

Global Tea Hut



NEWSLETTER #13, FEBRUARY 2013

Welcome to another year of Global Tea Hut! We are overjoyed to see so many of you returning again, and to look around this huge circle and meet so many new friends as well. It has been an amazing experience serving you this year, and we look forward to finding new ways to make this experience better in the coming year. As most of you know, February is the start of the Chinese Lunar Year—a time for renewal, Spring and good wishes of prosperity to those we love. In that spirit, we hope that the coming year inspires us all, and that the tea in these envelopes find its way to a thousand, thousand cups; and beyond to the beautiful souls who drink them, taking the spirit of tea with them as they go out and change the day! In that way, we will shift the consciousness on this Earth and help heal a world to harmony.

If you are new here welcome yourself. Have a seat and a bowl. Look around and introduce yourself. There are around 150 tea brothers and sisters from around the world sharing this tea with you. Feel the community in this gathering each month. Step outside of the illusion of disconnect, of linear time. It doesn't matter that you drink the tea on a Tuesday and we on a Monday; if you drink it in the spirit of togetherness we will find each other as surely as if we were sitting at the same table. And it doesn't matter that we are practically far apart—this world isn't flat, it's a globe. You sit drinking your tea and that earth touches the beach; across the ocean is another beach touched by those same waves and another sister sitting on the ground drinking the same tea. Inland, one of your brothers in Russia sits looking out at the snow-swept fields, thinking of you as he drinks his tea from a warm, steaming bowl. Do you see him in your tea? Throughout the month we are indeed having one, huge global tea session together!

As time has gone on, this experience has become so much more than a means to support our free school and center. Global Tea Hut is the highlight of so many people's month: a connection to this tradition, to tea and to each other. We are so honored to be a valuable part in your lives. We encourage you to go look through the past issues online and see what you have

missed. Also, you can see all the photos in living color, and many of them are gorgeous.

In the coming year, we hope to improve the packaging of Global Tea Hut. Right now, Joyce is hunting for some small, recyclable tins or boxes to put the teas in, instead of envelopes. This will prevent the more fragile teas from getting crushed on their way to you. We also hope to incorporate more authors into the mix this year, and therefore would like to encourage all of you to submit some articles throughout the year, or at least participate on the forum connected to our website. You don't have to be an expert; we encourage you to share your personal experiences with tea and with these envelopes of love and light. As we mentioned last month, the free online magazine *The Leaf* will be jump-started once again this year and it will contain a more tea-related and less personal tone, while these newsletters will seek to combine tea wisdom with spiritual, communal and personal experience, lending it a more friendly and casual tone. That is how we intend to differentiate the content of these two free magazines.

We have had some discussion about taking out the annual subscription renewal and just setting the subscription permanently, saving lots of hassle for some people who would rather cancel if and when they choose, rather than having to resubscribe each year. If you have any feelings on this issue, or would like to comment, we will be starting a discussion topic on the forum...

There is a tremendous amount of energy beginning to flow through this center, tradition and all the beautiful souls involved. As we create this healing space, feel free to participate in any way you can. Involvement is the best support, and the only way to truly understand anything. We believe that tea will play a large role in healing humanity and thereby the earth. It is a great teacher of harmony: within and without, to Nature and our fellow beings. We pray that these teas may be such medicine, bringing you light from Nature.

Tea brings Nature to society.

We pride ourselves at sending you guys amazing living teas each month, and put a lot of time into finding unique examples of what a living tea is. As we have spoke of in these newsletters, in this tradition we like to discuss teas in three main categories: Living (real) tea, organic plantation tea, and so-called “dead” or “commercial” tea. Understanding these categories helps us effect change in the tea world, and in how human beings relate to Nature and our place in Her cycles. These categories aren’t meant to be derogatory towards certain teas or producers, but rather to highlight the importance that certain ecological and environmental truths have on the health of humans and the Earth itself.

True, living tea is seed-propagated; the trees have room between them and are not pruned, which drastically reduces the roots. Living tea could also be called “garden tea”, with less plants and huge biodiversity. Producers of living tea recognize the infinite connections a tree has with its environment, and that removing any cog in the natural ecology disrupts everything, including the tea. This means there are fewer tea trees and that they are indistinguishable from the wildlife around them, interacting with other plants, trees, snakes, insects, etc. Living tea trees are allowed to grow old, and are cared for and approached with respect for whatever amount of tea they offer us.

There is a great problem with real, living tea, however: there simply isn’t enough. For that reason, we must compromise in this modern age. We need some plantation tea: cloned and pruned, planted closer together and with less wildlife around. Still, this lesser tea can indeed be produced in a sustainable, healthy way when it is done organically. Chemical pesticides, fertilizers and weed-killers greatly disrupt the health of an ecology and break natural dynamics that we can’t possibly understand. Recent studies, for example, suggest that birdsong is relevant to the health of trees and plants and that the reduction of wild birds is also causing problems for certain trees and plants. And why are there fewer birds? Pesticides, of course: no insects means no birds. An organic plantation allows us to produce larger quantities of tea for a greater audience while still having a bit of biodiversity and more importantly without creating huge gaps in the local ecology. The chemicals on tea are also unhealthy for us, causing a variety of diseases in humans as they do in the Earth.

These are the only two kinds of tea we promote in the Global Tea Hut, and we hope that this project

itself can help make a difference in promoting more Living Tea and organic plantations. Some of the farmers we have highlighted here, like October’s Mr. Xie (also featured in one of our videos), have successfully converted many of their neighbors to organic farming by showing them how to earn a living without compromising their principles.

If tea is to be a medicine, connecting us to Nature, to ourselves and to each other it cannot contribute to the destruction of the Earth. It must be grown in a healthy way, with a true tea spirit behind the conversation between the producer and the trees. Everyone is always converted in one sip. You know it when a tea is alive, and the spirit of this magical plant is shining through.

Tea of the Month

This month’s tea is a very special Yunnan Red tea that is often called “Golden Monkey.” If you remember, we discussed in a previous issue that what Westerners often call “Black Tea” is actually Red Tea in China. Red Tea is a heavily oxidized genre of tea, that is usually processed by piling the leaves immediately after picking and leaving them piled for twelve to twenty-four hours. The tea is then rolled for a long time, much longer than partially-oxidized tea, to further break down the cells and encourage oxidation. It is then dried and packaged. This special Red Tea, however, is very unique for many reasons.

Golden Monkey tea is the Red version of the famous White Tea called “Silver Needle”, which originally comes from Fujian. Silver Needle is an all bud tea, renowned for its amazing fragrance and light, uplifting liquor. The buds are covered in downy white hairs before they open, lending the tea its name. Golden Monkey is produced in both Fujian and Yunnan, as is Silver Needle (though the Fujian variety of Silver Needle is considered far superior). To make Golden Monkey Red Tea the same white buds are oxidized in piles, but not rolled at length like Red Tea usually is. Much of the Golden Monkey tea in Yunnan comes from plantations and is rarely organic. For that reason, it often has very strange energy and we have found ourselves uncomfortable drinking it on many occasions throughout our travels in China.



This special tea of the month is made from wild, old-growth trees in the Jinggu area, known for their white furry buds—a natural mutation. Most Golden Monkey tea comes from small leaf varietals rather than large leaf trees. These special trees are often referred to as “Big White Fur (*Da Bai Hao*)” and are some of the only wild, old-growth trees in Yunnan to have downy white hairs and sweet, juicy buds. Take note of the amazing hairs all over these buds. A tremendous amount of work went into picking only the un-opened buds of these large trees, as a single kilogram contains thousands.

Golden Monkey is made by piling and oxidizing the white buds until they are golden in color. This tea was masterfully oxidized, which isn’t easy at all. The oxidation of these leaves was controlled by a true genius who was able to preserve the delicacy of the buds, while also bringing out the golden depth of a fine Red Tea. This is one of the finest Golden Monkey teas we have ever come across.

The liquor is golden with reddish hues. There is a bouquet of fruity, peachy and flowery flavors in this tea and it also has all the Qi and power of an old-growth, living tea. The energy is light and Yin, uplifting and celebratory, like the first spring warmth—the day when you first put on your summer clothes. If you like, you can steep it with less leaves for a shorter time and get a light, delicate cup that is transcendent. You can

also add more leaves and steep for longer, to get a deep red tea that is thrumming with amazing jungle energy. Both are incredible experiences.

We hope this tea brings you as much joy as it has us. We always loved the malty, earthy and delicate flavors of a good Golden Monkey but have rarely had the chance to drink a good example lately as so much of this tea is inorganic plantation tea. We were very fortunate to come across a quantity of this rare treasure and immediately thought of sharing it all with you, our global tea family. Like us, share it with some good friends, maybe somewhere in the sun. You will find yourselves smiling, entranced by the healthy, living energy and the drunken deliciousness this unparalleled tea has to offer. We wish you a thousand, thousand such cups—deep smiles and satisfied completion included...

** As we mentioned in previous months, we recommend letting the tea get over its jet lag. Let it sit a week or two and become acclimatized.*

Our tradition is based on a life of tea, and whether as tea monks who are committed full time or householders who may only devote a portion of their energies to this Way of Tea, the goal is the same: awakening and presence through tea. This life and practice is to help cultivate our own inner wisdom, and to then share our inner peace with others in the true spirit of tea—leaves and water offered freely in recognition of the oneness of Being, and the healing power in commune with Nature and each other.

As a tradition it is important to remain living, just as tea itself has so much more healing power when it is alive and vibrant. For that reason we must tread carefully around dogma and formalization, allowing future generations to adapt this Way of Tea to the truths and situations they face, passing on these tools of cultivation without any attachment to the concepts or words that surround them. The living wisdom that flows must be flexible, growing and adapting to the contours of the world. It must be an open system, able to evolve and absorb any truth, now and then.

We wayfare together as individuals, each with his or her own destiny, and each with his or her own unique abilities and capacities for service. Our goal is to facilitate an awakened destiny in everyone, without exclusion. As we are all of one heart, we are also of one tradition: the tradition of the Earth.

We have arbitrarily divided this life of tea into eight bowls, eight aspects, but they should not be regarded dogmatically. The division is merely for communication; it isn't important. Far more relevant is the daily consumption of these eight bowls of tea life in this tradition, and the resulting transformations in consciousness—awakenings that ring across the very heartstrings of the world. Each of the eight bowls has reflected on its dewy surface the other seven, like the diamonds of Indra.

One of our masters says that if you want to brew tea well, you must first learn to be a person. For example, without meditation and prayer there is no mastery of the sacred, and without that a life of tea would be fruitless. In that way, each of the eight aspects of this life as it is lived is a fractal in each of the others.

In Zen, teachers often ask the students koans to delve their understanding of the tradition. The answer is a state of consciousness rather than certain words or poetry, and as long as one embodies that state, the teacher will know it and any answer will suffice. This is why many such dialogues involve the master repeating the student's answer verbatim—when the student gave the answer, it was wrong, but when it was uttered from within the consciousness of the master, it was correct. Similarly, a life of tea needs to be lived, not discussed. These eight practices are a Dao, a Way of life. Understanding them has no meaning aside from true participation.

Though this introduction might help clarify the work and its directions, each of the different aspects of this Dao will look and feel differently as they are embodied in different individuals, and a true knowledge of their efficacy will only come in the living form of each. The drawings of the local flora in an encyclopedia are very different than the living plants, in infinite ways. Guidance and understanding are often wonderful incentives to practice, though a rather poor substitute for even the smallest bit of participation, as discussion of tea is no replacement for a true bowl. And like the Zen master, the proof is in the tea itself. When others who are awakened drink of your cup, they will know the state of mind it was prepared in. Cultivating and sharing spiritual awakening through tea is ancient, older than mankind.



The Eight Bowls of a Life of Tea:



Skillful means; Moral Uprightness



Mastered mind; Meditation



Humility and Gratitude; Study, Contemplation and Prayer
Cleanliness; Purity



Cleanliness; Purity



Physical wellbeing; Diet and Movement



Healing and Community; Work and Service



Connection to the Great Nature; Bowl tea



Grace and Beauty; Gong fu tea

Skillful Means; Moral Uprightness

Rather than speaking in right and wrong, involving judgment and rank, let us define morality in terms of that which is skillful, wholesome and healthy. We are what we do, and the way we treat ourselves and others affects our tea. We should consequently honor life, and not kill; avoid greed and desire, with a love of freedom from material possession. We know that our actions, words and most importantly thoughts towards ourselves and others affect our ability to live a life of tea in every way. Rather than formalizing a moral code of conduct, we practice self-effacement and recognition of the true oneness of all Being. From such an awareness, comes true love and compassion. And in that state, all conduct is pure conduct. In that way, we walk with heads held upright. Knowing oneness, there is no opportunity to behave unskillfully—life flows like tea, from empty vessel to empty vessel. ‘Love and do what thy will’ shall be the whole of the law.

Mastered mind; Meditation

Without mastery of the mind we shall never walk upright, no matter how wonderful our intentions. The mind is a strong and powerful elephant, able to serve or destroy the city equally. For that reason, our centers and schools will always be places of meditation, just as a life of tea in this tradition will include morning and evening meditation sessions, framing each day in peace and centeredness. Also, periodic retreats of longer

duration should be held in the life of a tea wayfarer. Just as we need to plunge the dipper into the healing waters of silence every day, we also need a deeper draught now and again to balance periods of activity with stillness, doing with being. Our minds are turbid waters, and only quiet stillness can bring the clarity we seek in a life of tea. Connection between the kettle, pot and cups is completed in their emptiness, which they all share. The emptiness in the vessel is what makes it useful, connecting it to the other vessels. Like that, all great tea comes out of the meditative mind.

Humility and Gratitude; Study, Contemplation and Prayer

All liturgies are in truth consummation and proclamation of a state of being—making the invisible become visible on the physical level. We make altars to our own inner truths. Bowing to the Buddha, I bow to awakening and stillness in me. I learn humility before the Divinity in me, and then begin to learn from the wisdom of those people, places and things which surround me. Daily prayer and contemplation compliment my meditation and tea, as does academic study of inspirations of masters past and present—for in their words I find the maps to my truths, as well as the words and ways I’ll need in order to articulate my experience, strength and hope to others. In study, we do not seek to ape the ways of any saint, sage or seer,



but rather to find inspiration and guidance in our quest to know ourselves. In prayer, we do not seek to petition the Divine with our desires, but to recognize outwardly our ownmost truths. We seek to create a sacred space in our life that is always there to remind us of our true face. Surrounded by flowers, fruit, incense, tea and light we remember and make ceremony of the fact that we are Mother Earth, we are suffering and forgiveness, we are Buddha-nature. Proper prayer is for forgiveness, or out of gratitude for the endless blessings each and every one of us is showered with daily; prayer is for loving-kindness and the sharing of our merits as we follow this spiritual path; and prayer is to ask the Divine, or our higher self, for knowledge of the Divine will and the power to carry it out. We ask that the Divine will, not our own, unfold in our inner connection to the Dao. And having seen this path, we ask for the acceptance and courage to walk it. Tea is prepared with mastery only when it prepares itself. As in life, we must step out of the way and let the current flow through us—the way the tea flows through the pot and cups.

Cleanliness; Purity

Reverence and purity facilitate a life of tea, and the communication of peace and wisdom through tea. Purity functions on all levels, from the body to the tea room, the spirit and the mind. We must respect the space and beingness all around us, keeping our homes, and especially our tea spaces, clean and bright so that all who come within them—including the many aspects of ourselves—will find stillness here. Even a confused or cluttered mind will find peace and cleanliness here, especially if that cluttered mind is my own. There is a profound peace in the practice of carefully laying out all your utensils for tea, and looking them over in a few minutes of meditation before you even begin. And like all truths, the tea session should leave no trace of itself—all should be cleaned thoroughly after the tea has been served and the guests departed. This applies equally to the inner level, as one should not carry around the dregs of previous sessions which only give rise to the comparative mind and prevent you from connecting to this moment. Wash away all traces of a tea when it is done. Clean thoroughly—internally and externally—so that your guests will know that there is but one encounter, one chance. In that way, true presence and connection have room to grow in your life and tea.

Physical wellbeing; Diet and Movement

It is unfortunate that much of the world has taken to compartmentalizing life: body for the doctors, mind for the psychiatrists and spirit for religion. True

healing is a unification of these false barriers. A life of tea is a *life*, and applies equally to all aspects of truth. The sacred must flow through the spirit and body, unifying and then ultimately transcending such arbitrary boundaries. What we eat affects our tea incredibly. The pure foods are either vegetarian, or that which is donated and then received by an open pure heart. We must promote physical wellbeing in order to heal the spirit as well. Tea has always been synonymous with medicine, in its purest form. We drink tea to flush the toxins from our bodies, as well as our hearts. Similarly, tea preparation involves the flow of energy through our bodies. For that reason, we practice Qi Gong, Tai Chi or Yoga to make this flow graceful, knowing that it will influence how we live and how we prepare our tea.

Healing and Community; Work and Service

The only reason to seek mastery of this tea is in service of our world. Furthermore, it is perhaps paradoxical that the road to mastery itself essentially contains service, for without it mastery can never be achieved. Having cultivated inner awareness and peace, we must seek to share it with others. In recognizing oneness in the center of ourselves, we are committed to healing this world one bowl at a time. For no being can be healthy in an unhealthy environment. We are the earth, the air, the mountain and the tea; and we are the sharing. In community, we find strength and support, example and leadership. Together, we can achieve much more than any of us alone. Our tradition is forged from the combined insight of the tea masters, sages, seers and cloudwalkers from ancient times unto the present. Let us donate our time, money and energy towards promoting an awakening and healing through tea, sharing this life and Way with all beings. As a practice, service helps us break away from our self-serving plans and goals, connecting with others in our heart of hearts. We must also work towards transcending the dichotomy between sacred and profane. All that we do is our ownmost life. There is nothing which is not our Dao. We should find our livelihood along our spiritual path and travel with it, rather than seeking for wealth, fame or power outside our center. We should furthermore view our work in the world as another kind of service, offering us the chance to donate some of our resources as well as the opportunity to work on ourselves through all the responsibilities and relationships we encounter in the world. Like the lotus, we cannot survive without the mud.



Connection to the Great Nature; Bowl tea

The Leaf is the highest of scriptures. In tea we read sutras written not in the language of man, but that of the mountain and forest, earth and air, brook, stream, sunshine and moonshine. These leaves contain vast tomes, if we but learn to speak their language. In ancient times, it was said that a leaf fell into the Divine Emperor, Shen Nong's kettle as he sat in meditation. This legend speaks of the plant kingdom's need to be human, to reach out and teach us of our origins. In drinking bowl tea, we return to the oldest brewing method. We seek connection to the spirit of tea, as it has been drunk these thousands of years. In leaves and water, we find simple connection to Nature and roots, reaching down into the depths of our time and evolution to find our own source. In this way, we also wash away any of the pretensions associated with expertise, not allowing our training to make us feel superior, missing our only chance at connection with Nature, others and ourselves. We drink bowl tea in the shaman's hut, for healing and silence, wisdom and smoke—runes that hint at the Great Mystery these veins unlock.

Grace and Beauty; Gong fu tea

Our tea life isn't just about a greater connection to Nature through the Leaf, but an attunement with our self as well. We must therefore cultivate both inner and outer harmony, a flow from the absolute into the relative. We learn this flow through the practice of gong fu tea, refining our sensitivity and grace as we prepare finer and finer tea over time. We must spend adequate time doing exercises to refine our palates, our sensitivity to tea and its Qi as well as some academic study of tea and spiritual matters both, in order to refine our intellects as well. We should be able to articulate tea and spiritual matters, and feel comfortable doing so. A mastery of tea includes a grace with all kinds of teaware, preparation, discussion and presentation. We should know dry leaves by appearance and smell and be able to prepare them with a grace and beauty that transcends the ordinary. We should strive to brew the tea the way it wants to be brewed, recognizing its inner nature and becoming a graceful part of that flow. We should also develop our aesthetic sensibilities, in recognition that beauty comes from the Divine; and that it significantly affects our ability to transform others through tea as well. A beautiful tea arrangement aids in one's transformation. All of this refinement should temper our spirits and teach us how to live in grace.





here are infinite factors that go into making tea, which is one reason it can be called a Dao: for the way we eat affects our tea, the way we walk and even the way we treat others. This is why we don't offer a more "scientific" procedure to making tea as some shops and/or brands do. They typically advocate brewing with "time, temperature and amount". There is nothing wrong with that per se, and understanding how much tea in how hot of water for how long can indeed improve your tea, but there are still ever so many frayed ends in that methodology. Saying ten grams of tea is fine, but ten grams in what size pot? And how hot the water is matters, but what kind of water, boiled in what, poured from what height and in what way? And steeping time also varies with every single steeping of every single tea. It is much better to develop gong fu, or mastery of tea, which means feeling the tea and water, and communicating with the tea so you know the right steeping time.

Try to connect as much as possible with your tea brewing. Then, as your tea brewing skills grow, so will you. A good practice to start with has to do with pouring the water from the kettle. As we discussed in previous newsletters, it is very important that you hold the kettle in your off-hand, so if you are right-handed that means the left side/left hand. Most everyone can feel the kettle connected to their hand and arm with relative ease, but why does the connection stop there? If your attention is on the kettle, you will feel your control of it—connection via the hand. But why does that connection end at the spout? Practice feeling the connection continue on into the pouring water. In other words, don't ***pour*** the water into the teapot ***put*** it in!

After you have improved your connection to the stream of water coming out of the kettle, you can work on your pouring precision. Practice stopping in an instant, placing the water in exactly the spot you intend and controlling the flow. How soft or hard the water flows into the tea is an important aspect of gong fu tea, and different teas require a different speed/velocity. For example, it is best to cover Puerh in a flood of water quickly.

Do you remember how we discussed that things done with the right hand are counter-clockwise and with the left, clockwise? Put the water in the pot correctly, depending on which hand you are holding the kettle with. Keep the water moving until the water level is above the leaves, so as not to scald any one leaf.

Practice connecting to the act of pouring from the kettle and try all these experiments again and again, on and off. What are the differences in the tea? Have you found a kind of pouring that suits another kind of tea besides Puerh? If you continue honing your skills and connecting to deeper aspects of your tea preparation, you will also grow in sensitivity and awareness as you tread this road...





HOW TO HELP YOUR COFFEE-LOVING FRIENDS MAKE THE TRANSITION

Article by Steve Kokker

As teashop owners, we get a lot of customers telling us how they're tentatively attempting to decrease their coffee consumption and enter the world of tea. As tea lovers, we are bound to often come across these *coffee persons* on our journeys. Their numbers are increasing all the time, and we can play a part in their shift of beverage and consciousness. What can we say and do to help our friends out in an informed way?

I should start by saying that I'm not anti-coffee (and it's important to not make yourself come off that way either, otherwise your friend's reaction might be defensive). For years, in my 20s, I enjoyed a morning cappuccino-as-breakfast-substitute as well as mid-afternoon booster shot. Sure my nauseous mid-morning stomach and fatigued early-afternoon brain would hint that perhaps my coffee habits weren't optimal, but my brain told me, "Shut up, you like it, you need it! It's a habit, stick with it and don't think about it!"

One day I realized that perhaps I don't even like coffee at all—if, after all, I need to drink it loaded with milk and sugar, then perhaps I like some kind of coffee drink, not coffee itself? I took the milk out and eventually reduced the sugar to zero. Then I worked on quantities, ultimately reducing it to the equivalent of an espresso shot a day. In this way I trained myself to actually appreciate coffee, versus just robotically imbibing whatever happened to carry its name. Still, I told myself that I couldn't get through the day without at least that one shot.

Then, when I started to drink more tea, my body started to forget about coffee and I was shocked one day to realize that I hadn't had coffee in weeks. And hadn't even noticed its absence. Then I went through a few years of having coffee only whenever there was a specific desire (not craving) for coffee, and only then if I could drink a very high quality one. This taught me to listen more to what my body tells me it wants and needs, not to my habit-driven mind. Now, it's been maybe a year and half since I've had even a sip (It was in a St Petersburg café, and I did it for the romance of it all!), with no next one in sight.

Coffee in and of itself is not evil or unhealthy. If it's not a Mega Latte topped with Caramel Syrup Surprise, there are some psychological and physical benefits to coffee. Yet all too often it ends up a quick-fix solution to an unhealthy lifestyle where lack of sleep, lack of exercise, inner harmony or an imbalanced diet leads to drowsiness, a feeling of *something missing* or lack of mental sharpness. It's also tied into a fashionably busy lifestyle; if we're always running around and late for the next

appointment, then we're important, fulfilled, in command; coffee confirms this. Coffee-loving is another part of our tendency, as consumers, to identify with products and brands. Coffee is also a social glue, bringing people together 'for a cup of coffee,' though that usually means 'we're both terribly busy people and can't spare more than this much time'; the people we meet for coffee are generally not those we like to meet for long dinners... or tea sessions.

Do we need to play the addiction card too? Addiction is an overused and poorly understood phenomenon, which in a wide scope can be applied to almost anything we engage in repetitively, and the 'caffeine addiction' line has been thrown around so much it has lost most of its meaning, but it can be instructive to ask oneself what we are dependent upon in our lives. Whether there is such a thing as addiction to tea is something we're often asked, intimating that people are aware of their current dependence and worried about substituting it for another. I believe that barring some examples, 'addiction' lies more in the person and their behavior/attachment than the substance in question and so it's difficult to say that anything absolutely is or is not addictive.

In coffee, our brains get used to not only the caffeine but the up to 500 different chemicals that are swimming around in your cup (not *all* of which are toxic or come from pesticides, some are even from natural sources!), and breaking the habit (like with smoking) might seem like more trouble than just continuing it. Many people experience low-grade withdrawal symptoms every morning, when they awake starved of caffeine from the previous evening's abstinence, feel tired (coffee also disrupts sleep patterns whereas long-term tea consumption has been shown to regulate them), and irritable and impossible to 'get going' without coffee. Yes, this is a symptom of what might be termed addiction. Tea does not generally cause any of this.

Aside from frowning and casting an "Addict!" stone at our friends interested in 'crossing over', what can we tell them about the benefits of the Great Tea Life?

- It will be a part of a healthy lifestyle instead of compensating for an unhealthy one.
- Tea provides an energy boost and inner state of calm without unpleasant surprises.
- You'll open yourself to the possibility of connecting with Nature in a real and meaningful way.



- The space for deeper human connection and interaction opens up as two (or more) face each other to share tea.
- You'll feel less like a creature of habit and more like being nice to yourself.
- Mid-afternoon fatigue will eventually be eliminated.
- It will help you get in touch with your emotions, versus becoming more distanced from them.
- It teaches the value of careful focus, concentration and just being.

Which teas to suggest they start with? Chat with them a bit to find out their own preferences. Often, even if they know little about tea, they will come up with a few clues as to what their bodies are looking for. It's difficult or even mendacious to say with certainty that Tea X creates Effect Y, which is what people often wish to hear. In general, what we're most certain of is that when someone drinks a living tea, the kind GTH sends out, the more 'alive' the drinker will feel. This happens without any caffeine pyrotechnics. Still, there are very general things to say about a few classes of tea which we've seen over the years to be recurring favorites for coffee-drinkers stepping into the tea world. Yerba mate, though it is not from *camellia sinensis* seems to top the list with its high caffeine content and bitter notes. But we try to steer people to the other options, like Shou Puerh, matcha and Red Tea.

Shou Puerh: Its black-as-coffee hues, earthy flavor and rejuvenating effect can pack enough punch to keep coffee simmering in its corner. It'll sharpen the mind at the same time as give a sense of solidity and deep calm. The

calmer you are in general, the better your subjective state of being; once people experience calm alertness, they will be less likely to choose a slam-dunk dose of energy. It also has a mildly laxative effect, something which many coffee-drinkers appreciate out of their cup of java (though they'll rarely talk about it!).

Matcha: Whether drunk in the traditional way, whisked with a *chasen*, or added to smoothies or other foods, finely ground Japanese green tea is a superfood status tea which also gives people an almost immediate sense of well being and alertness. Though people may be initially off-put by the seeming complexity of preparing it, they're won over when they see that it takes less than a minute.

Red Tea: With Red Teas, the real trick is to find living, clean Red Teas like the Sun Moon Lake tea GTH sent you several months back. Those teas provide a stunningly subtle awakening morning-time, when one is so receptive to outside influences. Their inner energies merge with your own and start coursing through your body lovingly. They seem to take you into their arms and lift you up solidly though confidently. When one uses regular, commercially available Red Teas, coffee drinkers don't appreciate what they feel is a poor, shy, mild-mannered lookalike.

It's important not to add yet another unnecessary and truth-distorting false dichotomy in the world; it should never be about coffee *vs.* tea. Once a person is given a chance to feel for themselves how proper, clean tea works in their system, and ideally experience this in an environment which allows them to feel at peace with themselves, they will make their own choice about what is appropriate for their present states of mind.

Light Meets Life

光壽無量

For the past five years we have opened the doors of this little home in Miao Li, hosting hundreds of tea lovers from around the world. Some come for solace and meditation; some come to just have some tea, a good veggie meal and be on their way; others come to learn about tea lore, preparation and delve deeper into the Way of Tea. And there are those who come and stay longer, participating in serving tea to people and learning how to carry on with that at home. Our center is always open and everyone is welcome. Everyone who comes drinks some nice tea and eats a delicious meal, leaving full—in body and spirit. We tea and feed people; it really is that simple. There isn't anything else going on here. We meditate, drink tea, have impromptu lessons, eat, drink tea, meditate...

We are an open tradition, which means you can take what you need from this center. There are those that aren't so interested in using tea as a part of a spiritual life, viewing it more as a hobby, or great past time. They come to learn how to make a better cup. And we teach them the skills they'll need to do so, showing them any one of the five brewing methods in this tradition. Others want to learn how to live a life of tea, learning deeply from the teas we drink and listening to them, as plant teachers arisen out of Nature to teach us harmony. That is available, too.

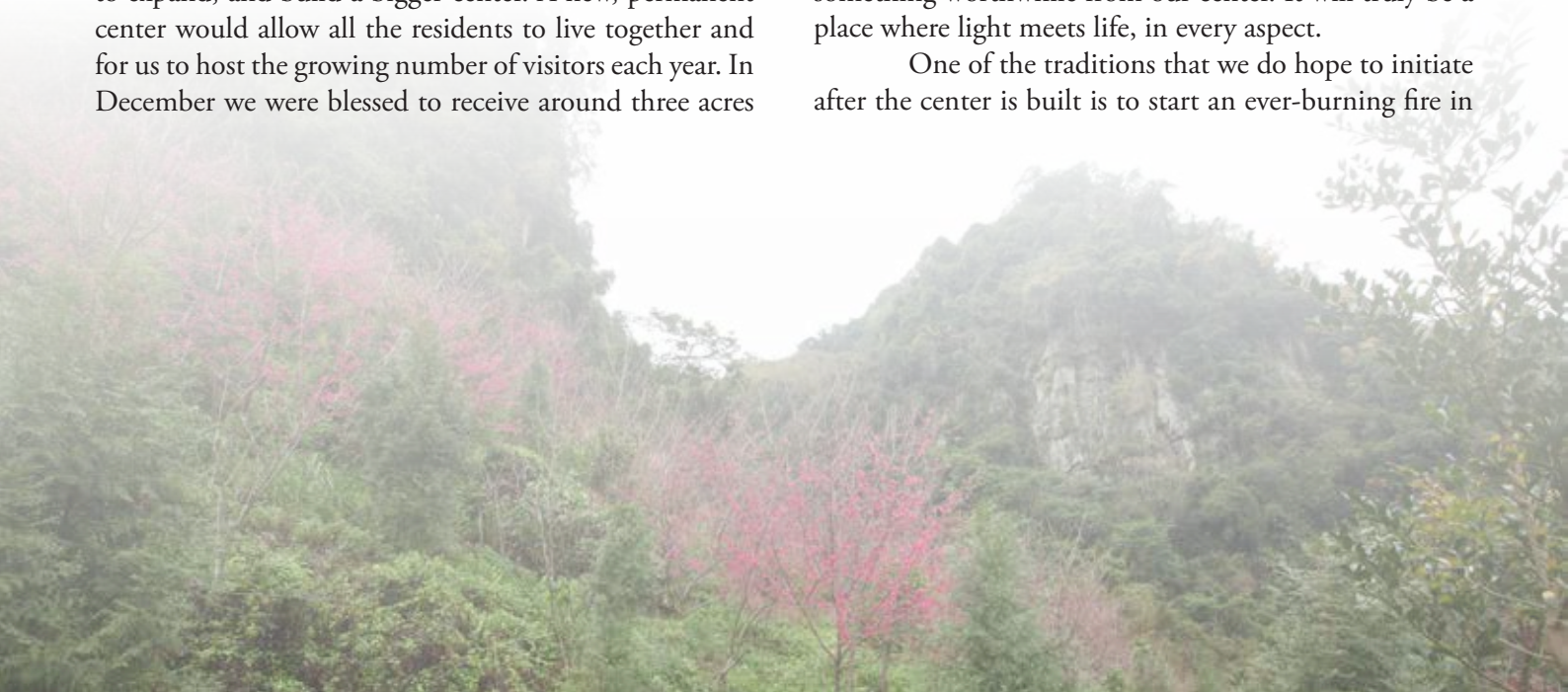
For the past several months we have felt the need to expand, and build a bigger center. A new, permanent center would allow all the residents to live together and for us to host the growing number of visitors each year. In December we were blessed to receive around three acres

of gorgeous land with a waterfall, river, cliffs and incredible views all around. It will be a great place to meditate, drink tea, and also grow our own tea, affording visitors the chance to not only learn how to prepare tea, but to walk and talk with the trees and even process some tea.

Many of you have asked how this came about. It was all rather sudden. There is a Taiwanese brother who comes here occasionally on Saturdays, meditates and drinks some tea and then goes home. His name is Tom. He is generally rather quiet, only occasionally asking questions relevant to his own tea or life. One day, after having come for a year or two, Tom meditated as usual, but when he sat down for tea we noticed that he kept checking the time on his cell phone—not his usual behavior. Finally, he politely asked to be excused. He said he had to leave early to go to a meeting. We said of course, and then he poured out the metaphoric tea he'd been waiting to share: "I have to leave early because I am having a meeting with someone to buy land for you." Two weeks later, we got to see the property and were stunned at how the Universe was responding to our need for a bigger and better center.

We intend to continue our personal, free style of learning. We do not want this tradition to crystalize in any way. There are no rules. In the first ever English book on tea, John Blofeld said that "the art of tea is artless." We hope that every tea lover can come and take away something worthwhile from our center. It will truly be a place where light meets life, in every aspect.

One of the traditions that we do hope to initiate after the center is built is to start an ever-burning fire in





a hearth in the main building where the tea rooms will be. Many Native Americans believed that the fire in the center of the village was sacred, and that if it were extinguished so would be the tribe. They, therefore, carried the coals in a horn when they moved. By never letting this fire out, the center of our tradition will burn ever-bright and warm. We also want this to symbolize that everyone, everywhere is always welcome. If you are having a bad day in Estonia or Florida, you can remember that those coals are at that very moment burning and that all you would have to do is walk through the door—day or night—and we'd be ready to put a kettle on. Perhaps in such a momentary rumination, your spirit will indeed travel there...

We want you to know that we are building a home for us all: a place where a steaming cup, a meal and a bed are always waiting for you. You will always be welcomed with a hug and a celebration, and you'll leave that way to. And like our center now, we will keep everything completely free.

Wu De is on his way to LA and SF to raise money for the center, and we have been doing some abundance prayers. We recently met an architectural firm that has built temples and monasteries in Taiwan, China and

Japan for years. The photos of their work are stunning, and tremendously inspiring. They have an amazing eye for detail and incorporate very powerful materials: stone, old wood, bamboo, water, etc. They are also very good at building with, rather than against the land. We are confident that they could help us build the greatest tea center that has ever been. They do have a minimum for which they will take the project, however. We are praying that they will build our center and that some open-hearted donor(s) will help us achieve our mutual dreams, having seen the vision we are already building in our hearts.

Should any of you wish to contribute or have any ideas for ways to help us realize this vibrant dream, please contact us. You can donate at the Center page of our GTH website or send a check to:

**Global Tea Hut West
2441 Beverley Ave. #6
Santa Monica, CA 90405
United States**

Or [contact](#) us for other ways to support



Thinking about the beautiful land on which we will grow food at our new center, there are many aspects of the project to consider. In the last issue of *Global Tea Hut*, we touched on the topics of Land Guardianship and Sustainability as they pertain to our food system. This issue, I would like to take a look at some components of Permaculture.

Permaculture is derived from two words, “permanent” and “culture.” If you consider the nature of these two words, what comes to mind are the notions of durability, endurance and a sense of long withstanding, combined with the notions of art, customs, tradition, people and location. What we have is the overall sense of a perennial system, and in terms of agriculture, that is akin to Nature itself. Nature is intelligently chaotic and grows for the long term. Clean-cut lawns and tidy, kept backyards don’t stay organized for long without human management. All systems tend towards entropy or disorder. If left to Nature, there would be deep roots, weeds where necessary, healthy soil, recycled materials, and patterns and cycles that endure the ages. In a world where mono-cropped agriculture systems are just the opposite of Nature, small, intense and biodiverse perennial food systems such as those employed by Permaculture are a turn in the right direction.

Permaculture isn’t just about growing food, however; it is a complete design-system approach to farming and creating sustainable human settlements, and our new land has the design potential for just that: growing some food and building a sustainable tea center dedicated to Cha Dao, meditation, and Nature. Along with our vegetable garden, we will also be implementing components of Permaculture in our tea garden design and the building of the center itself. But for the sake of this newsletter, and because I’m no authority on the subject, I’ll be focusing this article on the food growing aspects of Permaculture. That’s also the nice thing about Permaculture: it need not be employed in its entirety. Anyone can practice it; at home, at work, on your windowsill, around the balcony, in your backyard and so on. It’s suitable for striving towards any system that is more ecological and/or sustainable, no matter how big or small that system is.

It’s important to note that Permaculture is not a new body of knowledge so much as it is a rebirth of ancient wisdom from times gone by. In fact, many of you are already practicing aspects of Permaculture and without even knowing it. As well, people have long been practicing Permaculture for hundreds if not thousands of years. The term was coined in the 1970s by Bill Mollison and David Holmgren, the pioneers of Perma-

culture as we know and practice it today. Any applied ecological design that accounts for water, soil, climate and plants is an aspect of Permaculture. So whether you are catching rainwater or digging swales, composting or mulching, observing weather patterns or cycles within Nature, growing food or building green homes—you are practicing Permaculture.

What makes Permaculture really unique is the way it highlights and utilizes ecological networks and interconnectedness to create closed systems which meet their own needs internally. What this entails is observing components of a system, noting their inputs, outputs, and functions, and then implementing them in such a way so as to benefit each other naturally. There are so many factors to consider, and somewhere along the web of life they are all networked. For one simple example, on our land we have a lot of rocks to make use of. Rocks absorb and radiate heat, take up physical space, generate microclimates and create shelter. Immediately, proper use of this abundant resource can aid in warming the soil, creating boundaries, casting shade and becoming a home for insects, snakes and spiders. Woven together will be an underlying theme in our garden and landscape design. It only makes sense. We need only but look to Nature, in all Her perfect, chaotic balance and harmony.

It does little good to break a system down into its constituent parts and analyze each component individually to get an idea of how everything gels together. The whole is always greater than the sum of its parts. A higher intelligence is at play when things operate interdependently.

We need to treat the land like a living organism that breathes, grows, decays and changes—because it does! It’s alive and our design should account for that living quality. This isn’t just some inert piece of land upon which we find ourselves; it’s more akin to the ocean: undulating, ebbing and flowing with microorganisms, worms, spiders, centipedes and countless other soil dwelling beauties that till the good earth, convert and transfer compounds, and ultimately participate in a network with a vast spirit and intelligence.

In light of all of this, here is what the food system will be like at *Life Meets Light*: it will, of course, yield vegetables, herbs, compost crops and fruit trees in a variety of garden bed designs: raised, double dug, sheet mulched and possibly done in a mandala design that will titillate both the eyes and the appetite. The garden beds will be mulched to protect our soil, create shelter, block out weeds, hold in moisture and feed the soil. In designing the garden beds, we will increase the



surface area around the perimeters to efficiently plant more food in the same amount of space. Rigorous composting will be carried out to supplement the soil. I would like to install a banana circle compost pit and set up both regular composting stations and vermicomposting bins. The banana circle will not only generate humus-rich soil, but also yield food, shelter and microclimates. The vermicompost will generate worm castings and liquid fertilizer. Vertical space will be utilized in the form of hanging baskets, stacking and building an herb spiral. Water from the nearby river will be used and bamboo from the center's grove will be utilized as trellis, water canals, boundary markers and so on. I would also like to catch rainwater and possibly redirect the center's greywater for use around the property. With so much water, we could install water features to attract birds and insects and also to create more microclimates. I could go on, but essentially what we are aiming for is a balanced and sustainable ecosystem that mimics Nature, promotes biological diversity and offers some food in the short and long term.

Applying Permaculture requires a lot of observation. What I'll be doing from now on is recording as much information as possible like soil type, rainfall, sun exposure, cloud coverage, prevailing winds, exist-

ing plant, animal, and insect species, climate, microclimates, available resources, etc. In this way, I can become better acquainted with this land and its Spirit, and better design a sustainable, closed, perennial food system.

This project is still a ways off, but it's exciting to be designing it now and sharing that prospect with all of you. As times goes on and plans unfurl in more detail, I'll of course keep you updated on how things develop and change. In the meantime, please also let us know of any comments or suggestions you might have for our food system. I have a whole slew of other sustainable, self-sufficient, ecological projects in mind as well, but it's important to start small and build progressively. This center is as much yours as it is ours, so if you have a green thumb we'd love for you to make a print!

"Apprentice yourself to Nature. Not a day will pass without Her opening a new and wondrous world of experience to learn from and enjoy."

- Richard W. Langer

Wu De is fond of saying that with the medicine of one plant, it is possible to tap into the medicines of all plants. I wholeheartedly believe this to be true. I've also found that my interactions with various medicinal plants has fueled my dialogue with Tea and that, conversely, my interactions with tea have helped me to more deeply understand the medicine in other plants.

This time last year I was traveling through India to research tea consumption and production. Most of my time in India was devoted to professional and spiritual work, but in celebration of my 30th birthday that February, I decided to take a break and go to the beach. On my birthday, shortly after raising my tea bowl toward the sky from the lush patio of my Kerala guest house, I received a wonderful gift in the form of an email from Wu De.

The email introduced Global Tea Hut: "a session of tea drinkers all over the world raising bowls and cups to the soul of Nature". Now, a year later, I still vividly remember feeling immense joy and gratitude in response to that email.

At that time, I had visited the Tea Sage Hut for only a few weeks. In all my years of drinking tea, working with tea and interacting with tea people, I had never found anything quite like Tea Sage Hut. There is no other tea community like this one. There is no other place with the shared abundance of tea and teaware to be found here. And, as far as I know, there is no path to directly and powerfully experiencing the present mo-

ment through tea that is as accessible yet deep as the path found in this tradition. Within my short visit to Tea Sage Hut, I already knew that I would return to live and serve as a student of the Leaf here.

But, like Kaiya and Shane, I'm lucky—it is *kismet* for us to stay here! For many, there are obligations which keep you bound to places far away from here. What of you? Why should students in Taiwan be the few to gain so much from this tradition on a regular, ongoing basis?

Before I received the announcement about Global Tea Hut, I had begun to mull this over and I had no answers... but it seemed that my tea brothers in Taiwan had given the matter more attention! I was elated to receive an email outlining a plan for the very thing I had wondered about: how people around the world could have direct involvement with Tea Sage Hut, even when they are far away.

This February, I turned 31, Global Tea Hut turned one, and I found that I am exponentially more grateful for Global Tea Hut than I was a year ago. Here's why:

It's alive!

Global Tea Hut is much more than just an idea now. It's a real community made up of real people around the world (plus Kaiya—we're still not sure he's a real human). I've had the delight of meeting some of you here in Taiwan, and knowing you personally as my tea brothers and sisters makes preparing and mail-





ing out your envelopes each month even more of a joy. (With great gratitude, I thank each of you for being you, for loving tea and, where applicable, for visiting us!)

It's getting bigger!

Seeing the membership of Global Tea Hut rise in the six months since I returned to Taiwan has been absolutely beautiful. Amongst the new members are some of my friends and family back in America (whom I am thrilled to introduce to this tea tradition), a few of my professional colleagues (who can use this tea medicine towards enormous change in the world), new visitors to Tea Sage Hut (who can continue to grow in this tradition from afar) and, most importantly, YOUR friends and family.

More and more of you have shared the benefits you receive from GTH with those you love, and that is a sharing that ripples outward, impacting more and more people as time passes. There are a lot more people subscribing to GTH than there are people putting GTH together; and combined you have a much greater reach than we do. You know where this medicine is needed and you are sharing it there... and over there... and way, way over there... all around the world. (With

genuine and lasting recognition and awareness, I thank you for doing what we cannot do alone!)

It's far greater than the sum of its parts.

OK, so this last reason isn't catchy and we've been over it before, but it's important, so I'm gonna ask you to indulge me on this one a bit as I reiterate what's happening before moving on to what's about to happen.

People who are making organic tea (people who genuinely care about what they are doing and how they impact the earth, their families and the people who drink their tea) are getting to share their tea with people all around the globe. People who love tea are getting to drink teas they might not otherwise have the opportunity to drink, and to learn about tea in ways they might not otherwise be able to learn about it. People around the world are being connected in direct and indirect ways through the shared experience of connecting to (and through) tea. In the process, Tea Sage Hut's many endeavors (including sharing tea at public events, hosting visitors from around the world and promoting sustainable tea) are being fully supported.

(With wholehearted appreciation, I thank everyone involved for playing their part, whether you're a

Birthdays

20 tea producer sharing tea that you made by hand with tea lovers around the world, a subscriber sharing tea that you steeped for friends where you live, a reader emailing an article that illuminates others through the newsletter, or a supporter mailing a donation that allows us to do what we do.)

All of this is phenomenal on its own, but there's one more thing that I find to be downright mind-blowing, and for which I am filled with hope rather than gratitude. Through the reach of Global Tea Hut, we've been able to spread our tea tradition ever farther and wider, and to move forward with an even bigger vision for tea as a medium for facilitating connection, transmitting peace and wisdom and encouraging spiritual growth. A mere year after GTH was born, our new tea center, Light Meets Life, is on the cusp of becoming a reality. We have the land (Or it has us). We have the

plan. And through all of you, we have the cumulative resources to make Light Meets Life not just a tea center, but *the world's most magnificent tea center!* Yes. Really. Let that notion steep a bit the next time you sit down to a GTH tea.

(With a vision of awe-inspiring abundance for all students of the Leaf, no matter where we are, I send out a surge of hope for the new center, that it will be an even higher and more beautiful iteration of the community that has been built through GTH, and that it will unite us not just in our love of the Leaf, but in our love of each other, our higher selves and Nature.)





Living here in Miaoli and serving at the Center every day, the only opportunity I have for any interactions with people who aren't into tea or spiritual work is in the workplace. I've been at my current job for one year now, and although I don't talk much with anyone, over time they've reached the obvious conclusion that I'm a weirdo with mixed-up priorities. Recently, an exchange at work resulted in a small explosion on the part of one of my co-workers that I found to be rather insightful.

I don't really recall how it came up, but somehow I was offered some candy, M&M's or a Snickers bar. I declined, and was asked why. I can't remember how I responded exactly. In any case, my co-worker immediately exploded: "Geez! What's wrong with you? You don't even eat junk food? It's like you're against the whole world or something!"

I have always liked the somewhat comical description from the Dao De Jing, which loosely interpreted is that if you are speaking to a worldly person and they understand what you are saying, what you are saying is not the Dao. As it happens, this is also a pretty good litmus test to have in your pocket for a lot of situ-

ations; or a moral compass of sorts you could say. We have had the experience, for example, when describing our projects to tea merchants here in Taiwan: "Room and board, teaching and tea... *all for free*? What a silly idea!" Compass says: we're on the right track!

Oddly enough, Snickers bars and M&M's are exactly the two junk food snacks that I used to always eat in between meals, and were the last two junk foods I stopped eating, whenever I stopped eating junk food. As I've deepened my practice in tea and meditation, my sensitivity has increased dramatically, and a wide variety of unhealthy habits have quite naturally fallen away as a result. The worldly perspective on bad habits is that you quit them. But I didn't have to 'quit' eating junk food, I simply stopped wanting it, naturally. The spiritual perspective on bad habits is not to quit them, but to transcend them. To 'quit' involves some involvement with the thing, a sort of throwing it away forcefully. You are going against whatever it is you want to quit. But I don't have anything 'against' eating junk food any more than I'm 'against' putting my hand in fire. You may have done it once as a child,





but after that searing pain, never again. M&M's aren't quite so obvious. You read the label, you see they are filled with weird dyes and chemicals. Conceptually you know these aren't good for you, but since concepts have no reality and M&M's really are delicious, of course the delicious reality wins. But when you can actually feel those unnaturally slippery dyes and taste the bitter chemicals they carry under that waxy, glibly entitled 'chocolate'—when you can feel those chemicals seeping into your body, altering your whole system in wonky ways, every bit as clearly and instantly as putting your hand in a fire, then you have no desire for them anymore. Gone are the sentiments: "I like to eat M&M's", or "I don't like to eat M&M's", or "Eating M&M's is unhealthy and may cause liver dysfunction!" I simply don't eat them. But try answering this question "Why not?" to someone who only knows a life of conceptual and moral positions, and the conclusion is always the same: that guy's weird.

Positions of any kind are anathema to my spiritual life. I'm not against alcohol, or drugs, or meat, not even war, or anything else you care to mention. There is a caveat though; it's better to say that I'm not against anything when I'm *conscious*. Drop me in a war and my practice will need to be much stronger, of course.

I already struggle with trivialities every day, but each situation is an opportunity for practice. If you followed me around each day searching for them, you'd find a dozen or more examples, sometimes in a single hour, of moments of unconsciousness where I'm 'against' any number of trite situations: being scolded, contradictions, following directions, dog poop on the floor, being made fun of, the angry way my boss talked to me at work, you name it. In these instances I am quickly throwing up all kinds of defensive postures. The most common formula is 'x shouldn't have y'. In other words, "I am the authority on what should and should not be, and I have concluded that this thing should not be!"

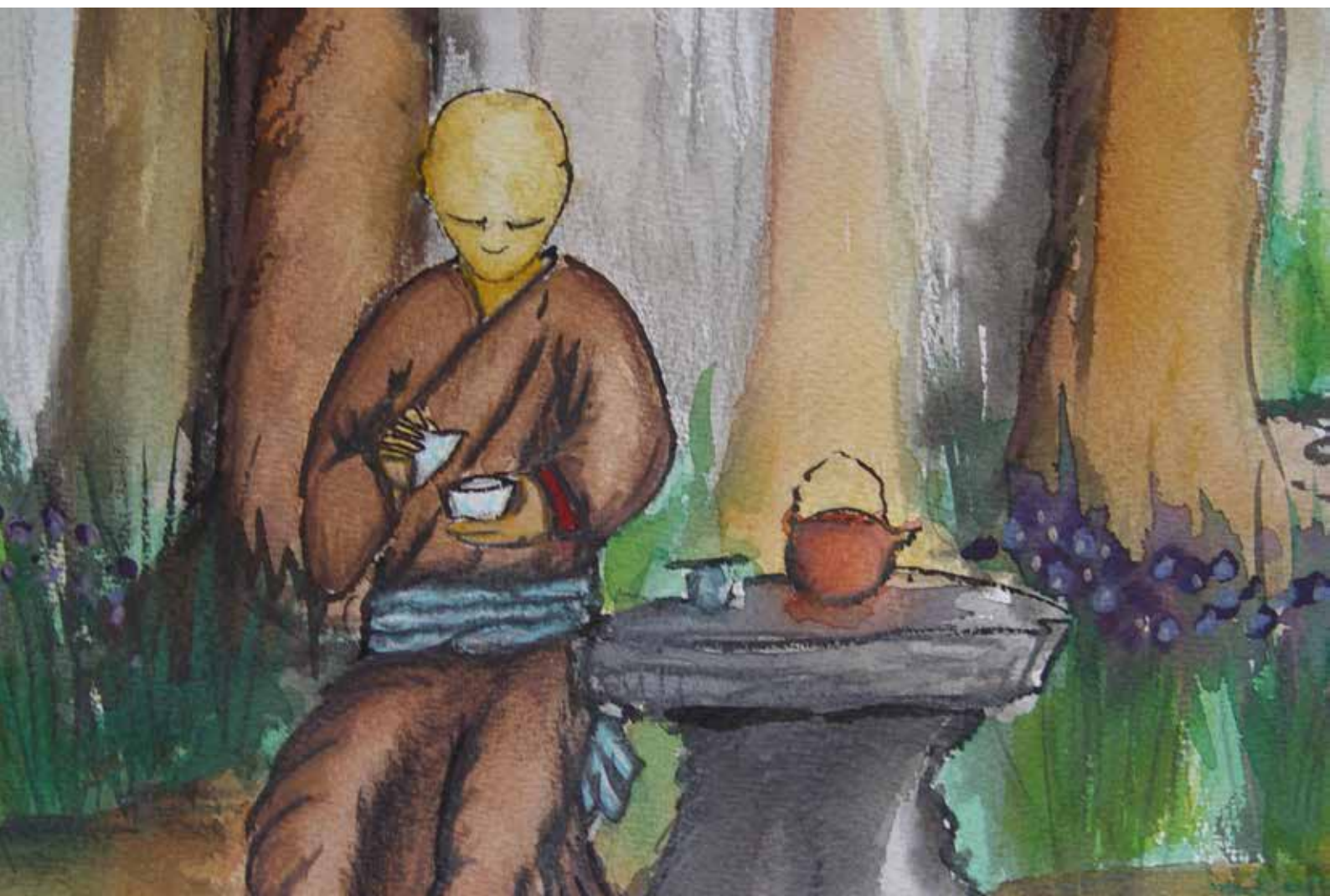
With this in mind, I have given myself permission for a military attack, a reaction to that person, situation or thing, and feel justified, even holy, in my aggression. As though God himself would agree with me and I can do no wrong if my goal is to stamp out this thing that should not be. It may sound ridiculous to move from dog poop on the floor to holy wars, but the difference is only one of degree; the energy itself is identical. This is exactly the same energy that is at the root of all human conflict in the world. Just imagine the difference in our reality if we were somehow all relieved of our plaguing 'shoulds' and 'shouldn'ts'! And so, that

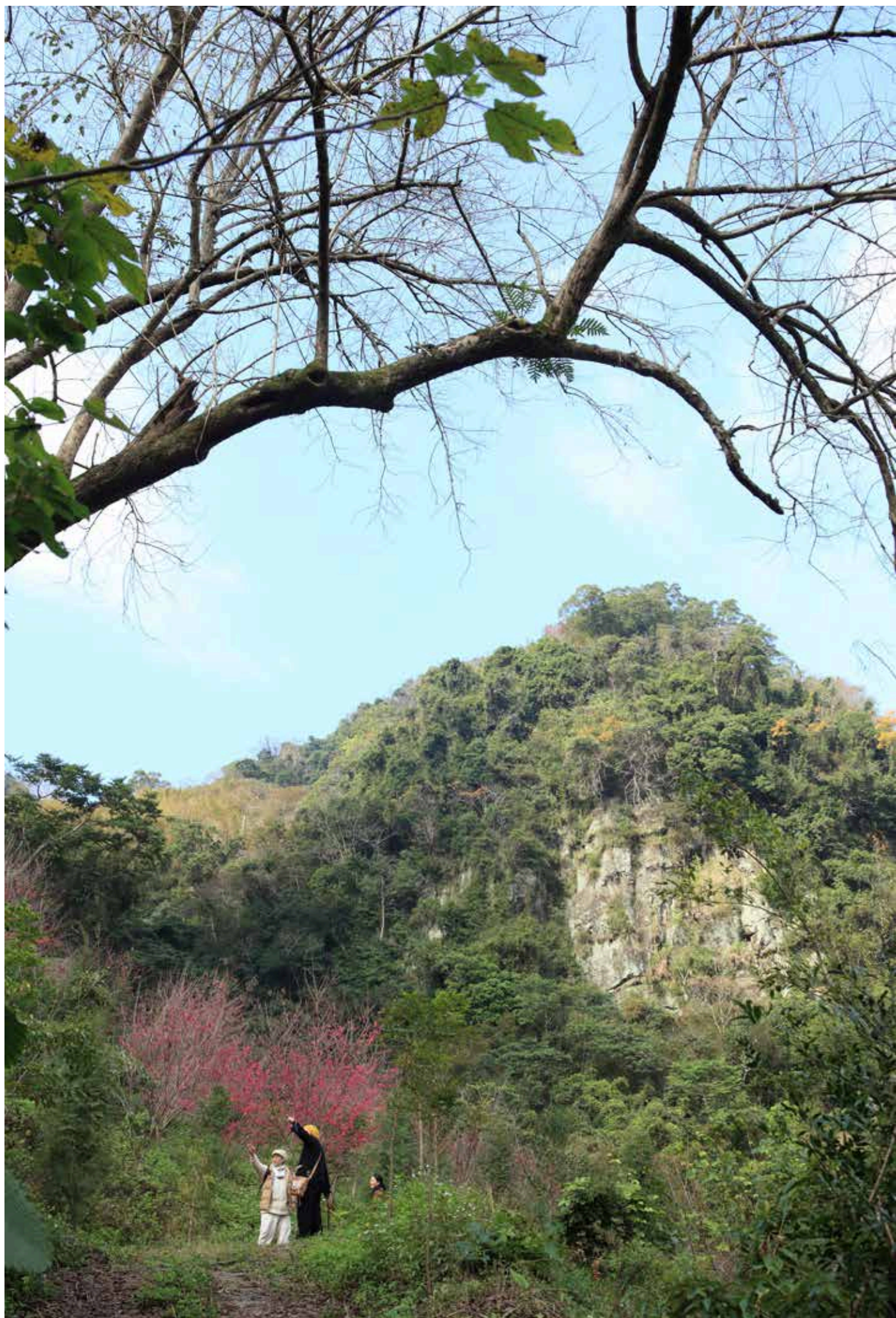
24 is exactly what all of these daily situations must become for us: opportunities to work through the conditioning that brings nothing but suffering to both ourselves and everyone else.

If I am present, I quickly notice what happens when I react in such situations. Taking a moral position and lashing out or constricting inwardly both have a huge negative impact on my spiritual well-being. I lose any presence or equanimity I may have had. I have moved from consciousness into unconsciousness, and a snowball effect starts to vibrate on the same frequency as that which I claim to be resisting. Someone is angry at me and I become angry at them and shout: "Stop being angry at me, I didn't do anything wrong!" I have increased anger, not diminished it. It's just like eating the M&M's and feeling those chemicals seep into my body, changing it in a negative way. My practice enables me to recognize that taking a stance is also a downward shift in consciousness. Both tea and meditation have taught me that you transfer what is within you into everything you touch, every person you meet. And in my heart of hearts my utmost desire is to raise up the consciousness of this planet, not bring it down; so moral stances and righteous indignation must be let go.

As a practice, there is no value in being 'against' anything. To be against is a declaration of war, and there are no 'just' causes except in the minds of the combatants. Never has there been a war of any kind,

whether it be between two countries or a husband and a wife, where either side wasn't fully justified in their own minds. But the minute you start digging trenches and constructing an offensive strategy, you have invited all the same negative energy into your cause as the cause you are supposedly against, and you have lost, even if you think you've won. In this instance, my co-worker couldn't have been more wrong. Throw me into a swimming pool of M&M's, and I'm not going to react to them either way. I just don't eat M&M's anymore. But there is still something valuable in what she had to say. She had to put it this way because she was speaking from a world where almost all interaction is conducted from the space of "what are you for? What are you against? Let me tell you what I'm for and what I'm against, and why, and let's have an argument about it." This is often considered the status quo; it's just perfectly normal interaction, and if you mention anything else, you will get strange looks and flat denials. It's a conversation, not a conflict. Weirdo! She didn't have a word for me other than 'against', because we're standing in two different realities. But if we change the word 'against' to 'transcend', then it would be a wonderful compliment and a great summation of progress. "Transcend everything in the world, including my self" is a great affirmation to work with...





There have always been seekers. People dissatisfied with the normal view. People searching for more meaningful vantage points. Wandering down the same worn paths looking for teachers, looking for answers. It was like that long ago too. Sure, they left behind villages instead of cities, walked instead of flew; but the journey is the same. Fulfillment never cared about Himalayan buses or ancient paths up a Chinese mountainside, anyway. Then and now, the genuine movement happens inside, and it doesn't really matter where you are. The questions are the same. So are the answers...

The mountains were beginning to mist like they do now in so many scroll paintings. The seeker leaned on a boulder and caught his breath. The path was getting steeper. He looked down behind him. Ahead were clouds. Behind they parted and he saw the lush green valley he'd come from. So many villages. So many towns. Teachers. Questions. Debates. And, he thought, "So many insights." He felt experienced.

He brushed a fold in his long robe aside and swung his water skin around for a drink before starting on his way again. As he walked up the mountain trail, he wondered what he would find ahead. He was told

that these seven mountains were home to the wisest sages in the Middle Kingdom. He wondered what they would look like. Had they too once walked all around looking for answers? He liked thinking they had. Like him, had they too sought out one teacher after another? And questions that only opened up thousands more in turn? Had they really found all the answers? Were their clothes also tattered from sleeping outdoors? Maybe none of that mattered. His questions did, though. He again began pondering what he would ask when he got to the top. He was rehearsing. At the same time, he knew that dramatizing the future or past wasn't becoming of a seeker. One should live in the present. He'd learned all that long ago. Often achieved it, too. But he still loved making up questions. Like poetry, they are. And besides, these were the wisest men around, so his questions had to be perfect. He might only have one chance, and he'd spent a long, rambling life waiting for it.

That night he slept in a small cave he found halfway up the mountain. The fog had rolled off around dusk and the night sky shown like a diamond palace he'd once dreamt. There were a few times when he had



stopped to wipe the sweat from his dirty brow that he'd wondered why teachers always lived up in the mountains. Then, he'd thought it was to keep away from people like him. That had made him smile and start walking again. Now he wasn't so sure, though. The air was clearer; the stars closer, and the breeze quieter. Maybe they just liked it up here? Or better yet, maybe they too had come down long roads like him? Vowing not to stop until they felt fulfilled? Maybe this openness was a part of that fulfillment. He wrapped his robes about himself and leaned back against the small cave wall. He thought about the animals that had all lived in there over time. Their lives. Their journeys without question. Almost pulled or led, they were. How unfortunate. He loved his journey. He loved the role he played in it. He loved the anticipation of new places and new lessons. He felt grateful to be here. He thanked his ancestors. He thanked the mountains, and would have smiled but he fell asleep.

The next day the path began to climb higher and higher. He more frequently had to use his hands now. By midday he'd torn his robes in three separate places. It had been hours since he had thought about his questions, or even the wisemen. Many times the path was small and curved around unprotected cliffs, so he'd had to concentrate on walking and climbing more and more. The air had also gotten thinner. There weren't

any more poetic stops, filled with landscape metaphors. No more lines that sigh. Only deep and conscious breaths, rocks to be avoided or stepped on, footholds to find, and sometimes even the vertigo of looking down a seemingly limitless drop that started only inches from his face. The mountain was the mountain, and for now his questions would have to wait.

He stopped to rest long before dusk. As he sat and worked on recapturing his breath, he saw that the rolling mist was now as far below him as it had once been above him. Normally, such a sight would have inspired poems full of philosophy, but history has always shown that the needs of the body will always outweigh such things. And right now his body needed to rest, needed it so badly that he had to focus on it. He had to try. He drank some water and lay back against a comfortable boulder. He was exhausted. And the minutes before his breath lessened and finally passed into a silent rhythm—those few minutes before he slept, were all much quieter than any written sentiment could be...

Most of the next day was spent in the same repetitive toil. The way up a mountain is filled with mists and green valleys that inspire paintings, but the higher steps are always of uniform rock. Many of the rocks he held looked alike, and since he wasn't thinking about much other than where to put his foot next, they might



28as well have been the same. By early afternoon, he'd found another winding trail that seemed to level off. He rounded a few cliff sides and wound around a few rocks before he came to a nice clearing with a few scraggly mountain trees and a small wooden house. This was it. He was, however, more tired and relieved than nervous about what the teacher would look like or what he would ask him when he saw him. He could save his questions for later.

He knocked on the makeshift door, but there wasn't any answer. Maybe no one lived here anymore. He waited on the dirt porch of the one-room house and rested. After a while, a man came around the same path he'd come from carrying two large pails of water suspended from a shoulder harness. He had a long white beard that made him look old and wise, but his sprightly gait and beaming smile seemed almost ageless. Also, his skin was more weathered than aged. He was, the seeker guessed, much the same as any wiseman anywhere should look. He wondered how they had passed each other without meeting, but didn't think long about it before the old sage was upon him. His eyes were clear and comforting. He invited the seeker inside and offered him a cushion to sit on next to an old

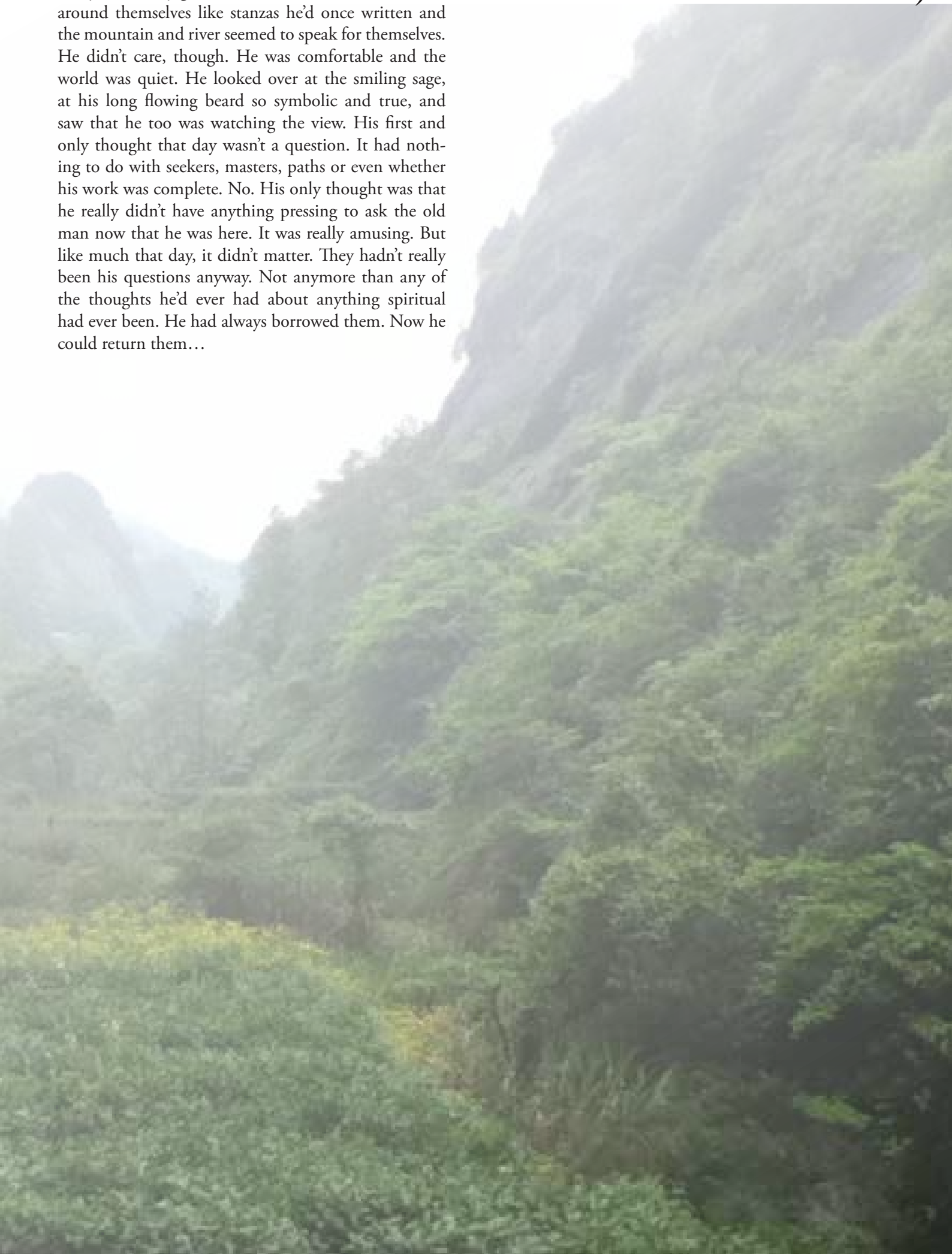
table that looked as if it had been hewn out of a giant tree—knots, curves and all.

The old man heated up the crystal mountain water and brewed first a light golden tea and then a deep and ancient leaf, wiser and older than even him. The seeker had never tasted anything like it. They had tea farms in many of the villages he'd passed through, but none like this. So refreshing and deep were his draughts that the entire world seemed to pour itself over the brim of his cup. At that moment the whole universe was only drinking tea. Maybe the mountain nourished these special trees? Maybe his long journey had parched him? It didn't seem to matter. They didn't talk, just smiled and drank cup after cup. There was no need. No meditation. No philosophy. No questions. Only tea. The seeker didn't mind. He loved the tea. It was the best he'd ever had and he enjoyed focusing on the aroma and flavor of each cup.

When the old sage finally paused and leaned back against the wall. The seeker set down his cup and did the same. He looked out the window cut into the side of the old wooden room. The view was exquisite. He could see past twisted and gnarled trees to a river



valley flanked by giant citadels of stone. The trees wove around themselves like stanzas he'd once written and the mountain and river seemed to speak for themselves. He didn't care, though. He was comfortable and the world was quiet. He looked over at the smiling sage, at his long flowing beard so symbolic and true, and saw that he too was watching the view. His first and only thought that day wasn't a question. It had nothing to do with seekers, masters, paths or even whether his work was complete. No. His only thought was that he really didn't have anything pressing to ask the old man now that he was here. It was really amusing. But like much that day, it didn't matter. They hadn't really been his questions anyway. Not anymore than any of the thoughts he'd ever had about anything spiritual had ever been. He had always borrowed them. Now he could return them...



From now on, we plan to introduce one of the Global Tea Hut members to you each month in these newsletters. We hope that this helps us all get to know each other better. It's also to pay homage to the many manifestations that all this wonderful spirit and tea are becoming, as the tea is drunk and becomes human. The energy of the tea fuels some great work in this world, and we are so honored to show you some glimpses of such beautiful people and their tea. We thought we'd introduce you to the amazing Skylar Rote.

I am a Woman of all trades. I live in Sunny Santa Monica, CA. I work in commercial casting, art, yoga, pilates, energetic healing. I am most happy drinking tea and creating beauty, weather in my designs or at the store in conversation with a stranger. I love to inspire the world around me.

Each morning I brew a bowl, I imagine where all of my tea brothers and sisters are sitting, what all of your stories are....

For me all it took was one bowl... all paths lead to the moment I first reunited with leaves and water: Staring into a deep lifetime of thoughts and memories. There were tears of joy and inspiration, and spurts of child like laughter. I left asking everyone I know, "Have you ever had a bowl of tea?"

I have found that tea connects all. It provides a door to the Divine temple within us, a place to find truth and wisdom and always a home. It answers all questions my heart needs to know, often washing away the ones that aren't important. It asks me to let go of my mind and open my heart—to connect with my true self, even if just for that moment in time.

Connection: often in life we forget that the most beautiful things are generally right in front of us; that in each moment something new awaits and there is so much Divine beauty to explore in that. Tea reminds us of the present moment, it quiets the distraction of our daily noise and brings the Zen into our breath.

I have just returned home to LA from almost 3 weeks with Wu De in Taiwan. So many times we spoke about "Why Taiwan?" The answer is there in everything. The tea speaks the truth of its roots and the air shares its clarity. The sky expands to welcome us all home. The people are full of love and the fruit is deliciously sweet. The water is pure and the tradition so alive. The coals are always burning, water always warming, tea always steeping. No matter how far away we may be we are all the roots of the tree in the center of the Tea Sage Hut.

With this knowing and each morning bowl, I am reminded of what really matters in life. It brings me home, closer to the sky and the leaves, and deeply grounded within the heart of the roots.

We are all tea and tea is us all.

I am so blessed to have so many beautiful Tea brother and sisters. My heart goes to you all this month as we share a bowl of tea from afar!



The Global Tea Hut website now has a forum up, where we can all discuss this month's tea and ask or answer questions, as well as share our experiences. It is a great way to meet some of your brothers and sisters in the hut. Come and join us:

www.globalteahut.org/forum

(We are also on Facebook and Twitter now!)



We have launched the new video series! The first video is an introduction to this Global Tea Hut. The second is about bowl tea. The third is about Mr. Xie. You can visit our Youtube channel via the GTH website or watch the video on the new page at our site. We will be launching regular videos including a new one about *Light Meets Life* and others about brewing methods in this tradition.



There are currently 140 people in Global Tea Hut from all around the world: countries like Spain, Thailand, Russia, Estonia, Australia, New Zealand, America, Canada, USA, the U.K. and Taiwan. Our accountant, Kaiya the Magnificent (and Merciful) said that once we got to around 120 people all our financial worries will vanish and we'd live happily everafter, forever and ever (He lied!). Membership will be limited to 200ish members!



If any of you are interested in seeing these newsletters in color, you can read them on the Internet at the GTH website, under the link for 'newsletters'. Some of the photography is worth taking a peak at.



You are all welcome to visit our center in Taiwan. All classes, as well as room and board are completely free of charge. We have tons going on. You can read more at:

www.teasagehut.org

We weren't able to send the envelopes without having them registered. This is because the post office informed us that they will be mishandled that way. If your envelope is returned to us, we will send it back. If it gets lost, please let us know. Try to choose an address where someone is sure to be home during the day to sign for it. Also, remember to pick it up from the post office. If you really, really require unregistered post, let us know...



WuDe will be in LA and SF from 2/17 through 3/7 doing workshops, events, discussions and an artshow all to raise money for the new center. If you are interested or would like to participate in any way contact Colin Hudson at: **(303) 842-4660**



If any of you have any ideas about how we can raise the funds to build our new center or would like to make a donation yourself, please contact us through any of our websites.



Let us know about what you think of Global Tea Hut so far, either by contacting us or expressing your thoughts on the new forum. We would love to hear your comments or criticism. We are here to serve and make this experience better for everyone, bringing us all closer together.

www.globalteahut.org
www.teasagehut.org
www.the-leaf.org

Be happy!



TEA SAGE HUT PROJECTS

Our center

- Expenses (essentially covered by local donations and Global Tea Hut)
- Food and entertainment, trips and gas for visitors who wish to see Taiwan
- Bowls and tea for every guest to take home
- A Puerh Cave on the third floor
- A library of vintage teas for future students to study from
- A Large collection of various teawares to learn from

Future Center

- ~~Mountain land (We got it! Check this one off)~~
- Building (We will need from between 300 and 500,000 USD)
- Gardening (both landscaping and vegetables for eating)

Publications

- *The Leaf, Tea & Tao Magazine* (Online and free at: www.the-leaf.org)
- Translations of some Chinese texts for free distribution
- Printing of pamphlets and introductions for free distribution
- The purchase of copies of Wu De's books: *Faces of the Master*, *Tea Wisdom*, *Way of Tea* and *Zen & Tea, One Flavor* for free distribution at our center

Videos

- We still need around 500 USD worth of equipment
- We are also looking for a way to better host/share the videos