overly theoretical, not to say, abstruse.

Nevertheless, I was far from thinking that I could ever go beyond being a mere observer of cha no yu, for I had never wanted to play at “pretending” to be Japanese. It took me a while to
come round to really wanting to become personally involved in the way of tea. My decision had to do with the manner in which Christianity, as a way of life, was coming across in the closing years of the twentieth century. I am not referring to the substance of the faith but rather to the way in which it was being presented on both artistic and dogmatic levels. My stay in Rome had brought me awareness of the shallowness of both the Baroque and the ostentatious ways in which the faith was being portrayed. The theatrical poses depicted in countless statues were, not unlike the often-peremptory declarations issued by the Vatican, drowned out by the constant hubbub of the city and seemed to have lost much of their meaning. I also felt that the Catholic liturgy, reduced to a string of words punctuated by gestures that were either tentative or vague, left much to be desired, and I dreamed of a much simpler form of celebration that allowed for long periods of silence.

So after a while I asked if I could be initiated into the Zen tradition. Little did I suspect that this decision would lead me farther afield than I had imagined. I was about to take concrete steps that would engage me in a dialogue involving both a way of life and a spiritual tradition. This would lead me beyond discovery, toward an inner transformation.

Sen no Rikyu, the founder of the Urasenke tea tradition, left a collection of one hundred sayings for the guidance of those who want to practice this art form. Among the first is the following:

There is nothing difficult about chado: all that is needed is a little skill. Above all, though, you do need to love the art of chado, and also persevere.

I did think at the time I possessed that minimum required amount of skill, and I knew myself to be very highly motivated. As for perseverance, I really did not yet know what that meant within a Japanese context.

Tea lessons at the Centro Urasenke were always preceded by a half hour of silent and still meditation. The first order of the
day was to learn about patience and its power to transform. The way of the tea is a long and demanding road to follow. It is a *do* (in Chinese *dao*), a spiritual journey, just like flower arrangement, calligraphic painting, or archery. The *do* is in fact a journey toward inner transformation. When seen in this way, it is not the result that counts, not the work (*opus*) itself, but rather the act of doing (*operatio*), the process. The thing to look out for in a calligraphic painting is the extent to which it bears witness to a man who is really free: a freedom mirrored in his brushstrokes. Zen art is not so much a means through which an artist finds expression but rather an opportunity given him to work on his inner self, thus refining his approach to reality. This is especially true of *chado*, where the material used is neither ink, nor paper, nor flowers but rather the welcome of one another. In such a case the spiritual journey resides in essence within the movements that are essential to the making and serving of the tea. No less is at stake than the embodiment (incarnation) of an unconditional openness to the other person within a hospitality ritual that is pushed to the limits of perfection.

Sen no Rikyu has said:

> There is nothing special about cha no yu:  
> All that need be done is heat the water, add the tea,  
> And then drink it calmly.  
> That is all you need to know.

How indeed very simple, and how natural it all seems when done by a master. As I began my apprenticeship, however, I came to the painful realization that what seemed to come to my master as second nature was for me well nigh impossible. No sooner did I try to imitate her than my clumsiness, my inhibitions, and my fixations all came to the fore. In fact, our movements, just like our handwriting, and our fumbles, are telltale signs of our inner disposition that is so often in conflict. It takes a great deal of time and a long journey to rediscover the simplicity within us. The first attempts at tea making are full of humiliations. But, with much work, patiently and above all humbly undertaken,
directed at improving each movement, it is in fact possible to have an effect on one’s inner disposition and to recover, step-by-step, a sense of natural simplicity.

There is nothing intrinsically difficult about the movements required for cha no yu. All the movements are practical in nature and are the ones needed for the traditional making and serving of tea. Nothing is merely symbolic or decorative. Each movement is essential. The one who prepares, and those who receive the bowl, are bound to follow a precise ritual that dates back to the sixteenth century. The ritual’s very precise requirements do not preclude individual expression, quite the contrary. The detailed requirements are not unlike the notes that make up a musical score; they are essential if the performance is to follow a predetermined pattern rather than become a free-for-all. It is paradoxical that having rules to follow frees performers so they can express their true personalities. What really matters, according to Rikyu, is to love one’s art, and live it as a do, thereby dedicating to it all the time it needs.

There is another of Rikyu’s sayings that serves as a useful reminder to those whose apprenticeship is in progress:

If you really want to make progress, you must, over and over again, start at the beginning.

When it comes to the practice of the way of tea, we are forever beginners, for, to quote Shunryu Suzuki,* the true spirit of Zen is the “beginner’s mind,” a “new spirit” (sho shin). It is indeed very challenging to have to come to terms with the idea that we constantly have to go back to the beginning, especially for Westerners. It is however a school that serves us well when it comes to freeing ourselves from the constant need to affirm our egos. Then, at long last, our true personality will be capable of freeing itself from the desire for self-expression, and our gestures will become spontaneous; a spontaneity that is in accord with our true nature.

This is fundamental to the way in which the Japanese approach the apprenticeship necessary for all the arts, inclusive
of *origami*, the art of paper folding. What is demanded of the apprentice is grueling hard work, a dogged steadfastness to keep struggling beyond the limits of what seemed possible and, above all, a determination never to allow emotions to well over. The pain that comes from sitting hours on end—body bent back, hard against the heels—during the course of lengthy tea ceremonies can become obsessively painful but, as my master was wont to say, “it’s not important; it’s simply a question of not thinking about it.” The tedium that comes from watching others, over long periods of time, prepare and serve tea without having the opportunity to do so oneself can also become excruciating, but “to observe silently what others are doing is a discipline that is just as important as the one involving the actual offering of the bowl, perhaps more so.” To spare me from any feelings bordering on self-satisfaction, my teacher never gave me any positive feedback. Only once, after I had been practicing many years, did she let on: “Well, that’s a little less ridiculous!”

To train in the ways of *chado* is to learn at the school of objectivity. At first, whenever I failed in my attempts to carry out a particular movement, I would find a ready excuse: “This bowl is especially rough,” or “This towel is inadequate,” or even “People are talking around me, and I find that distracting.” I was, in other words, saying: “This is not my fault.” What I eventually learned at the school of objectivity was that I had no choice but to work with things that were less than perfect, and in circumstances that left something to be desired. I came to understand that I could neither avoid taking responsibility for what I did nor seek to gloss over something that was “my problem.” Failing that I would never attain a state of spontaneity in accord with my true nature, and therefore never move beyond my old complexes.

Absorbing the rules that are specific to the proper practice of Zen-inspired movements requires a great deal of time. It has often been observed that the work required to master any of the spiritual ways common to the East is not unlike that of a musician who is involved in tuning his instrument, say a *koto*. The tension within each string must be the one appropriate to that particular string. If the tension is insufficient, the string will
not give out the right note, and may even fail to sound at all. If the tension is too great, the string will be out of tune, and may even break. There is but one way to tighten each individual string, and but one way to tighten all the strings correctly in relation to each other. The good thing, however, about following this highly demanding set of rules is that it then opens up a universe of infinite possibilities. Much the same can be said of chado, and even for poetry: chado becomes reality only when it reaches perfection.

Underlying all the disciplines required of the way of the tea is a quest for the correct muscle tone in an area referred to as the tanden (tandian in Chinese; or hara), the natural center of the body located in the region of the abdomen, below the navel. Accordingly, it is necessary to start by working on deep breathing exercises that involve not only the upper body but also the trunk. The emphasis given to the abdominal area as the battleground for what is essentially a spiritual struggle may seem surprising. It is, however, of the utmost importance. The need to pay attention to the body, and most especially to this particular part of the body, is typical of Zen. With practice, it becomes self-evident that a motion carried out while concentrating on the tanden acquires a degree of forcefulness, of coherence, and of straightforwardness that would not otherwise be achievable. Only then do motions cease to be “ridiculous.” The same goes for all the other Japanese do, among them calligraphy, aikido, and the Noh theatrical tradition. The force that initiates each gesture does not originate from the thinking brain but rather from the body’s energy center, the ki, the cosmic force experienced in the abdominal region. This part of ourselves that we think of as lacking in nobility is nonetheless of key importance when viewed at a more existential level. In truth, neither our strength nor our initiatives count for much, but what does matter is our capacity to tap into a mysterious force that at once reaches beyond us and moves through us. Much of this will sound strange, maybe even aberrant, to the ears of an uninitiated Westerner, but when actually experienced, this methodology becomes very convincing. Take, for instance, the motion whereby the tea bowl prepared with the utmost care is placed before the
guest. While this gesture is already a sign of kindly intent, it will, when imbued with the force of **ki**, take on a far greater significance and value. It will then no longer be limited to being a token of the friendship that arises out of an exchange among individuals, but will become a revelatory sign that speaks to a notion of gift that reaches out beyond us. For the guest to be truly honored, it is fitting that, thanks to these simple motions, he be invited into a relational dynamic that is cosmic in scope.

Even after these foundational principles have been grasped, there is still a need to adhere to other rules so as to ensure that each gesture also conveys a sense of serenity. It is important to act in accordance with the rhythm inherent in each gesture. If, for example, there is need to move the **natsume**—the small lacquered tea caddy—it is important to start the movement in a very forthright manner, but without appearing to want to hold on to the caddy; as the movement climaxes, it is good to introduce a fleeting pause; finally, when the movement concludes it is again appropriate to pause ever so briefly so as to avoid giving the impression that the conclusion of the task is cause for relief. Only then can the next movement be initiated without risk of causing confusion. With such deliberateness, the movements take on the power that is truly theirs.

Another of the rules included in what amounts to a grammatical primer for those who practice **chado** is taken from the Noh theatrical tradition. It was expressed by Zeami* (d. 1443) in these words: “It is important to pay more attention to those parts of the body that remain still rather than to those that are in motion, since the attention given to that which is still and firm, makes it possible to introduce silence into the heart of the act itself.”

I could make a long list of the many very detailed rules developed over the course of the history of the way of the tea. Better, though, that I state one more time that the purpose of this very lengthy apprenticeship is not so much to form virtuosi but rather to free the heart. Here is the way Rikyu puts it:

> True tea is prepared with water drawn from the depths of the heart; depths that can never be plumbed.
This work directed to the self and carried out with great patience also requires that much attention be given to inanimate objects. The way we interact with objects has a lot to teach us about our inner disposition. According to the spirit of Zen, all things around us are worthy of the greatest respect. They are not just means through which to express other things; they have intrinsic value.

In this ancient tradition, the preparation of tea is not something terribly complicated. There is in the tea room a small charcoal stove, on top of which is a kettle. The tea used for the cha no yu is the macha, a powder made of ground tea leaves. The task at hand is to put a little of this powder into a bowl, pour boiling water into it, and then mix it all up with a small whisk (chasen) made of a single piece of splintered bamboo. While all these objects are made out of ordinary materials such as earthenware, bamboo, paper, and cast iron, they nonetheless need to be of very high quality.

If the cha no yu is to be done under optimal conditions, there is need to bring into play almost every art form, and not just the arts that involve motion but also those involving objects. The way to the teahouse is through a small traditional garden (roji). The teahouse (chashitsu) is usually built in a style inspired by small mountain hermitages (soan). Inside, there is invariably a small alcove closed off to visitors (tokonoma) in which hangs a calligraphy (kakejiku) executed by a Zen master, and within which is placed a floral arrangement appropriate to the season (chabana). The objects needed for the making of the tea, whether they are made of lacquer, wood, bronze, cast iron, or ceramic, are themselves works of art. Particular emphasis is placed on the quality of the cups (chawan).

I believe that the reason that chado is held in such high regard by the Japanese is because it is at crossroads of all art forms. There is no better way to be introduced to Japanese art in general than to seek to understand the tea ceremony.

Those who wish to gain an appreciation for the objects used in the tea ceremony may do so according to a prescribed method (haiken). After making use of each object, time is spent in looking
at them very closely as a means of appreciating their texture, their graininess, their shape, their weight, their roughness or smoothness to the touch. All the senses are engaged in this all-embracing process. Of particular interest is what is called the sabi, the shine or patina acquired as a result of a very long period of reverential use. After all these attributes have been carefully and thoughtfully taken into account, it becomes apparent that the time taken up in so doing in no way detracts from the attention given to the guests; the attention given to the objects seems to redound to the honor of all those who have participated in the cha no yu.

One of the defining characteristics of chado is the way it nurtures the act of encountering others. Since the essence of cha no yu is hospitality, it would not be fair to present it as if it were a recital performed by a soloist who prepares and offers a cup of tea as part of a public performance, even if the public were particularly attentive. If one were to want to make a performance of it, it would have to take the form of an implied dialogue between a host and guests he has invited to his house and to whom he offers tea. Cha no yu can only come about within the setting of an encounter. Every effort is made to ensure that the guest feels at one with the environment.

There is a well-known Japanese medieval text that has given rise to a great deal of commentary over the centuries. Written by Kamo no Chomei* in the thirteenth century, it is called “An Account of my Hut” (Hojoki). The author, an aristocrat and former high-ranking dignitary at the imperial court, decided to retire from the world on a mountain to the north of the capital city. In the written notes he left to posterity, he describes the joys of his austere way of life. He observes how the birds that frequent his hermitage seem to be wholly at ease, how the fish in the small lake seem to also be within their element, and for good reason, for they are “fish in water.” But then he asks himself why it is that human beings never seem to be wholly within their element. Most often, they go by either burdened or enslaved; in other instances, they run around as if they were conquerors. In what place, he asks, could they really be within their natural element?
Rikyu, several centuries later, offers the following answer: “It is inside the small tea room that man can really be who he truly is, free of all complexes and feelings of self-importance. There, he discovers that his true element is conviviality.”

An emphasis on the goal of achieving a true encounter during the course of cha no yu is clearly reflected within the four principles that underlie its practice. The principles address inner discipline, the care of the objects used, but most particularly the importance of paying due regard to the guests. Those principles are: wa, harmony; kei, respect; sei, cleanliness; and jaku, serenity.

It will be necessary to explain them in greater detail if we are to gain a better understanding of Rikyu’s “Summary for the understanding of Zen.” Wa, harmony, is the foundation on which rests everything that has to do with Japanese behavior. It touches on the just and natural relationship that should exist among people and things, and between the sky and the earth. Kei, respect, also concerns those relationships, but with particular emphasis on respecting the hierarchic order that permeates all relationships. Sei signifies outer cleanliness, but also inner purity, sobriety, and loyalty. Jaku is the end goal of all processes: the offer of a bowl of tea is really the offering of serenity.

What to me is the most remarkable thing about those four principles is that they in fact encompass the four great religions and philosophies of ancient Japan. Wa encompasses Taoism, sei Confucianism, kei Shintoism, and jaku Buddhism. In the chado tradition these different principles are brought together in the spirit of religious ecumenism. Even though the inspiration underlying the way of the tea is typical of Zen Buddhism—and everyone is well aware of that fact—the one who invites the others to partake in the bowl of tea is loath to make any explicit reference to the Buddhist origins of chado. Not because he harbors any doubts about it but because he is even more convinced of the importance of giving a good welcome to those who come to him. It is said that there was, at the beginning, a Buddhist figure inside the alcove of the teahouse—the tokonoma. Later, however, the tea masters chose to hang within it a kakejiku, a
calligraphy evoking either a poetic theme or a wise saying with universal application. That way a guest may be of a religion other than Buddhism, and yet feel just as welcome. He may even recognize within one or other of the four principles that are at work here an aspect of his own religious beliefs. I find this aspect to be of particular interest, namely, that a coherently structured spiritual exercise is of greater importance than a correct profession of faith. This is worth noting, since this kind of approach is seldom taken.

From its beginnings, the chado tradition has been respectful of strangers. It is known that Rikyu maintained contacts with all those who, during the Momoyama period in sixteenth-century Japan, were open to anything that might, in one way or another, benefit the country. He was therefore in contact with Christians and some were among his most devoted disciples. As to the Christian missionaries, they were also intrigued by the chajin (men of the tea), and paid close attention to the way of the tea. We in fact owe the most detailed description of the tea ceremony as it was practiced at that time to a book written by Father Juan Rodriguez Tsuzu, SJ (d. 1634).

Historians continue to debate the possibility that Christianity in some way influenced the tea ceremony. Certain gestures such as the wiping of the teacup with a cloth might have been influenced by the way in which Catholic priests wipe the chalice clean at the end of Mass. Personally, I incline more toward the idea that it might have been thanks to the gospel that Rikyu placed such emphasis on guests extending to each other a fraternal welcome. It is almost as if fraternity were a fifth implied principle, standing beside harmony, respect, purity, and serenity. I am not arguing that this concern for equality and fraternity was imposed from the outside, since it was already present within the Buddhist tradition. It is, however, possible that contacts with Christians might have moved him to further develop an aspect that was already present.

Regardless of its origins, this emphasis on equality among all who participate in the cha no yu is an essential prerequisite to the encounter. Before entering, the participants make a point of
setting aside the insignia of their social status, and those who are
samurai deposit their weapons in a rack set aside for that very
purpose. The door through which the participants enter is called
*nijiri guchi*, the humble gateway; it is only about twenty-eight
inches high so that, to enter the *chashitsu*, everyone is obliged to
crouch. Once inside, whoever happened to have been the first to
enter is considered to be the most important of the guests. The
requirement that all are to be treated as being fundamentally
equal to each other is a prerequisite to the creation of a convivial
environment. One of the Zenrin’s* sayings is concise and very
much to the point:

> Around the hearth: no host, no guest.

I like this saying since it does much to explain what is happen-
ing inside the tea room and indeed far beyond it, namely, that
to the extent that we are together in our struggle to reach out for
what is in essence beyond our reach—symbolized here by the
hearth—then the external differences that keep us apart cease
to have any meaning.

At the conclusion of my apprenticeship at Centro Urasenke
in Rome, I was privileged to go to Kyoto, to the headquarters
of the school of *Urasenke* so as to complete my study of *chado.*
This is where the Urasenke Chado Senmon Gakko is located, a
center of higher learning dedicated to the training of tea masters
from Japan as well as from other countries.

This stay in Kyoto was for me an opportunity to discover the
cultural and religious context underlying this tradition. There
is something really unique about being able to live in the very
place in which Sen no Rikyu and his successors lived. There are
many things that can really only be fully understood if they are
experienced directly and in person. I remember most particu-
larly my visit to the altar of the Sen family, accompanied by the
then head of the family, master Sen Soshitsu XV. He had placed
on it a Bible printed in Rome at the time of Rikyu. Each day he
would turn over one of its pages, indicating through this gesture
the desire to invite another tradition into the very center of his
own. He then invited me into a small tea room built by Sen Sotan (d. 1658), the second successor of Rikyu, and his grandson. This teahouse, which is called ko nichi an, is the heart of the Sen house. It is very small indeed, barely the size of two and a half tatamis, but it symbolizes the spirit of jaku, serenity. This is the spirit that is practiced today by the Urasenke tradition and which it strives to spread throughout the world.

I have, however, to admit that I learned nothing in this center of higher learning that I had not already learned from my master Nojiri Sensei. It is indeed true that the success of such an apprenticeship is entirely dependent on the quality of the personal relationship established between master and student.

Going deeper

I propose to move beyond historical and practical details and discuss the philosophical and religious insights that the chado tradition has contributed to the development of the art of welcome. These insights are both original and enlightening. Rikyu, in his effort to afford his guest the best possible welcome, does not choose the way of munificence and excessive refinement but rather the way of nakedness.

While in the sixteenth century (Rikyu’s time) tea had become the everyday drink of the Japanese people, it had in certain circles taken on a particular significance. A rather more aesthetic ceremonial, coexisting with temple rituals, had developed within aristocratic circles. Due in large measure to the involvement of the great artists of the Ashikaga period, this ceremonial had reached the heights of elegance and refinement. It was then that Rikyu introduced a change that revolutionized the tradition.

There is a story about how Rikyu made a discovery that changed his life. It happened on a day on which he had prepared tea for Hideyoshi. He was the Shogun’s official tea master, and always acquitted himself of his duties with the utmost elegance and with objects both rare and precious, in a tea room in which everything made of wood was covered in gold leaf. As he was
making his way back, and crossing over the Kamo River, he noticed a tramp sitting beside a rusty old stove preparing a bowl of tea in a rough *chawan*. Curious at first, and then enthralled, he watched the man drink his tea in total serenity. He said, “Here is my master! From now on, I will strive to prepare tea as well as he.” He had understood what others had grasped since the days of Ikkyu* (d. 1481): the serenity that is sought along the way of the tea is “a fathomless and most serene joy, hidden within the depths of that which is stripped bare of everything” (Hisamatsu*). Without seeking to deny the sacred and artistic attributes of the ancient tradition, he took it upon himself to approach matters from the opposite direction: not from the point of view of the beauty of the ritual movements and objects but rather by focusing on simplicity and on purity of heart. Tradition has given the name *wabi* cha, or *wabi* tea, to the way he so developed.

A rough rendering of *wabi* might be in the paradox that it seeks to bring about contentment in the midst of want, and joy in the midst of precariousness. The poet Basho* (d. 1694) is typical among its followers. He sees himself as “a pilgrim buffeted by the wind and at the mercy of whoever comes his way; a man who has drunk his bowl of *wabi* right down to the dregs.”

The taste of *wabi* traces back its origins to those who from within the monasteries had learned to value simple things. Nothing that pertains to daily life is treated as commonplace: even the most insignificant of things are revered. In such a spirit, it could be said that *wabi* is the art of rescuing ordinary things from utter insignificance by bringing out the wonderful simplicity and hidden cause of joy that lies within them.

It is, nonetheless, within artistic circles that this “art of living” took shape. Certain artists, who drew their inspiration from Zen Buddhism and reacted against the conspicuous display of wealth that typified the period, began to advocate an art form rooted in “poverty” that remains inspiring to this very day. The views of these artists can be summed up as follows:

Rather than stubbornly, passionately, and tragically reaching out for perfection and ultimate fulfillment, they commit
themselves to practicing extreme detachment. “The only way of fully appreciating the beauty of the mountains, of caves, of the wind, and of the moon, is to possess nothing else” (Ikkyu).

Rather than indulging in a yearning for what is infinite, they make do with what is inadequate, even with what has fallen into disuse. While gardens from the preceding period strove to imitate limitless landscapes, Zen gardens are walled in—creating inner spaces of unequaled intensity.

Rather than work tirelessly to achieve a refined and perfectly finished object, they trust in the spontaneity that issues forth from a generous heart, such as that which is reflected in a calligraphic painting; they have nothing to fear from what is done in accord with nature, and they go so far as to trustingly accept a chance blemish on a ceramic, or a flaw in a piece of wood.

Rather than abandon themselves to the disenchantment that comes from failing to attain an illusory ideal, they find joy in welcoming whatever is before them for, in truth, there is nothing in this world that does not have within it the power to reveal absolute beauty: for, thus the Zen saying goes,

Every voice is the Buddha’s voice,
And every shape is shape of the Buddha. (Zenrin)

Or, as Basho put it:

The old calendar
Fills me with gratitude
In the way of a sutra.

To state all this in Chinese terms, it can be said that instead of grasping for the *yang*, they stay close to the *yin* in the manner of this poem that, as far as Rikyu was concerned, was the best way of expressing the nature of *wabi*:

To those who seek only beautiful flowers
I can offer an even greater joy:
The first green shoots that sprout in February,
Beside the mountain village. (Fujiwara Iyetaka, d. 1237)
We are now at the heart of the matter. To me, the way in which wabi conceives of reality is an essential key to the understanding of not only Zen art but also of the act of welcoming as it has been shaped within the chado tradition: the art of hospitality. For this reason I would like to bring into still sharper focus this particular part of my apprenticeship. The steps I was taught are helpful in furthering a better understanding of all forms of welcome and also of dialogue.

For the Zen masters, art is suggestive of Buddhist enlightenment. It is well known that in Zen stories, satori, or enlightenment, comes about in the most unexpected ways—sometimes in the heat of action, but almost always after many years of patient and silent spiritual striving, and most of the time thanks to some external happening: an unexpected comment from the master, a blow from the stick used during meditation, the sound of a bell, or any other external stimulus, even if quite unremarkable. There appears to be a need for a trigger event capable of setting off the process of satori. Japanese art strives to be such a trigger, a do, just the slightest nudge capable of bringing about the event that reveals the fullness of everything. Art evokes, at least symbolically, the awesome moment when a person moves up to a higher level of self-awareness.

A good haiku always triggers such an awakening, even if at a very modest level, but significant nonetheless:

    Over the dark sea
    The stark cry
    Of a wild duck. (Basho)

One of the Zenrin’s sayings evokes a quite similar experience:

    When a bird cries
    The silence of the mountain woods
    Grows deeper

A work of art, if it is to function as a catalyst, needs not only to be of the highest quality but also simple in the extreme. It would
not be right were it to fully captivate the one who contemplates it: it is but a humble instrument, the purpose of which is to bring about an awareness of what is of the essence; in this case the infinite nature of the dark sea, or of the deep silence of the mountain woods, images that remind us of our own existential emptiness. There is an ink and wash painting by Sesshu* (d. 1506), the most noteworthy aspect of which is not so much the actual brushstrokes but the limitless nature of the landscape they convey. It is the part left unpainted that carries the most meaning for it is representative of emptiness (ku in Japanese), a concept that is at the heart of Mahayana Buddhism.* It is the emptiness that counts the most. This notion, or better still, this experience of *ku, is present in all Eastern religions. The Chinese character that signifies it is itself suggestive of the firmament; that is a space so vast that nothing can equal it.

One of the characteristics of *wabi, or Zen art, is precisely that its nature is in essence consistent with that of space, of emptiness, and of silence. It issues from silence and leads back into it. This art form is simple in the extreme, and yet it is not pure absence—were it so, it would fade into insignificance. It is at once a tenuous sound, a brushstroke, a slight movement and the opposite of silence: it is an opposite that is its accomplice, if I may describe it in such terms, for it calls upon and then ushers in silence and space.

It is for these reasons that I take *wabi to be the purest aesthetic expression of Mahayana Buddhism. Even though it only rarely represents Buddhist images, but rather distant mountains, children playing, or turnips and cucumbers, it gives representational form to Mahayana’s fundamental vision of reality, namely, that nirvana is present within the *samsara, an expression that could be translated as “the absolute is present within what is contingent.” Such a formulation may well appear contradictory, but Zen art can help us understand that *samsara, the minimum about which I spoke previously, has in fact the potential to help us become aware of what is of the essence, an opportunity to experience, even if a very early stage, nirvana.

But let us return to the preparation of tea. If the masters of *wabi chose that humble little kitchen for the purpose of making
of it a “summary of Zen,” it is precisely because movements that are basic, and part of the routine of daily life, are representative of that minimum wherein the path toward enlightenment has the best chance of manifesting itself. They wanted to meet the challenge posed by the Chinese patriarch Lingji* (Rinzai in Japanese, d. 867), who left the famous saying: “The way is none other but your heart just as it is.” Another oft quoted saying in cha do circles is the reply made by the layman Pang* (d. 808) to the master Zhi tou, who asked him to explain what he had done to have built up such a large following: “The things I do day-in and day-out are quite ordinary, but I am at one with them. I hold nothing back, I reject nothing, and nowhere do I come upon either hindrance or disagreement. You wish to know which are my ‘supernatural powers,’ and ‘extraordinary activities’? I go fetch water at the spring and I cut my own firewood.”

A little later, in the thirteenth century, Dogen Zenji* (d. 1253) also did much to place emphasis on day-to-day life. He had journeyed to China, a demanding and risky enterprise, so he could learn from the genuine masters of what the Chinese called chan, and would eventually become Zen in Japan. The very first monk he chanced upon, as he disembarked in Canton, happened to be a cook looking to buy mushrooms. Great was his surprise when he realized he had come across a master. The work of a cook is well suited indeed to the challenge of concentrating the mind. We know that Dogen subsequently wrote a short but famous treatise titled “Advice for the cook.” He did eventually reach Keitoku-ji, the monastery at which the famous master Tendo Nyojo resided. It seems as though kitchen work is very much in harmony with the way of Zen. Even today, many Zen monasteries in Kyoto offer traditional meals to their guests.

It is clear that the place of chado is very much at the center of Buddhism. The few motions that are actually required to carry out this very straightforward act need, however, to be “just right” if they are to bring out what is at the heart of this encounter: a quality, though, that gives pride of place to silence. The guests do, nonetheless, talk to each other, avoiding, though, anything that might disturb the aura of peace and harmony. The
encounter does not just come about as a result of speech; motions and the atmosphere that pervades the room carry far greater weight. Just as in the summer the heavier evening air has a way of carrying voices farther afield, so does the spell-like resonance attaching to each act have the power to carry with greater force its underlying message. What holds true here is of the same nature as what was referred to earlier regarding the ink and wash painting by Sesshu: it is not so much the brushstrokes that count but rather those parts of the paper that remain untouched. What dwells within empty space and silence is essential to the unfolding of the encounter. The ritual of cha no yu becomes a means of coming face-to-face with the very nature of emptiness, and it is in that very coming together that the encounter is made perfect, inside the silent space present within the heart of each of the guests.

It is then possible to bring about in a very practical way the Japanese saying Ichi-go, ichi-ye, “One life, one encounter.” Just one meeting, brief as it might be, has the potential to reenact within it an entire life, if only it can be experienced at that level.

As for me, now that I had been practicing cha no yu for many years, I was now in a better position to understand what had so fascinated me when I had first discovered it in Rome, and why, going forward, it would continue to inspire me.

**Moving further down the road**

At the conclusion of this period of apprenticeship, I had to admit that I had not only learned a great deal but also unlearned a lot of things I had previously learned. I had begun my apprenticeship with the thought that it would improve and diversify my existing skills, but in the end I found myself grappling with a lot of new questions and confronted with the need to rethink many of my beliefs. Above all, I had come to understand that the act of welcome, any kind of welcome, is first and foremost something that involves an emptying out, not only on the part of the host but also on the part of the guest. I had, at first, thought
that hospitality had a lot to do with the host showering the guest with bounty, but no, what really counts is neither the giving nor the receiving part, but to be able to stand side-by-side each other in a state of thankfulness. My tea master was in the habit of saying to me over and over again: “Zen is none other than abandoning everything and receiving everything.”

Even if the thinking behind *wabi cha* was developed in a cultural environment that was very particular, it nonetheless has a universal application. Here are some of the aspects of this universality that I, as a Westerner, became aware of.

The first is an outgrowth of my actual practice of the tradition. Each encounter requires preparation. A frequent temptation is to try to do the job far too hurriedly. Before the encounter even takes place, hearts need to be awakened. At first, the impression given is that the highly elaborate nature of the *cha no yu* ritual inhibits both spontaneity and genuine sharing among individuals. In practice, however, it becomes apparent that, quite to the contrary, the emphasis on preparation, and on the appropriateness of the setting, serves to deepen and enrich the interpersonal quality of the encounter.

Another aspect arising out of this tradition that is, I think, very well worth taking into account, in the context of our own, is the absence of intentionality. When we invite someone to take tea, it is, of course, with the intention of providing that person with a pleasurable experience, but when the moment comes to actually offer the tea it is important not to do anything that would make that person feel obligated to us by reason of some expected return for the goodwill we have shown toward him. Rikyu recommends:

> Spare nothing in your efforts to welcome your guest,
> But only so long as he is unaware of it.

For he might then feel obligated toward the one who has expended so much effort, thereby weighing everything down.

For the encounter to occur within an atmosphere characterized by freedom and the total absence of constraint, it matters
that both the host and the guests refrain from speaking about themselves. Quite the contrary, they should both be listeners: listening to the sounds of their surroundings, the clinking of objects fashioned from bamboo, earthenware, and above all the burbling of water boiling in the kettle—is that not the whispering of the wind within the pines? Together, they look at brushwork, allow the scattered light inside the tea room to come over them, and smell the incense-laden smoke waft up from the stove. They speak softly, not wishing to intrude into a space within which everyone is aware of the “overarching simplicity of all things.” Opinions that are strongly held are not voiced out loud, but rather expressed through the act of being intensely present one to another.

I quoted at the beginning a Japanese saying: “Zen and tea have the same flavor.” This is the taste of unity. The reason that cha no yu is “a summary for the understanding of Zen” becomes apparent in light of this strongly expressed desire of choosing to go beyond the duality of opposites in search of a concrete way of expressing unity. When in the West we offer a cup of tea, we bring our guest a pot full of brewed tea. According to our way of looking at things, it would not be appropriate to impose on our guest the need to watch as we go about the business of actually preparing the tea; there is something slightly demeaning about it, something best left to servants. Quite the contrary, in the case of cha no yu the guests witness the making of the tea: they are not offered the mere result but are also invited to partake in the highly purposeful work required to actually make it, for that is in itself a gift. The chado tradition does not seek to draw a distinction between the act of working and the enjoyment of the fruits resulting from the work performed. There is no attempt to treat as opposites that which is carried out to the end (perfected) and that which is subject to uncertainty (contingent). Rather than progress by way of positing opposites, the Zen tradition prefers to seek out linkages; linkages that are full of contrasts, and are at times so unusual as to be surprising, but invariably bear fruit. Thus cha no yu is a form of meditation that lies at the very heart of the act of doing, a ritual within which the interior life is not
at odds with the act of being in touch with others. The sacred and the profane are never exclusive of each other. The taste of Zen is quite recognizable.

There are in fact many different means through which humans encounter each other—depending on the circumstances. The means that are best suited to encounters with those strangers to whom one would want to accord particular respect are, however, the least well developed. In this respect, chado provides a most useful example. There is at one extreme the kind of encounter that involves those already in a relationship based on friendship or on mutual attraction, and that is characterized by complicity and immediacy, and at the other end of the spectrum, a strictly businesslike encounter that has as its purpose negotiation, or the rendering of a specific service and which therefore needs to be carried out within very specific boundaries. Standing between these two extremes is cha no yu, a form of encounter that is intense, deep but also discreet. It is a form of encounter that happens within the framework of true humility, with all those taking part sitting on the ground, and always occurring through the mediation of a bowl of tea and of an accompanying ritual. This is, unfortunately, not a paradigm that lends itself to a much broader application since the contact is very direct. That said, it is a paradigm that has something very attractive about it. Communication is not limited to that occurring strictly between the host and the guests; it is open, more transpersonal than interpersonal, and could even be said to be cosmic in nature. It does not deal exhaustively with the interpersonal arena, but opens up an infinite area of emptiness typified by the tokonoma, that preserves the chashitsu from becoming inappropriately inward looking. To my way of thinking, chado is one of the archetypes symbolic of encounter with the other, the other as it truly is.

Since my own encounter with chado, I have had many opportunities to engage in dialogues that were both intercultural and interreligious. Today I realize that it was thanks to the way of the tea that I was able to initiate those encounters and do so quite spontaneously, encounters that were to lead to my first experience of Buddhism. I invariably attempted to position
dialogue within as broad and engaging a context as possible, that of hospitality.

Well and good, but I must now give an account of other encounters that have lent support to this intuitively perceived truth. Later, I will attempt to show more clearly how it was that these encounters challenged me to a conversion of heart.