



Global Tea Hut

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WHO WE ARE

We are a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting, cultivating and expressing an awakening of harmony through tea. We believe that tea wisdom which has no connection to any financial motivation, good or bad, is very necessary in this modern world and therefore strive to build schools, centers and other tea spaces in the true, ancient spirit of tea—leaves, water and wisdom shared without any personal profit. There are several facets of what we do. Below are our main and current projects, branching from our roots outward:

Global Tea Hut

Global Tea Hut is one of our main sources of income, helping to support all of our projects. Members around the world donate money and then tea farmers, merchants or tea lovers donate tea. We connect the two gift-givers. For a minimum donation of twenty dollars a month, members receive a special tea, a newsletter and a gift. All the work involved is voluntary and the tea is donated, keeping expenses to a minimum. We have found that this Global Tea Hut connects tea lovers around the world, and that if you share in the tea with a desire to connect, you will clearly feel the community in the bowl. In joining Global Tea Hut, you can help support all our projects, drink a unique living tea each month, be a part of this community, read about the teas, this tradition and a life of tea and stay connected to our energy and activities here and abroad. For more information visit: www.globalteahut.org

The Leaf

Our free, online magazine about tea hasn't had a new issue in over a year, but it will be restarted very soon with an all-new ninth issue. *The Leaf* focuses more on tea information, differentiating it from these more casual/personal GTH newsletters. It is currently electronic only, though we offer free hard copies to the visually impaired. For more information visit: www.the-leaf.org

Tea Sage Hut

This is our current center, located in Miao Li, Taiwan. Each year, we host over one hundred visitors from all around the world. At the Tea Sage Hut, guests come and drink tea, eat vegetarian food and have a bed should they need it. We have weekly tea classes and daily meditation sessions each morning and evening. We also help coordinate travel around Taiwan and put guests in touch with tea farmers, tea and teaware shops and events. All instruction, room and board, and hugs are free. We operate on a donation basis, and guests are free to leave as much or as little as they like for future guests, knowing that their visit was supported by past guests and hoping to pay the experience forward. For more information visit: www.teasagehut.org

Light Meets Life

In December, we were donated three acres of gorgeous land in the mountains of Da Hu, Taiwan. The land has a waterfall, sakura trees, cliffs, views and abundant verdure. Light Meets Life will be the name of our future, expanded center. It will be a great place to learn about and drink tea as well as to meditate. We plan to have an ecological, organic tea garden for educational purposes and a communal farm to grow our own food. Our new center will be run on similar principals to that of the Tea Sage Hut, only on a larger scale. For more information visit the Global Tea Hut website and click on the 'Our Center' link at the top of the page.



August 2013

In August, the world turns towards home. This is a month of returning, reuniting and celebrating our old friendships. It is a great time to call some friends and family you haven't spoken to in a while and catch up; or better yet, schedule that tea gathering you have been longing for! Soon, crops will ripen and harvests will begin. But for now it is the space in between: a leisurely month—good for strolls with loved ones, dreamy naps on a meadow or lazy tea days near the woods. It is a great month for ball Oolongs and Dan Cong teas. Sometimes, it is a good time for those middle-aged Puerhs, and checking how they are aging. After all, if it is a good time to reunite with loved ones, why not tea you haven't spoken to in a while as well?

In the lunar calendar, we enter the Orchid Moon in August, which represents the limit of heat and the return towards Yin. It was traditionally a time of holiday, for returning home and visiting loved ones. Most tea is resting, absorbing the sun and moon, stars and deep earth minerals so that it can bud once again in the autumn, or traditionally next spring. Summer tea, like Eastern Beauty and Sun Moon Lake Red Tea is just coming to market now, so those farmers might be busy with the final stages of production, like sorting, weighing and packaging.

There are two very import Chinese holidays in the Seventh Moon. The first is called 'Double Seven (*Qixi Jie*)' or sometimes 'Chinese Valentine's Day (*Qingren Jie*)'. As legend has it three orphans lived together in a village. The two older siblings threw out the younger one so they wouldn't have to share. He wandered with his ox finding menial labor. One day the ox spoke to him and revealed that he was actually a god who had been cast from Heaven for helping humans with magic seeds during a famine. His punishment was to roam the earth as an ox. He helped show the boy, who was called 'Niu Liang (Cowherd)', a pool where some of the daughters of Heaven came to bathe. The boy met one of them, named 'Zhinu (Weaver Girl)' and they fell in love. They were married and soon had twins together. However, her parents were angry that she had married a mortal and kidnapped her back to Heaven. Her mother

sent her back to her loom to weave clouds, forbidding her to see the boy again. Meanwhile, on earth, the ox gave Niu Liang his horn to use as a magic boat, so he could, together with his children, travel to Heaven to find his love. The queen of Heaven thwarted him by scratching the Milky Way between Earth and Heaven so that Niu Liang couldn't see his wife ever again. And so these two stars stare across the Milky Way at each other in longing. They say that once a year, on Double Seven, all the magpies of the Earth—romantic at heart—form a bridge so that the two lovers can cross and spend the day/night together.

The second holiday is Mid-year Festival, which is also Ghost Festival. It is a time for burning paper money, offering incense, fruit and food to one's ancestors, as well as appeasing ghosts and demons so they don't haunt us. In ancient times, some people called the entire seventh moon the 'Ghost Moon', believing that the gates of Hell opened and ghosts roamed freely amongst the living until the end of the month. It is a time for filial piety, returning home and paying tribute to one's elders and ancestors. In some places paper lanterns are lit and set adrift on water or released into the air to help lost ghosts find their way home. You may not be superstitious, or even believe in ghosts, but there is something beautiful in praying for the salvation of all, even the dead; and in honoring our ancestors, and all those who have come before and handed down traditions and truths to us, sacred or mundane.

We can learn from the way that the ancients propitiated the darkness rather than trying to battle it. They had holidays, altars and made offerings to the demons, recognizing that if light defeated darkness, the universe would end. These forces are always in balance, and though the darkness makes more noise in this day and age, the light is equal to it. Forgive your demons—make peace with them and see what happens: the ones that need conflict will go elsewhere, and the ones that remain will be cute imps that no longer bother you. Sometimes we can even turn our demons into great protectors, like the fierce demons that guard all Buddhist temples and monasteries...



YOUR TEA OF THE MONTH, JULY 2013

Old-growth Red Tea, Summer 2013, Sun Moon Lake, Taiwan

This is our nineteenth month of Global Tea Hut, and up to now we haven't repeated a single tea, providing eighteen unique experiences, energies and sessions for you all! And you can rest assured that we will continue this trend: finding new, rare and exciting teas to help educate you about different genres of tea, methods of production, regions, roasts, ages, etc. After all, there are so many amazing teas we hope to share. But there is one tea we will repeat every year, as it is so close to our heart, and so much a part of what we do here at the center and in our courses abroad as well. Almost everyone who visits our center leaves with a free bowl and a bag of this tea, as it is the perfect tea to start out a journey, and a great companion and friend even for those who have traveled some distance. As a result, there are tea brothers and sisters around the world who were first introduced to Tea through this magical leaf. So whether you are meeting Her anew or celebrating a reunion, please join us for a bowl of 2013 Sun Moon Lake Red Tea...

In the first half of the twentieth century, the Japanese were in control of Taiwan and looking to develop the island agriculturally, exporting goods to help fund the rise of their empire; and tea was to play a large role in this. They brought large-leaf tea trees from Yunnan and Eastern India and planted them in Sun Moon Lake, hoping to establish Red Tea plantations there. However, war soon began and the Japanese were later expelled. The tea gardens were left untended for around eighty years, producing semi-wild offspring. These magical trees took on all the power of this magical place, absorbing the minerals, sun and moon, weather and energy. Eventually, people began to tend these wild and semi-wild gardens again, producing an amazing Living Tea.

Our Sun Moon Lake Red Tea is organic and ecological, containing all of the characteristics of Living Tea:

- 1) **Seed-propagated**
- 2) **Room to grow**
- 3) **Biodiversity**
- 4) **Chemical-free (no pesticides, chemical fertilizers or weed-killers)**
- 5) **Respect and reverence; a healthy conversation with humans**

Perhaps, it would be worthwhile to review these briefly, as they are central to a life and understanding of tea ("renew" is a better word!).

First, all living tea is seed-propagated. As we mentioned in previous issues, tea is a sexual plant and a lot goes into creating the seeds—a tremendous amount of natural energy, mostly involving insects and cross pollination. Every seed is unique, and every seed-propagated tea tree will also be an individual soul. In fact, that is why so little tea is seed-propagated today. Commercially, farmers think that consumers are ruled by their palates and want flavor uniformity. Is that true? Do you really want to throw out so many potatoes and carrots because they don't fit unnatural cosmetic standards? Or do you realize that Nature is wiggly, and that the magic of tea is that it is different every time? It is also more work to tend a variety of trees with different needs. The vitality, however, is very different between cuttings/clones and seed-propagated trees. First and foremost, seed-propagated trees live longer by orders of magnitude—think centuries or even millennia versus decades—and, moreover, birds won't eat the seeds of cloned trees after the second or third generation.

Second, all living tea is given room to grow. Living things grow as large as their environment permits. Koi fish will remain small if kept in a small bowl, but grow big if they are in a big pond. The same is true with Bonsai trees. People are that way too: we only grow as much as we give ourselves room to... Every plant has a ratio between its roots and crown, and when you prune the crown the roots also shrink. Plantation tea is pruned for easy picking. Some living tea compromises on this issue for practical reasons, viz. a single farmer can't possibly climb and harvest five hundred trees on time—he would be too slow and miss the picking window. Our Sun Moon Lake tea is pruned, for example. But there is still space between the trees to extend their roots and grow healthily. The tea trees organize themselves, in fact, in a living garden, rather than being forced into rows like on a plantation. They know which soil is more nutrient dense, and can have more trees clustered closer together, and which is less so, and therefore they must grow more spaced apart.

Third, all living tea is ecological. It includes a vast array of biodiversity. We always think that in controlling a few factors in a monoculture system we can generate sustenance for ourselves, but the overall impact is always more complex, intricate and subtle than we could ever imagine. And as we are finding out, our destructive intrusion into natural ecologies is having many larger and unintended



effects, over time and space. There is no saying what the true relationship is between the weeds, bugs, snakes and even snake poop and tea trees. How are the local squirrels related to the tea trees? It may not be apparent, but if they cohabitate in the same environment, they are related. Maybe the discarded nutshells help fertilize the trees, or maybe it is more complex by one or many degrees: maybe the nutshells are food to a certain insect that attracts a certain kind of bird which sings in a way that tea trees enjoy, helping them to flourish? True tea is ecological: you cannot distinguish the tea garden from the surrounding forest!

Fourth, and the most obvious, is that living tea is chemical free. The evil triad that pollutes our earth, animals, birds and people is not sustainable and not a healthy compromise. It doesn't matter that a study proves that such pesticides can be consumed by people without quantifiably detrimental effects. First off, they destroy the environment, often running down the mountains and harming other ecologies as well. Second, what are healthy amounts? And how long was the study? Maybe the participants showed no deterioration of health after a two-year study (which would be a long one), but what happens when you consume pesticide-laden tea for ten years? Such chemicals are unhealthy for people and harmful to the earth. They defeat the purpose of tea, which is to bring Nature to society. Master Zhou Yu always asks, "How can you sit in a beautiful tea room and connect to Nature, when the thing you are using to connect was produced in a way that destroys Nature?"

"Red Tea" or "Black Tea"

It is important to understand that what most Westerners call "Black Tea" is actually "Red Tea". Ordinarily, it doesn't matter what something is called, but in this case there is actually a problem, because there is another kind of Chinese tea that is called "Black Tea" (characterized by post-production, artificial fermentation). So if you call Red Tea "Black Tea", then what do you call Black Tea? The reasons for this error are to do with the long distances the tea traveled in chests to Europe, and even more importantly with the general lack of information for the first few hundred years tea was traded. Europeans weren't allowed inland in those days. They never saw the tea trees and rarely its processing either. Buying through middlemen in broken pidgin, you could see how easy it would be to spread misinformation. But you can correct this centuries-old error by saying "Red Tea"!

Finally, tea is a conversation between people and Nature. In the Chinese character for tea, the radical for 'man' is right in the middle. Tea was traditionally always respected. Each tree was a unique being, with life and spirit and treated that way. Most farms don't treat animals or plants in that way anymore. There is no respect for the individual being in any of the trees—you can hardly tell where one ends and the next begins on most farms. It is just uncountable "tea"—product, value, stuff, object for consumption, etc. Our Mr. Shu, who produces this month's Sun Moon Lake Red Tea, is as good as they come in this regard.

Tea of the Month

Mr. Shu is a second-generation farmer with an incredible attitude. Many of his neighbors have increased yield by switching to plantation-based, inorganic farming practices, but he would rather live simply and in harmony with Nature. While his neighbors constructed new-and-improved houses with satellite dishes, he stayed humble, simple and in love with his work and trees. This year there was a drought and bugs that decimated the area—insects that come only every decade or so. When we talked to him about it, he responded with great wisdom, proving that—like the ancient Daoist texts—even the simplest people can achieve harmony with the Dao, mastery of life and a great wisdom that we all can learn from. He said that this year he received less. If he were to stress about that, or worse yet compromise his values and turn to pesticides for help, it would be like rejecting his destiny, arguing with Heaven. Furthermore, he said that it would show how ungrateful he was for what Nature *had* given him. “We should be grateful for what Nature provides and accept the times that Heaven takes from us—learning from times of having less, or even losing what we have, as much as in times of abundance. We all will face lack and loss sooner or later. If you resist and argue with Heaven that your destiny is unfair, you don’t learn and there will be greater misfortune later. Better to accept whatever Nature gives us and be grateful for it. I have less this year, but it is okay because I saved when I had more last year; and maybe next year I will have more again.” There couldn’t be deeper life lessons than these!

Most Red Tea is processed in 3-4 phases: first it is picked and then it is withered in large piles. Most tea is spread out when it is withered, but Red Tea is piled to completely oxidize the leaves. It is then rolled for an exceptionally long time, to continue the oxidation and break

down the cells. It literally turns into a pasty mass in the process. Then it is dried, usually in an oven. Our tea, however, is completely different. The farmers think we are crazy, but we reduce the withering/piling period and the rolling period, leaving some green in the leaves, which you will see when you brew them. The reason for the complete oxidation in normal Red Tea processing is to make the tea sweet and delicious. Nevertheless, we have found that such extreme processing removes some of the tea’s Qi, and distances it from the mountain and deep essence it touches. The leaves of these large-leaf trees are often bitter and astringent, but we can accept a bit of that along with the sweetness, can’t we? And isn’t that a significant life lesson as well? In the end, we’d rather have a slightly less delicious tea with incredible and relaxing Qi than the other way around.

We recommend putting these leaves in a bowl, watching them unfold in the oldest brewing method around, older than the pyramids in fact. It is a great morning tea, leaving you awake, bright and calm. Try waking up a bit earlier one morning, alone or with some loved ones. Put more or less leaves in your bowl, to your taste, and fill it with hot water. As it steeps, have a moment or two of meditation. Then pass the bowl between you, sharing a single bowl as you share a single encounter, a single chance...

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.





AFFECTING CHANGE

Article by Shane Marrs

We are not human beings having a spiritual experience; we are spiritual beings having a human one. Everywhere you go you can't help meeting people who are more spiritually aware of concepts like equanimity, mindfulness, compassion, Being, presence, meditation, surrender, forgiveness and so on. More and more conscious communities are arising and lending themselves to causes greater than pursuit of personal profit, in service of all beings. Spiritual work is, after all, ultimately about transcendence and service to others. Being committed to a spiritual or Dhammic life means the choices you make every day are as much as possible in alignment with a life of service. And one choice that everyone faces today is surrounding the food we eat, and also the tea we drink.

Here at the Hut, we drink and share organic tea and more often living tea, which many of you have come to know as tea that is grown in harmony with Nature; tea that is seed-propagated with ample space to grow; tea that is tended to by caring human hands; real tea, with an energy that speaks to your heart. Living tea is the ideal. She has so much to offer. An old tree's roots tap deep and its crown sweeps the sky. That connection to the Earth and the Heavens relays a message in every brew, every bowl. Genetic variance sits in each seed and a local ecology unfurls in each leaf. Such tea not only heals us now in the present, but also will be here long after we are gone to heal future lovers of tea. But as we've said before, the major problem with this type of tea is that it simply can't be made available to everyone due to its growing conditions and time requirements. In lieu of having living tea always available, as we are so lucky to have at the Tea Sage Hut, choosing organic plantation tea is a great alternative to align your tea-self with Nature.

Without going into any great detail on the economics of organics, I would simply like to talk about tea and what it means for you, and us here in Taiwan, when we buy organic. Let organic not be constricted to any particular set of values, certifications or trademark standards. What does organic mean to you on an intuitive level? I like to think about the food and agriculture practices during times when people were really in tune with their environment and the cosmos; when people lived off their own land and respected Her as part of their family; when soil was clean enough to eat raw; when organic food was just called... "food". While certification is something you will

need to consider on your own if you choose to buy organic tea. I'll leave it up to you to investigate. One can't be too lax or too serious when making that decision, and there are a lot of different organic standards out there. I say that because there are many other factors affecting your tea aside from what the label says, like your frame of mind, the intention behind your actions and the environment you live in.

Benefits of buying organic tea

When you buy organic tea you support the organic tea movement. Full stop. What is it that you're supporting? Your purchase supports organic farmers who have the integrity of the earth in mind. Ideally, they care for their crops, they care for their land, they care about the people down the food chain who end up consuming their product and they care about their own health. This is the energy that goes into raising their tea, and your purchase says you support that!

For us, in considering tea farming, we draw the line at chemical inputs. So long as the tea is surviving from the organic life in the soil itself, and so long as weed and pest control are conducted in ways that do not harm the earth, we like to support those farmers, certified or not. Word of mouth is good enough for us when relating directly to the farmers. Though the tea may be propagated from cuttings, though it may be planted in dense rows, though it may be treated as a commercial crop, this type of plantation tea, lacking any chemical input, plays a very crucial role in our world. Why? Because there are a lot of tea lovers out there! It is well known that tea is the second most consumed substance in the world, next to water of course, and that means if people are to receive the message tea has to offer on such a large scale, it needs to be made available on an equally large scale. And this type of tea is capable of meeting that demand without forgetting the importance of sustainable, clean farming practices while still accounting for all the tea lovers. That's why it's great to buy and support tea of this kind: It can reach a large audience while still upholding the integrity of the Earth.

When purchasing this type of tea you are also supporting a future where clean, healthy and sustainable tea is available. Whereas conventional methods of agriculture might yield higher quantities of tea *now*, they lack the dimension of time simply because when you force the land to give more than it has to offer and then try to make



up for that depletion with large chemical inputs, you have an unsustainable system on your hands. Mother Earth can only sustain so much abuse before having nothing left to offer in terms of fertility. Organic plantation tea is available in both time and space, meaning it's available now and into the future and in a quantity sufficient to heal us all without compromising the health of our planet. The only reason to compromise from Living Tea to plantation tea is to make more available to tea lovers, since there are so many of us. And inorganic tea doesn't do that, since it doesn't take future tea lovers into account!

Here, you are supporting earth-conscious farmers, sustainable, clean agriculture practices, the earth itself and even future tea drinkers! But what about yourself? Buying organic tea suggests that you not only care about others but that you also care about yourself and your own health, which in turn can be shared back again to others!

Indirectly, we are also supporting smaller-scale farmers and cooperatives because, while organics probably

can be maintained on quite large scales, the whole philosophy of going organic and being a steward of the land lends itself to small-scale agriculture practices; Just as the spirit of gong fu tea is better suited to smaller groups of tea lovers. Inorganic tea is one of the most destructive crops in the world, being farmed on unimaginably large scales on mountaintops. Deforestation, heavy chemical inputs, monoculture and greedy harvests result in chemical runoff and water contamination, landslides, ecological imbalance, loss of soil fertility, short term farming, and tea so far removed from its natural state of being we might even call it something else altogether. In Taiwan, there are still lots of small-scale tea farmers and cooperatives that support each other through trying times and they also need the support of people like us so that they can continue offering their services.

Global Tea Hut Membership: Power of the Consumer

In being a GTH member, you are not only inviting the benefits of buying organic into your life but also supporting the whole organic tea movement. As a consumer, buying organic and signing up for GTH, you are in one sense casting a vote, which lets farmers/merchants/middlemen/etc. know where your values lie and how much you're willing to spend. You really are voting every time you make a purchase. It makes a statement, and farmers are listening. I'm no expert on economics or any aspect of business, heck I'm not even an amateur, but I can tell you from a farmers point of view that there is great truth in saying that consumers hold the power when it comes to price and product, especially in a place like Taiwan where so much small-scale farming is still prevalent and farmer-buyer relationships are direct. I can only imagine the complexity of the system that our purchasing votes have to traverse through in order to reach the farmer. The message of our votes may be manipulated or even withheld altogether with big companies and big money between us and the farmers, but in one way or another, the farmers are getting the message, especially as consumer awareness increases. All the more reason being a GTH member is helping to effect positive change. Your donation is the manifestation of a clear, unobstructed message to farmers and retailers that living and organic tea is important to you and worth the extra cost. While it may be more expensive now, as more people cast their vote, causing the demand for organic tea to rise, the supply will increase to meet that demand and eventually the prices will level out.

So bear in mind that as a member of GTH, as a consumer of organic and/or Living Tea, you have power and you are effecting change. You are influencing systems beyond what you might expect by simply enjoying a bowl of tea and sharing it with others. Hold that bowl close to your heart in between sips and reflect on what that means. It means you are awesome and we love what you're doing!

Possibly you simply aren't in the position to buy your tea organic, be it the extra cost or limited access. We can't blame you; it often is more expensive and less widely available (all the more reason for those who can afford it and have access to it to buy it, because eventually it will be worth making available on a larger scale, ideally without sacrificing quality, and thus become more feasible for more people). In the case that you find yourself with some inorganic tea, possibly gifted to you for example, there are a few things to consider as I alluded to in the beginning. Tea leaves are very sensitive, as is water, making brewed tea doubly sensitive. Therefore, the frame of mind in which you approach your tea makes all the difference in the world. As high quality teaware can increase a poorer quality tea, so too a clear mind can clear the impurities of tea, for what are the impurities in tea if not the impurities in our mind?

I like to say that the poorest quality tea served with the greatest of intentions is always going to be better than the highest quality tea served with the worst of intentions. Another method of transforming your tea is to celebrate it with loved ones. Drink your tea with love and with loved ones. This type of space is so strong, and very important to the quality of our lives—so important that it can trump the many negative associations we might otherwise impart on the things we consume. If I haven't convinced you, or you can't host such a belief system yourself, just compost such teas or use them as mulch. Then, time will take care of the problem, and twenty grams of inorganic tea will one day be recycled into twenty grams of something else. In the end, the tea is spirit anyway...

"When it is understood that one loses joy and happiness in the attempt to possess them, the essence of natural farming will be realized. The ultimate goal of farming is not the growing of crops, but the cultivation and perfection of human beings."

—Masanobu Fukuoka, *The One-Straw Revolution*







GONGFU TEA TIPS

August 2013

When it comes to gongfu tea, the most asked question by far is how to scour an Yixing pot and get it ready for use. We thought we'd devote an article to answering this for everyone's benefit, and then maybe explore some other aspects of Yixing in the coming months, as Yixing clay plays such a central role in gong fu tea.

Yixing pots have been married to tea for five hundred years and are often referred to as 'the Father of Tea' (as water is, of course, the 'Mother'). When Master Lin is asked what teaware to use for tea, he always answers: "There's Yixing and there is no second!"

How deeply you will need to scour your newly acquired Yixing pot depends on whether it is new or used. A used pot requires more work, especially if it is antique. Mostly it is just a repetition of the same process again and again, though some very old pots need some more thorough scouring. We aren't going to cover that, however, as handling very old pots is delicate and shouldn't be done without hands-on instruction. So the following directions will mostly be for those of you scouring a new or slightly used pot. If you have an antique pot that needs cleaning contact your local professional (or visit us in Taiwan).

Clay is full of organics, especially stoneware—and all teaware is stoneware. This means that it is mined ore that is crushed into powder and made into clay. Yixing ore is fermented twice during production, once as ore and once as clay. And the older the better. Consequently, it is full of organics. When it is fired, they turn to dust, which clogs the pores (also, all clay has ordinary dust as well). And the pore structure of Yixing is what gives it life. Yixing pots have a double pore structure, which means that if you were small enough you could walk from the inside, twisting and turning, to the outside of your pot. It breathes, in other words. That is why we have to scour it: to unclog the pores so it can breathe, and also absorb tea oils if you wish (though that's a story for another day). We also need to clean out the tea oils if yours is a used pot.

First immerse your pot and lid separately in a pan of water. The better the water you use, the quicker the process will go. Put it on the stove and bring it to a boil. Just as it reaches boiling, add a teaspoon of non-toxic, edible bleach (sometimes called 'oxygen bleach'). Bleach is water-soluble anyway, so it will all be washed out later. If your pot is extra dirty you can add more. You will want to turn off the gas immediately, because the bleach will froth over

if the heat is still on. When the fizzing stops, cover it and leave it overnight.

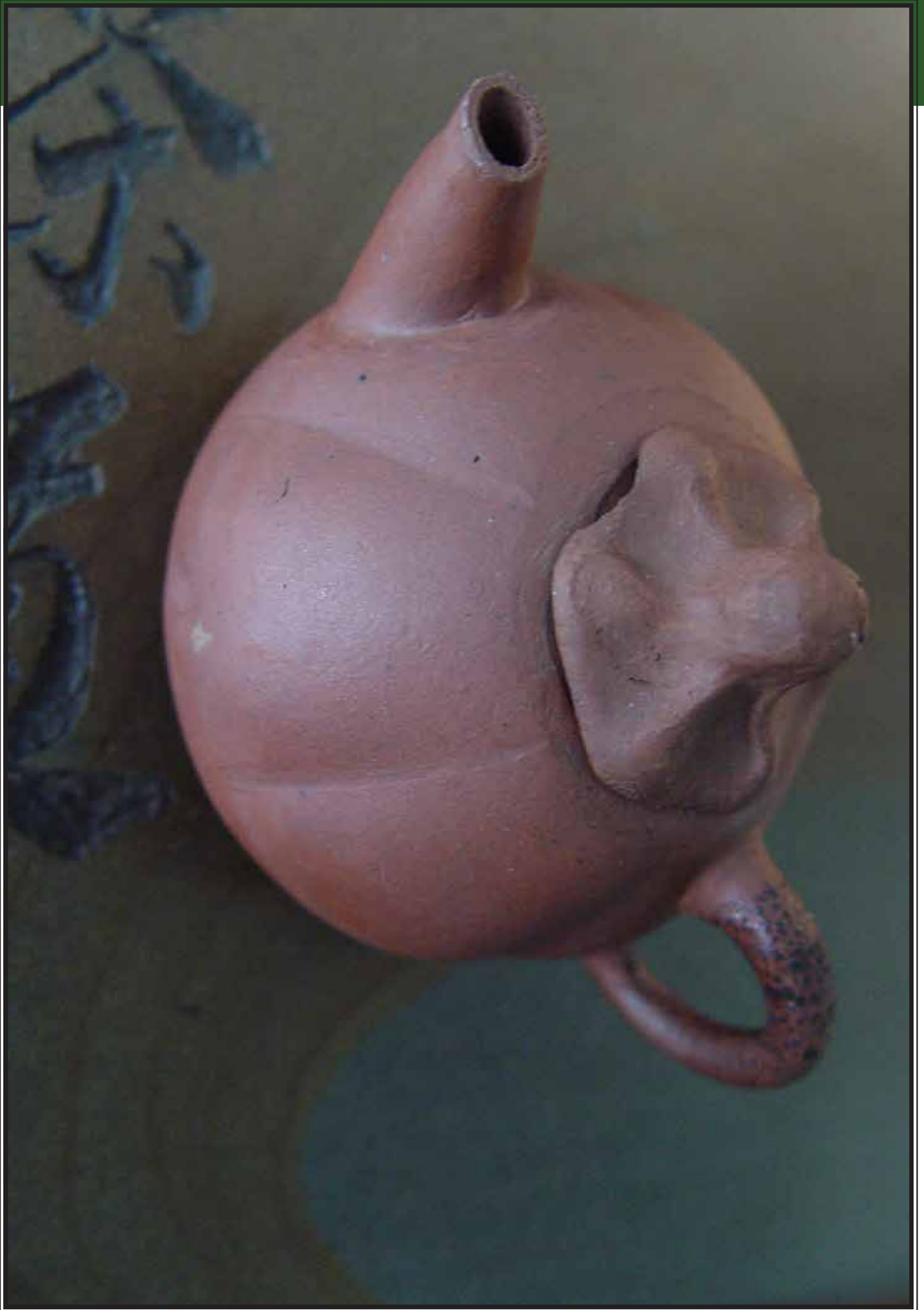
When you come back the next day take the pot and lid out and run them under cold tap water, massaging the inside and outside with your finger or thumb. Also, *thoroughly* clean the pot with hot water and a soft scouring pad to remove all bleach residues. Then, again put the pot and lid in cold water, making sure they are completely immersed. Again bring the water to a boil. Only this time do not add any bleach, just water! Turn off the heat and cover it. You don't need to wait a full day this time, just til it cools (around five hours).

Again take the pot and lid out and run them under cool tap water, massaging both inside and out. It's a good idea to clean the pot thoroughly with hot water again, for as you will see there will be bleach residue on the surface of the water. Then you will need to repeat boiling the pot in plain water one or two more times. Basically, the first boil with the bleach removes all the dust and unclogs the pores and the second two or three boils are then to remove the bleach itself. You will know when the second stage is done, because there won't be any residue on the water's surface. (That's why it is important to clean the pan itself every time, or it will leave residue and make you think the pot still has bleach residue in it even after its clean.)

Finally, if you are devoting your Yixing pot to a certain kind of tea only (we'll talk more about this next month), then you can bring it to a boil one last time and put in a few leaves of that tea, turning off the heat as you do (just like with the bleach). Stir it around with a chopstick and cover it, leaving it over night before rinsing it off.

Finally, at the table, we usually rinse boiling water through the pot a few times when we first use it to make sure it's really clean. Your Yixing will now be smooth, shiny and porous; and ready to take your tea to new levels!







TRANSFORMATIVE MOLD

Article by Kaiya

It's been an incredible and beautiful journey, living in Taiwan these past three years. The Center has completely changed in every way: physical appearance, more tea spaces, the number of people visiting, what we have to offer to guests, the energetic frequency, etc. Guests have come and gone, completely different than when they arrived, and some have come and stayed on, becoming full-time residents. And, as I have often chronicled in these newsletters, I've seen plenty of changes in myself as well. (Even Wu De has changed). In other words, there's been tons of transformation in a pretty short period of time, and it's one of the things that is so great about living here.

It's also something I was reminded about this month when I went to Colombia for my brother's wedding. In the city where he is living, the temperature basically never fluctuates outside of 21-23C (70-75F). Additionally, the region apparently has no pests of any kind: no ants, mosquitos, roaches, etc. I didn't encounter a bothersome bug the entire trip. Nobody had screens on their windows and everyone left windows and doors open all day and night. Comfortable environments like this seem great and have a lot of appeal to our comfort-seeking minds, but the fact is that when nothing changes, and we don't have challenges to deal with, we stagnate. As ever, we can look to our tea also as a compass of sorts. Tea very much prefers to live in an environment with seasonal changes. It likes to have a period of rest in the winter, then wake up in the spring, followed by a period of growth during the humid summertime. If you keep it in a stagnant environment where the humidity and temperature are constant, it won't develop as well and may even die, which means become flat and lifeless—without Qi or Spirit.

One of the biggest challenges for me recently has come in my own living environment: From being “my” house, where I lived alone, the place has transformed into more of an extension of the Center, a second building where guests can stay and enjoy tea and food. It has also come to accommodate more permanent residents, now being home to Shane and Nick in addition to myself. Learning how to arrange everything in a way that allows us to cohabitate peacefully has required tons of patience and compromise from everyone, but we've managed to get the hang of it. Unfortunately, during this process, I failed to relate to everyone in the house in an equally considerate way.

I said I was in the house alone before Nick and Shane came, but that isn't accurate. I was sleeping in the only bedroom in the house, on the third floor, until Shane moved in. At that time, I let him have the bedroom and I moved down to a room on the second floor, which was the tea's room exclusively until then. We had chosen that room for the tea because it is ideally suited: it is in the center of the house with no windows to let in light, which also means less temperature fluctuation, and it has lower humidity than the other rooms. I also liked it energetically as being the ‘heart’ of the house, as it were. Because the room was so perfect for tea, I didn't want to move the tea out just because I was moving in, and besides I really liked sharing the space. I slept better.

But as time went by, I started to realize that while the situation might be positive for me, it wasn't that positive for the tea. My energy slowly but surely began to affect it more than it was affecting me. We've done the experiments, and if tea is kept in a space where people are praying and meditating regularly, the tea improves greatly. But this was not a space exclusively for those activities. The tea wanted to be somewhere less ‘busy’, somewhere it could meditate peacefully with fewer disturbances, but where?

The third floor was out, as it has only Shane and Nick's bedroom and a small adjoining computer room and we all agreed that if the tea was unhappy in the bedroom it would be even worse in a computer room. The first floor is a tea room and the kitchen but I had discounted it long ago due to the humidity, light and aesthetics—I like having a tea room that is simple, clean and uncluttered, even by beautiful jars of tea. And it is nice in a lot of ways when the only tea in the room is the one you are drinking. But it seemed there was no other option, so the first floor became its new home.

Now for the hard part... I *knew* the first floor was not ideal for tea. There are a couple of weeks every year, right as the season changes from winter into spring, when it gets really humid around here, especially our house since it is a town house on a small street with less ventilation. I usually have to pick the tatami up in the tea rooms and leave them against the wall for a week or two with fans blowing on them because they mold so quickly and easily. All the wooden utensils in the kitchen mold as well. In fact, everything wooden or bamboo molds, and what's more it does it really quickly, within three days after cleaning it off. Even the tile floors sweat moisture, and if you don't wear house slippers, there are muddy footprints all



over the house in no time, no matter how careful you try to be.

I knew all this, and still I didn't really take enough care and consideration for the tea. I checked for external signs of mold in the house—the tatami, the wood on the shelves, and so on. Not seeing any, I didn't bother checking the tea itself, thinking that these external things would mold more easily than tea inside of jars, wrapped in paper and cardboard. We drink tea every morning at the center, so we very rarely drink tea at home, and it's not unusual to go a week or two between sessions there. But that's not a good excuse, and again it betrayed an unhealthy attitude on my part. I was treating my tea as though drinking it was the only relationship I recognized or valued; like a friend that never calls you unless they want something from you, which obviously is not a friend at all.

And yet, my consternation could not easily be exaggerated when I finally opened one of my favorite Puerh cakes for a session one morning and beheld that it was covered with little white spores. My face fell. My heart sank. Frankly, I cried. I felt such remorse, such despair. I immediately saw the error of my ways. I felt like a father might feel who had been too busy with work for all those years and one day opened his eyes and discovered his son had turned into a rotten apple. I had failed my tea, neglected it. I had allowed it, and most importantly my relationship with it, to stagnate.

Opening cake after cake, jar after jar, I discovered that the damage was extensive, indeed. With the exception of my glazed, tightly sealed jars of Oolongs and Yan-chas, as well as some of the really old Puerh, everything had been affected. The mold was white, and had a bad

Transformative Mold

smell. I tried brewing some of the least-affected tea I could find, and it was terrible. The tea was all lost. I had killed it through my inconsideration and lack of concern after putting it somewhere I knew would be uncomfortable and potentially dangerous for it to live. For at least a whole 24 hours, I was absolutely not in a state of acceptance of this fact. This transformation was too uncomfortable; I didn't want to go through it, didn't want to believe in it, as evidenced by the recurring thoughts along the lines of "I can't believe I..."

One of the hard realizations that came along with this situation, of course, was the necessity of telling Wu De. He scolds me all the time for not listening to all kinds of things, from cups to computers. But to admit to not listening to the tea in my house, and to such a great extent, was not something I looked forward to at all. But I had to know if there was anything I could do, how to "apologize" as it were. I couldn't waste any more time, knowingly leaving the tea in discomfort and stagnation, no matter how uncomfortable telling Wu De about it was going to be. The foremost thought in my mind was that I wanted to make sure that the tea was taken care of and put somewhere it would be happy and comfortable and maybe even be able to recover, to let it know it was important to me and that its comfort and well-being were my top priority. So I took a deep breath and made the call. (He actually didn't scold me much, responding to the tea, and came over right away to help.)

Probably the most important thing that I learned was that first and foremost, there are some kinds of molds that can be recovered from, and some which can't. Orange, black, green, and some yellow molds are all ruinous. (With yellow mold it's possible you are quite lucky, and in fact certain ones are even celebrated on Black Teas, because they have medicinal value.) White mold alone has the potential to be cleaned and recovered from. Hurray!

The first step was to clean off the mold. With Puerh cakes, this can be done very effectively with a brand-new toothbrush. Be sure to do this outside and wear a mask over your mouth and nose so you are not inhaling the mold. If the cake is extremely moldy, you should then afterwards break the cake up into pieces and shake them in a metal sieve vigorously. With loose-leaf teas you can start with the sieve method, and then spread the tea out and carefully inspect each leaf and remove those that are contaminated. Make sure you aren't shaking and dusting it off near your cleaned teas and re-infecting them.

Next, you will have to let the tea spend a little time in the Sun. Sudden shifts in temperature or humidity are terrible for tea, so it's important to recognize that this step is a necessary evil and not overdo it. You want to kill off remaining spores and also dry the tea out somewhat. No more than seven minutes on each side should be plenty of time. Do NOT try to leave your tea in plastic while doing this. It might seem like a good idea because the tea

won't blow away with a gust of wind, however the plastic will capture the escaping moisture and create condensation very quickly, which will then make your tea soaking wet. Find a flat container with high edges.

After cleaning my tea I had a pretty big pile of bits and pieces of Puerhs that were so moldy they were probably beyond salvage, so as an experiment I mixed these all together and left them in the sun quite a bit longer, and will store them for a longer time. (I'll let you know how it's going in about 10 years.)

After this, it's important to prepare a good place for the tea to rest in, with conditions as different as possible from those which allowed the mold to grow in the first place. For the damaged tea, I first wrapped all the cakes in plastic wrap or put the loose teas in Ziploc bags, making sure to expel all the air. I then put these inside cardboard boxes, and put the cardboard boxes inside a large plastic storage bin with a locking lid. I scattered pieces of white charcoal and those silica moisture-absorbing balls around and closed the lid. Be careful! Sometimes those balls and even plastic wrap or bags are scented! Now the tea was as protected from moisture and temperature change as possible. But where to store it, and just as importantly, where to keep all the undamaged tea or any new tea that comes to live with us?

I bought a barometer, and discovered that at the really wet period, the humidity in the first floor room was in excess of 90%. The third floor room, however, never went much above 80%. Time for another uncomfortable transformation. My new bedroom is small and fairly cramped even with only a bed inside. And I didn't want to sleep in the same room with a computer any more than the tea did. But the conversation that arose about this also shed light on the fact that Nick and Shane both preferred if the computer was not outside their bedroom. And so it moved to my room.

As it happened, that third-floor room was the most incongruous in the house. It was the only room that hadn't received any love or attention, didn't have any plants or paintings or any real care shown to it. It still had the same grungy old metal blinds over the windows that were there when I first moved in. But now, as a result of all this, it too is beginning to transform and come to life. After deciding to store our tea there from now on, we bought a couple of nice cabinets for the tea and have been discussing beautifying and designing a new meditation space there so we can heal ourselves and our tea at the same time.

As with all growth experiences, now that it is over I can recognize and appreciate all the good that came out of it more clearly. It's always the most difficult, and often the most painful experiences in our lives that we appreciate the most later on. They are the ones that we look back on and describe as having forged the bonds of life-long friendships, saved marriages or turned our lives around in the biggest ways. At the time we always resist—we don't

want to accept. We wish we could have kept the status-quo comfort level without any disruption forever, but if we have any wisdom at all we look back and are grateful for and remember those experiences for what they are: they are amongst the most important in our lives.

I feel very much that this experience has strengthened my relationship with Tea and changed my way of viewing not only Tea but also all the so-called 'stuff' in my life for the better. We all know the dissatisfaction that comes when we relate to other human beings on a superficial level, as objects to gratify our selfish desires. But although people are the pinnacle of Beingness on this planet, the truth is that everything from dirt and rocks to tea and teapots share in that Beingness as well. And how much richer and deeper is a life lived in recognition of that sharing? How much more gratitude and respect for our

fellow human Beings can we cultivate if we have gratitude and respect for our shoes, our dishes, or our car keys? As ever, practicing this kind of relationship with your tea is a beautiful stepping-stone and training ground for deeper relations with the more mundane 'objects' in our lives. Let your tea help you bridge that gap, as it has for me. Let your tea reawaken your respect and love for everything in your life!





Light Meets Life

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As our current center, Tea Sage Hut, fills up with light and a love for tea brought from Chajin around the world, the need for a bigger, better center of our own becomes more and more apparent. And everyone can see the vision, and feel the vibrations of the magical land we will build it on! The world needs more free spiritual centers, and free not just in the financial sense; but also free of any sectarian or religious motivations. We aren't promoting a particular philosophy or worldview—we are merely offering a sacred space to meditate in any way you see fit, drink tea and learn about Nature, eat healthy food and develop a community of friends, brothers and sisters. Light Meets Life will be a quiet retreat in the mountains where you can come to learn more about tea, tea farming, preparation, meditation and healthy living: in harmony with Dao and Nature...

It is important that we review this vision again and again as it takes form, or “renew” it! We plan to build a huge main hall with tea rooms of various sizes, classrooms, tea and teaware storage, a huge dining area and a communal kitchen. There will then be two sets of small houses. As we mentioned two months ago, each row will have five houses, but will share a single roof. The bigger set will have a raised tatami platform and cushions that sleep four or five, a rest/study area (complete with teaware and a tea table) and a bathroom. That will allow us to host twenty or twenty-five guests at any time. The second row will be smaller residences for more permanent students. We will also build a meditation hall. Our vision

is to use glass walls on all four sides and have no altar, allowing Nature itself to be our sacred space. We envision these buildings in a Japanese style: using antique wood, stone and water with little to no decoration, and definitely fitting into the mountainside, as if they'd always been there...

Aside from this, we hope to landscape the area with koi and lotus ponds, as well as to enhance the waterfall. Shane will help us design an awesome vegetable and herb garden to feed us all delicious and bio-dynamically nutritious foods. We also have future goals to create a hot spring (if possible, since there is geothermal activity in the area, or at least a wood-fired bath and sauna). There will be many outdoor tea spaces as well, including a flattened stone that could seat around five and a bamboo grove for full-moon sessions—there is nothing like full-moon tea in a bamboo grove...

Recently, we were chatting with a dear tea brother about how sad it is that some of the greatest medicine in the world has become so expensive, and is mostly being used for sensual pleasure by the rich these days. We were, of course, talking about aged Puerh, which is so magically transformative. Master Zhou Yu used to write a lot of articles about how such teas should be used spiritually/medicinally, and what a shame it was to treat them like an expensive delicacy. Many of these teas are so rare and priceless that it would be difficult to buy them at any price if you didn't have a good reason and good connections. From decades of friendship, we have some such

connections, which means that it would be theoretically possible for our center to have one of the greatest libraries of vintage Puerh on earth if we were sponsored adequately. There are many vintages that are so rare they can't be bought at any price whatsoever, and are exclusively in the hands of private collectors. However, if you know the right people and are building a free tea center, hoping to use such teas medicinally/spiritually, it is possible to get some. As most of you know, we have already started a vast library of tea and teaware here at the Tea Sage Hut. It is very important that we continue this with Light Meets Life, expanding the variety of tea we have to explore together...

Wu De will be in LA this month, so come out and support his work there. Buy one of our Light Meets Life cakes. The proceeds will go towards making this vision real. You can contact Kaiya if you are interested in getting a hold of one or more of these cakes. There is a small amount only. They are special teas for many reasons, especially for what they represent.

Help us to awaken this dream by envisioning yourself visiting and meditating, drinking tea on a rock, etc. We are building it for you, after all. If we all see it out loud, and amplify that dream, we can together awaken it on this earth. We'll create the greatest tea center the world has ever known, and one that will hopefully outlive us all!

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.





MY RUSSIAN ADVENTURE

Article by Wu De

There is a hardness to Russia, but it is also vast and deep, ancient and mysterious. And when you tell a Russian how gloriously enigmatic they are, there's often a twinkle in their eye that suggests they too are bewildered by it all—or is that just another piece of the charming puzzle? It's easy to get lost there, and not just in space. When you think you have understood a facet looking in, the whole thing swirls into the sun and prismatic showers wash everything in rainbow confusion again. Some of the best surprises are when you think you have come upon a hard place only to find softness and warmth. Though challenging, I find Russia to be very sensitive, deep and defiant of whatever categories or stereotypes I bring with me on the long flights there. That also makes it really hard to write about. It's easy to see the obvious: that it's cold and life is tough—but then I stop and remember that some of the deepest, most loving and loyal friendships of my entire life are Russian; and it didn't always take long to get to the point where we loved one another, and language/culture barriers don't seem to matter either. In fact, I'd rank the opening of a Russian heart amongst the most beautiful things I've experienced in this life; and, in the end, I'd be dialing a lot of Russian numbers if I needed some real friends to count on...

The awakening is always a surprise, so it always comes from without. And Russia is ripe with surprises: ordinary run-of-the-mill ones, like when you think that Moscow is going to be a mean, dirty, gray city and instead find that it is colorful, rich, extremely clean and green (at least in the summer) and beautiful (for a big city); and deeper, more personal surprises, like learning about how it is possible to meet obstacles bravely with grace. Russians shrug off inconvenience, hardship or unwanted obstacles with a levity rarely seen in all my travels. "We'll have to pay extra money," Max translates with a smile. And then when he curses our luck with a "Shucks!" the smile is still there, and as with any trouble we've encountered on the trip (and what trip doesn't have troubles?) the expletive seems feigned, like he's not really affected at all. I always learn to trust more deeply in the flow watching how skillfully Russians handle unwanted situations. Their shrugs and smiles almost seem to say, 'You think *this* is bad? What about the blizzard of '04!?' (Though who can say for sure what any of their gestures really mean?) Accepting what is—that's a powerful reminder, and a more valuable souvenir than the gorgeous lacquered box I was gifted!

I've never taught so much, worked so hard or for such a worthwhile cause as these recent three weeks in Russia: we did tons of events! I literally went from the plane to a workshop, and then from a workshop to the plane on the last day. But I am not complaining. Quite the opposite: it gives me purpose, confirmation of my life's Dao and also led to so many insights for me, many of which are just now starting to blossom. What's more, I got to celebrate some great friends and make some new ones as well. I even taught some Russians a thing or two about hugging (garnished, of course, by the spirit of my guru: Swami Bhagavan Gwendt-ji).

Almost all the workshops were themed around an introduction to Cha Dao. In Russia, many people already have a bit of a relationship with Tea, which is different from other places I teach. Still, I felt like the first trip there demonstrated to me that in many cases the foundation was weak, and without a strong foundation we can't build upwards—every floor rests on the one beneath it. Not everyone is so fortunate to start his or her tea journey from the ground up. I wasn't. I came to tea through the sensual pleasure of it, and it was many years before I had a meaningful, spiritual relationship with this plant medicine. I suppose it is like the way couples are often first attracted to one another based on appearance, sexual compatibility. If their relationship stays on that level, though, it will be a shallow one indeed, and probably won't last either. Having a teacher means that we can start from and/or return to the foundation of tea, which is the thousands of years of tea used as plant medicine before it was ever bought or sold, or drunk in the spirit of pleasure. This is not to deny the pleasure—a man and woman in love can still enjoy each other's bodies—but that isn't primary. Furthermore, the touch should come out of the love, not lead into it. The Goddess wants you to love Her first, then touch Her out of that respect and love, not grope for your love through Her. And loving Her means getting to know Her first.

To get to know Tea, you have to get to know *Her*, not *about* Her. If She is to be a living presence in your life, then you must respect Her as such, and communicate with Her—relate to Her—not view Her as stuff. Our ancestors never put "stuff" or "chemicals" into their bodies. They consumed *life*! In many Native American languages the verb for a kill on the hunt was 'to give-away', so a brave would return home and tell his wife, "a deer gave-away to me today." But gave away what? It's life, of course. We consume life, not stuff (call it energy if you will). It comes from Nature; it comes from the sun, water, wind



and weather. And viewing your food as medicine, and as *living energy*, will open up many healthy doors for you! Tea is also alive, and as a living being I can't get to know Her by reading books about China, or the local region a tea comes from, or even tea processing. That is like me reading a book on U.S. history in order to get to know my new American friend; or assuming that a book on human sexuality, pregnancy, birth and infancy would help me get to know him either. Absurd! No book or information will help me get to know a living spirit. To do that, I have to show up and meet them—look in Her eyes and communicate. What else would 'getting to know somebody' mean? And we are all here, in Russian workshops or here in this global hut, because we wish to get to know Tea better. The awesome news is that She'll introduce you to Nature as well, both Hers and yours...

Anyway, I felt the need to confront some of the more "geeky" tea that showed up at the workshops (before proceeding into the geekiness, of course). I feel like a Chajin can geek out on tea and teaware all you like as long as you keep the spiritual bond with Tea primary. Plant medicine first. Whatever second. I enjoy a teapot book as much as any of you, just as I don't mind talking with Joyce about her new earrings. But that isn't primary for me, and when it comes down to it, I only feel like I can have such a conversation with Joyce because our love is already established, and I am certain she knows it as well as I do. Otherwise, you better believe we'd be talking about that instead!

So there was plenty of tea stuff to geek out about, though not enough for some (like Ivan the Incredible).

Russia was amazing, and I hope some of the photos scattered throughout this issue testify to that. Every workshop ended in sincere, heart-felt hugs and some seeds were planted. Some of the sprouts I planted were watered and grew up, and some had even been propagated and supported by students before I even arrived! I am sure that weekly tea gatherings are right now happening in Novosibirsk, Tomsk and Moscow for sure (*Right!?*).

Deep and heartfelt bows to all my tea brothers and sisters up North, for all your amazing hospitality and for all I learned. A few of you taught me much more than I could have possibly given to you. I feel indebted. And I hope that all of you get the chance to visit Russia one day—meet its mystery and magic, and have tea with some of your brothers and sisters there, all of whom would be happy to host you!





SUN MOON LAKE

Article by Lindsey Goodwin

The origin of this month's tea is Taiwan's famed Sun Moon Lake (日月潭 or *Ri Yue Tan*). It's an idyllic area of Taiwan, and it has been designated a "National Scenic Area" (which is cooler than it sounds, because Taiwan is practically overrun with stunning nature sites, and there are thirteen places in the country with this designation).

These days, Sun Moon Lake is a major tourist destination, which has its pros (i.e., signs in English, good infrastructure and some great places to stay) and cons (i.e., traffic and crowds on the weekends). Most people consider Sun Moon Lake to be a romantic getaway spot. It's a popular honeymoon destination, and during even a short visit there you'll likely espy more than one couple getting their wedding photos shot on the lake's shores, in a bamboo thicket or alongside tea plants with a backdrop of verdant mountains and clear waters...

But there are other types of tourists there as well: Cyclists love to loop the lake or meander past it while on a larger journey around Taiwan; religious pilgrims pay visits to several of the local temples, including one built by former president Chiang Kai-Shek in memory of his mother (the one where Wu De proposed to Joyce); Chinese sightseers arrive by the bus-full to ride boats and snap pictures before being carted off to the next venue on the group tour's checklist; Taiwanese families go there for boating as well, and for the fantastic local delicacies, which include bamboo shoots, edible ferns and tea-related dishes. (Although the Red Tea ice cream and sweet, Red Tea 'egg roll' pastries are popular, I find Sun Moon Lake's version of tea eggs, seasoned with spices, Red Tea and local mushrooms, to be the most delicious of all the area's tea cuisine.) And for tea people like us, the main draw to Sun Moon Lake is, of course, the tea itself.

Sun Moon Lake is famous for its Red Teas. These teas often have dark, wiry, twisted leaves and brilliant red liquor. They may have opulent notes of fruit, mint and spice, and overall they tend to lean toward the lighter end of the spectrum of Red Teas, much like a heavily oxidized oolong.

On the main drag of the town, tea is loudly peddled at all sorts of shops and casually poured at practically every restaurant and cafe. If you ever visit Sun Moon Lake, I advise skipping all that busy hawking and spilling. The tea tends to be (How to put this?) not the best quality and it is almost never organic, plus the atmosphere is touristy

by Taiwanese standards (though it's not nearly so bad as American tourist traps!). However, there are much better teas (and tea environs) to be found if you journey out from the town's center a bit.

If you bring your own tea or are able to source some organic Sun Moon Lake Red Tea while in the area, there are countless spaces for outdoor tea sessions around the lake and in the nearby woods and mountains. You can rent a scooter and explore to find your own tea spots there, connecting with the land, the water, the lake breeze and the mountains. (For better or worse, on the weekends, you can also connect with the scores of other tourists.)

During a visit to Sun Moon Lake earlier this year, I had a few beautiful Matcha sessions with Merlin, each in a different setting around the lake. But there really is something to be said for drinking Sun Moon Lake tea around Sun Moon Lake, too. Luckily, this is easy for us. We here at the center are blessed with connections to two local tea producers in Sun Moon Lake.

One tea producer specializes in organic *Assamu* (Assam varietal) Red Tea, and is the maker of this month's tea. Although the family speaks little English, we are sometimes able to arrange visits to witness production firsthand at their small factory. You can learn more about this producer in the short article on this month's tea.

The second producer we know is larger, and they produce several types of Red Tea, including an *Assamu*, large-leaf tea like our Tea of the Month, the celebrated Ruby Red (Taiwan 18) and Rose Quartz (Taiwan 21), and even some small-leaf Red Tea made from Taiwanese varietals. They also have a "DIY" tea production area, in which you can roll your own red tea by hand. The company handles the picking, oxidation, drying, packaging, etc., and you can watch some of these aspects of production, or you can sit and drink tea with the woman who runs the





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company (and her sister, who speaks English). But the real joy in visiting this factory is rolling the tea!

If nothing else, rolling your own tea gives you a sense of the incredible skill held by tea masters. In my travels, I've had the chance to see many people try their hands at tea production for the first time. Almost every time I've witnessed this, a newbie exclaims something along the lines of, "This is much harder than I thought it would be! You really have to *work* to make tea." (And most of the time, they weren't even awake before dawn to harvest the leaves!)

We all know *in theory* that making tea by hand is difficult, but (to state the obvious) we can't know this experientially until we actually experience making tea for ourselves. This firsthand experience of working with tea leaves generates immense respect for the people who produce our tea, and for the tea itself.

Sun Moon Lake

Furthermore, rolling your own tea can provide a much more direct, visceral and even spiritual connection with tea than you might imagine. The Ruby Red varietal is particularly suited for this kind of participation with the Leaf. During rolling, its thick cell walls rupture to ooze out a syrupy juice that smells of wintergreen, cinnamon and ripe fruit. As you work, gripping, rolling and releasing these increasingly sticky leaves over and over again, your hands are stained russet. You then lean forward repeatedly to put a little weight into the rolling, and your back and shoulders slowly begin to feel warm, then sore. You can feel the effort clearly. You can feel the rewards for your effort clearly. And if you pay close attention, you can feel something else happening: You can feel the tea interacting with you in a less physical, more spiritual, way.

Even more so than water, tea is a spectacular sender and receiver of energy. Many of you have felt this in your tea drinking and preparation, so you know of what I speak. Imagine feeling that same kind of communication, only with leaves that were plucked from trees that morning, and which are being shaped (by you) into leaves which will be infused and consumed (likely by you and people close to you)...

Although I didn't do this the first couple times I rolled tea (I was too focused on getting the basic technique down!), now I like to roll tea with an intention to communicate Tea spirit through the leaves and to help people connect to Nature and themselves through tea. I like to put *metta* (loving-kindness) into the tea. I can't say whether it helps the taste, but it certainly seems to help those who drink it, and that's what really matters.

There's another way tea people like ourselves enjoy connecting with tea in Sun Moon Lake. This one involves old tea trees. Sun Moon Lake has a unique history of tea production dating back slightly under one hundred years. During the Japanese occupation of Taiwan, the Japanese government tried to move Taiwanese farmers away from Oolong production. The Japanese tea company Niton wanted to (and, for a time, did) fiercely compete with international Red Tea brands like Lipton; and the Japanese government wanted their newly acquired lands to produce a markedly different product from the Green Teas of Japanese make, a product which would create more profit for their empire. For this reason, they pushed Oolong producers into Red Tea production, and set up a tea research and production facility in Sun Moon Lake for making the Red Tea venture more prosperous. When the era of Japanese occupation ended, some farmers returned to Oolong production (and aren't we glad they did!), while a few others stuck to Red Tea, generally in climates and elevations especially suited to it. The efforts to generate successful Taiwanese Red Teas were and continue to be part of what makes Taiwan's tea production so special and unique. However, in Sun Moon Lake production was abandoned

for several decades after the Japanese were expelled, and then restarted in modern times.

In the early days of Taiwanese Red Tea research and production, several large plots of sloped land near the lake were planted with tea seeds. Each seed was genetically distinct, and each of the many surviving plants has its own variances. During a stroll through the groves, you can easily see that some trees grow tall and lanky as though reaching for the sun and moon, while others spread gracefully upwards and outwards like a half-unfolded fan. And you may even glimpse ones that remain squat and stocky like a Hobbit nearing his 111th birthday, or rise thick and dense from the soil like a stone column from more ancient times. A closer look will show you that there are infinite other differences. One tree's leaves are waxy and thick, with saw-toothed serrations along the edges and veins a few shades off from the deep, blue-green of their flesh; another's leaves are a tinge more yellowy, smaller and completely smooth around the edges, with veins that bulge out rather than differentiate themselves by color. The density of the leaves changes completely from one tree to the next, as does the abundance (or lack) of flowers (which may, themselves, differ in size, shape, color, etc.). And the seed pods! Encasing one or more seeds, these pods: fuzzy and tawny, waxen and emerald, thick and parched like dried citrus peel, thin like soaked birch bark wrapped around pearls. They show such variance, perhaps hinting at the treasure troves of genetic material contained within.

A closer look reveals that these are not just surface differences: Just as processing and steeping the leaves of each of these plants would produce a vast assortment of tastes and aromas, stopping to get a sense of the plants themselves uncovers a very different sense of 'Being' from each plant. The spirit of Tea is clear as soon as you step onto the overgrown fields, but the *spirits* of the individual tea plants show themselves a little more slowly. If you take the time to do so, connecting with the plants in this way can be a profoundly meaningful experience, and a tremendous way to connect more deeply with Tea's essential nature.

If you have the chance to visit our center in Taiwan for more than a couple weeks, I highly recommend a two- or three-day trip to Sun Moon Lake while you're in the area. In addition to being all-round awesome, it's accessible by public transit (Three cheers for Taiwanese infrastructure!) and it's very reasonably priced by Western standards. We can help you arrange a visit to see the old tea trees, set you up at an incredible guest house and organize an opportunity to do some tea rolling of your own. But that's in another Now... For the time being, share this month's gorgeous tea with someone who needs it!



Dearest Denis and Katya





BE TEA

Article by Steve Kokker

Many of us have had this kind of experience while serving tea to a friend: The moment comes at last, perhaps after a prolonged period of silence, after many cups have been consciously taken in. Perhaps your friend has come to you in a slightly distressed state, nervous or edgy, slightly off-balance. You drink, exchange some words, and let the tea and the mind settle. Then it comes, this instance of lovely connection: the two of you, in a space of silence, suddenly look at each other and for an instant see beyond the shapes and forms—the light bouncing off each other spilling into the eyes. There is now relaxation and ease where previously there was residual tension and mental chatter. There is now presence where previously there was restlessness. You see each other, truly see each other. Your eyes lock and you each resist the nervous tendency to giggle or laugh. Rigid mental patterns fall away like autumn leaves. You behold the other's Beingness. After a time, a gentle, comfortable smile appears. You both 'get it'. There's a moment of understanding each other that goes beyond that which the mind seeks, beyond that which can be communicated through words. Ah! The blissful experience of human connection unrelated to verbal exchange!

As far as communication tools go, language is obviously up there. How else could we get our dog to sit down, wish a tired cashier a nice day, express our incredulity in front a stunning landscape with an "Oh my God! Look at that!", order a falafel-to-go or thank a beloved for everything they've done? Moreover, how could we transmit our knowledge about the top-selling albums of all time, weather-altering com trails, the ancient teachings of Padmasambhava, or our opinions about that new restaurant and how its tacky decor compares to others? Surely we need language for all that? Surely we need all that too?

The limitations of language to transmit ideas and emotions are something that far more learned writers than I have written about extensively. Not only do 'Great service!', 'I'm bored', 'Really deep experience!' and 'Have a nice day!' mean completely different things to different people (not to mention little words like 'love' and 'God' and 'good'), but varying skills of verbal expression or levels of shyness/self confidence will also affect the degree to which concepts are effectively communicated or lost. Language is a priceless mode of transmitting ideas (and gossiping about other people's lives). Yet words are inherently limited and sub-

jective; for every successful verbal transmission there are likely many misunderstandings as well.

When we tell a friend, "I'm feeling a bit off-balance today," they will likely interpret this through their own understanding of their own moments of being off-balance and at best have a smattering of a glimpse of what their friend is going through. Those more empathetic might try to place themselves in their friend's position and see what "off-balance" might mean from their unique perspective.

There are, however, other modes of human communication and connection, potentially very deep, profound ones. Dance, theatre, sex, touch, massage, music and art are domains in which a space is opened up between people or between a feeling/concept and an onlooker/listener in which the pathway of connection is much more direct than via language. Silence is the pathway for such connection, and 'understanding each other' becomes something attained somewhere deep inside and beyond the mind's reach.

Sharing silent tea is another potential way to connect deeply with others, without words to muddy things up, or place us in boxes and categories. Tea sessions need not be completely silent for connection to take place, though. Some teas are so powerful that the transmission which takes place is on such a deep, subtle level that the surface noise of words cannot disturb this process. Powerful teas will do their work, and open people to each other even when the drinkers' conscious minds wish to be occupied by something else. Some degree of stillness, however, helps the tea do what it wants to do: open up our connectivity to others and to Nature. As with other areas in life, we can help this process out by surrendering to it, taking a back seat to it, or we can throw up a few roadblocks along the way in the shapes of thoughts, excess words or other forms of mental noise. Tea will do its job regardless; we can either deepen or limit its effectiveness.

Getting It

'Getting it'. I like to put it in those terms. There are a rare handful of people who 'get it'. I mean by that those to whom one rarely or never needs to 'explain' things, those who never, even unconsciously, seek drama, who do not fall into instant reaction to every statement, who wordlessly receive and transmit states of being, who use words carefully, sparsely, not to fill space and mask discomfort but to transmit what is needed. During a conver-



sation, they resist the mind's tendency to stop really listening to what the speaker is saying and fill in the blanks, or to interrupt with an opinion, fact or with one's own version of what is being described. They resist the amygdala's immediate reaction to the present as if it were a lived-through past event, not something new.

These are people who truly do not 'mind what happens', are understanding and compassionate of others and themselves as fragile human beings, and who do not seek to accumulate a greater sense of self via talking. Of thousands of people I have met in my journeys, I have to say that such souls are exceedingly rare. There are many who 'get it' periodically, but rare indeed are they who can live this way almost all the time: present, rooted, grounded and with mind thoroughly mastered. You don't tend to meet them in everyday, urban settings; they tend not to be dancing in the thick of society but more likely on its fringes, not as any reaction against humanity but simply in response to their own inner stillness with which they are in good connection.

A lot of us have moments like this, where we 'get' another, or 'get' some situation without any further attempt by mind or ego to delve, quantify, question, analyze or smother in a slew of words. Moments when a closed-eyed nod suffices. Usually people find it easier to get into this state of mind when the external world has quieted down to a trickle of bird song and rustling water. Or perhaps they are moved to tears by a dance performance in which something inside stirred and they had a feeling that they had

touched upon something which transcended their everyday beings. Perhaps during a physical union with another they experienced a merging of beings, a loss of the self, or some deep intuition/feeling about the essence of their partners which they'd never felt before. Via simple touch it is also possible, with a still mind, to 'read' or sense another person in a way that reading their biography could never express. Serving meditative tea to someone similarly allows a glimpse of the being under the cloth/persona and the concomitant opportunity to connect with him or her at that level—if the server is also able to drop the mask and serve with presence.

Meaningful communication occurs when the people involved are not lost in their selves, their needs, opinions or desires. Words may arise or flow, but in this state they come from another space and can indeed deepen the moment. Words are certainly not an enemy, but even when arising from a state of presence, they remain secondary to the primary route of connection, which is always beyond the word.

Do We Even Need To Understand?

I believe that there is no such thing as full understanding between people. Here I define understanding as the effective transmission of one person's experience to another. To paraphrase author Robert Anton Wilson, we all live in our own reality bubbles, and we bump up against other people's bubbles and make judgments about

Be Tea

them or attempt to understand them but always through the intensely limited spectrum of our own past experiences and understanding of the world.

I used to find this the ultimate human tragedy, that we can never truly understand each other, yet now I don't find this overly pessimistic, as it doesn't really matter whether or not we fully understand with the mind what another person means or has gone through. If we can 'feel' with empathy what they mean more than understand it intellectually, that's what really counts. For ten years I kept a copious, daily diary and used to think that it would be horrible if someone were to find and read it... until someday I realized that even if someone took the time to read these 4000 pages (and no one ever would), they still wouldn't know me any better than if they'd spent some time just being with me and looking into my eyes with presence.

Still, communicate we must, and fall into conditioned patterned behaviors we likely must too, until we fully master our minds. I have a few practical reminders that I try with varying degrees of success to keep in mind in order to better navigate through the sometimes-turgid waters of human (mis)communication:

- *Say what you mean and mean what you say* (just like Mama always told you). Because other people tend not only to hear what you say, but also all sorts of things you never intended or stated, try as best as possible to clearly express only that what you are trying to express, simply.
- *Be concise with words.* Judging by the length of my articles I still have yet to learn this one! The less one chatters, the more space you make available for others, and the less opportunity you leave for misunderstanding.
- *Try not to hear what is not said.* As listeners we can also try not to let the brain fill in too many blanks and assume that which is not necessarily implied.
- *Do not take words personally.* Funny how we can get hung up on words, and rarely with facial expressions. We can react to sentences and yet rarely will we fret in quite the same way over a gesture, touch or silence. Even if we don't like what we're hearing or not hearing, there is no need to get hung up on it. The words you just heard were at best a very partial reflection of that person's state of mind at that precise moment in time, likely to change over and over again. Practice non-attachment to words.
- *Become a better listener.* A good, present, focused listener is indeed a rare bird. Even when we think we're good listeners we likely have much room for improvement. Attempting to see things from the perspectives of others, in their contexts, is key.

- *Practice non-verbal communication.* Practice listening, for example, in other ways: become more attentive to people's body language, facial expressions and micro-expressions, the way they hold their bodies, walk, sit, how they change in different situations. Even with someone you know well, try each sitting and facing each other for two minutes—just looking into each other's eyes in silence, and notice that which you never really noticed before.

- *Feel the flow and quiet the mind.* This needs no practice or reminders at all. When thoughts and opinions and mental reactions arise to words spoken, just let them settle gently down and continue 'being' with that person, trying to see beyond the surface. Listen calmly without hearing too much.

These newsletters have been filled with great suggestions by other authors on how to really 'be there' during your tea sessions. In being so, your steady presence encourages the steady presence in others to come forth through all the mental clutter. What a gift to offer!

These newsletters have also beautifully described how much tea has to teach us, of what a patient, loving teacher She is. Tea communicates with us in a very direct way, and on a deep level where no words or ideas are present. We can learn this from tea as well. Tea is big enough to be what we need it to be in order to reach us best. By being as present as we can, we're also responding to the moment in the most appropriate way possible. To paraphrase Bruce Lee: Tea can be uplifting; it can be grounding. Tea can crack through layers of repression or can smooth out ruffled nerves. It can gently embrace you or unleash a flood of emotions. It does what is needed to do. Be Tea, my friend, be Tea...





Ivan the Incredible



MEDITATION: PART I

Article by Nick Dilks

Over the next few issues I would like to offer some tips for bringing more of the spirit of meditation into our tea drinking. This could be particularly relevant for those solitary tea sessions, which we might savor from time to time. But it is also useful when drinking tea with friends: whether it's a quiet, mindful session with us at the Tea Sage Hut or even a more bawdy one resembling last orders at a bar! If we can remind ourselves of these tools, we will get so much more out of our *one encounter* with this tea. In this issue, I will talk about preparing the space: a key issue before we even begin to meditate. In later articles, I will explore tuning into the body, awareness of breath, loving kindness, Insight, and finally, a six elements meditation.

When setting up to sup from the 'Goddess best beloved! Delightful tea!', one can consider two extremes: over- and under-preparation. As the author of the quote above, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, put it: 'He who is best prepared can best serve his moment of inspiration.' And it's true: there really is something uplifting about sitting down in a beautiful, clean space that has been lovingly prepared. The mind delights in the *Chaxi* and the teaware and how they reflect the earlier mood that chose them; the small flower you picked yesterday evening as you strolled up the path sings of beauty in its delicate vase; the lovingly prepared pile of leaves on the bamboo scoop awaits the swirl of bubbling water from the kettle. The body too feels more alive and satisfied after stretching, sweeping the floor and tidying up a bit. The mind of course is more centered than it would have been, had we under-prepared and just tossed the session together in a hurry.

But, on the other hand, there is much truth in Napoleon's idea that 'over-preparation is the foe of inspiration(!)' If we start getting a bit O.C.D. about our tea space, the fun is soon sucked out of everything and our tea can veer towards yet another unpleasant chore on the ne'er diminishing tick-list. Of course, it is my personal ideal to always aspire to 'right' cleanliness. After all, one of the 'Eight Bowls of a Life of Tea' in our tradition is 'Cleanliness and Purity', both within and without. But it is also, I feel, important to recognize where we are. Some of us will have time constraints and others will be less drawn to this aspect of tea and may struggle with it. From monitoring my own attitude to clearing the space, it's easy to see that I am more of conqueror than a poet! However, experience has taught me that the surest way to fail is to force myself, so I just

keep the ideal in mind and express it as much as I am able. By focusing on the rewards of a lovingly set up tea session rather than berating myself for the times I'm a bit slapdash, I hope to coax—rather than beat—myself towards these ideals. All of us probably feel a bit tight for time during the week and it's natural to try to cut corners, but my sense is—as a novice tea drinker—that as tea rewards me for my efforts, the time and space to dwell in its company will keep magically increasing!

So, let's have a look now at how we can improve how we set up our tea space. The first thing to do is to set aside sufficient time to enjoy a mindful tea session. This involves leaving enough space to clear up our teaware properly at the end, lest our spacious reverie quickly descend into a jarring, agitated epilogue. As I live here in the tea community, I'm neither short of opportunities to drink tea nor the space to clean up calmly after. But for the past month now, I have been getting up very early to enjoy some tea on my own each day. We get up early enough here, so it has been a bit of a sacrifice but it can be done. Make sure the phone is switched off, and if you live with other people, let them know that you would appreciate some support with quiet, etc. Then, when you are ready, you can turn your attention to setting up the tea space. As with anything we are attempting to do well, I would really recommend learning to practice the Four Foundations of Mindfulness from the Buddha's teachings: that is mindfulness of body; feelings and emotions; mental states; and Reality. These can help us to arrive at the first sip in the right state of mind. The mind is really first and foremost in getting ready for a tea session.

What are these Four Foundations? And what is mindfulness? It never harms to go back to basics from time to time. Mindfulness, in my opinion, is the attempt to bring a fully inclusive awareness to what we are doing *right now*. From a certain point of view *we are awareness*. But, as Byron Katie says, 'We can forget this occasionally: that is 99.99% of the time!' And it's true. It's very easy for us humans, as Joyce puts it in *The Dubliners* to 'live a short distance away from [our] bodies'. We are also apt to get lost in our feelings and emotions, and walk around identifying with a negative mental state for hours: 'I am angry' etc., instead of holding that state in our awareness and trying not to act from it. We also tend to get lost in our thoughts, some of us to the extent that we live in a sort of virtual disassociated world in our heads and walk through life on just enough auto-pilot to avoid traffic accidents!



This is where the Four Foundations come in. Through consistently bringing our awareness from the thought-world back into the body, we become ‘embodied’. There is actually much satisfaction and even pleasure to be gained from practicing the First Foundation. Sweeping a floor mindfully, for instance, can be a very pleasurable and sensuous experience: feeling the wood in your hands; the friction and release of the bristles on the floor as they make their sweeping motion; noticing the air on your skin; and the pressure and release on the soles of your feet as you walk along: all of this can be very pleasant by itself and will tend to bring the mind into the present moment, which normally means a reduction of agitated thoughts.

The Second Foundation is built on the first, and involves feelings and emotions. If we are not aware of our bodies, we are unlikely to really notice these. Emotions we probably know, but in a Buddhist sense ‘feelings’ refer to the hedonic tone of the moment: whether something is pleasant, painful or neutral. It is important to note this be-

cause generally, if something is pleasant we unconsciously crave more of it, and if something is unpleasant, we feel aversion to it. This is what sets off the emotional roller coaster of our responses to life and can actually limit us tremendously. For instance, if I had a bad experience of public speaking at school, when the next opportunity arises ten years later, the bad feelings that may co-arise will probably put me off trying again. To return to our discussion of setting up the tea space, if I have never enjoyed cleaning, the idea of sweeping the floor before I sit and sup will probably evoke a negative feeling. If I am unaware of this, then I won’t want to sweep or set out a beautiful *Chaxi* or take the trouble to pick a beautiful flower. Conversely, if I am aware of this, I have a choice: I can stay within the narrow confines of my pain/pleasure limitations or become curious and... have a try! As I sweep, I may notice these unpleasant feelings strongly but now they do not take me over completely. So it is much less likely that I will fall into an unpleasant emotion, such

as irritation, and become identified with it. Even more, as I bring awareness to bodily sensations, my experience might actually become pleasant. Either way, I am learning an important lesson in life: that I don't have to be limited by whether something is pleasant or unpleasant. I am learning to do the thing anyway with curiosity. This is the cornerstone of any path of transformation.

The Third Foundation involves bringing awareness to our thoughts and our mental states, such as restlessness, calmness, sleepiness or alertness, focus and distraction, and so on. Just like the emotions of the Second Foundation, if we are unaware, we can get lost in each mental state that arises and become that energy. This leads to an exhausting life as we are tossed around like driftwood on the stormy sea of the latest prevailing reaction. So, if we are tired while we are sweeping or our mind is full of resistant thoughts, we notice and surrender to these as we sweep. It's no reason to put the broom down. Besides, as the Fourth Foundation points out, everything is impermanent anyway. The chances are that the sleepiness and negativity will diminish perhaps as soon as the first bowl is imbibed after the preparation is done.

In the Fourth Foundation, we are noticing and reflecting upon the Buddha's teachings as we come into contact with the myriad experiences that the world offers us through our senses. We might notice for instance how we open ourselves up to suffering when we try to chase after pleasant experiences. It's also normally obvious that we suffer when we resist *what is*. As Byron Katie says, 'When I argue with Reality, I only lose 100% of the time!' There's lots more that could be said about this but that will suffice for now.

Now, back to our tea session: Hopefully, by now we have set aside some time to mindfully tidy up the tea space. We can then use our creativity to set up a *Chaxi* with some ornaments and chose the teaware to go with it (or vice versa). I was talking to Wu De the other day as we were looking at some tea sinks in Yingge, and he was saying that, though they can be beautiful, he prefers tea cloths because they tend to encourage more frequent changes. That is, it is easier to just leave the tea sink on the table all year round. Normally they are big and heavy, so they are more difficult to put away. And besides, the water just drains off anyway; a simple wipe with a towel would suffice for cleaning. By having a tea cloth, which will need to be washed more frequently, the tea table can become less of a fixed space. This is more in line with the reality of impermanence and the attitude of 'One encounter; one chance', which points to the uniqueness of each tea-session. As the *Chaxi* rotates, we can combine them with objects that suit the tea, our moods, and the plants available as the seasons rotate. By surrounding ourselves with ever-changing beauty, we increase the pleasure in our lives. Being creative or sitting amongst creative beauty has

been shown to boost the feel-good chemical, *serotonin*, in the brain. What more reason do you need?

Next comes tea selection. One of the things that I have been impressed with at the Tea Sage Hut is the thought and intuition that goes into selecting the tea. Before I came here, I would just 'have a bit of what I fancied'. But we needn't stop here. By doing a small amount of research and personal experimentation we can start to discover which teas suit different times of day, different seasons, and even different moods or health issues. In this way, we can begin to use tea less as a pick-me-up and more as a medicine in the sense of restoring balance. A nice Shou Puerh, for instance, might help us to balance the dampness and sleepiness we might feel on a cold winter's morning but might be far too heat-producing on a hot day. Don't believe the books; experiment for yourself! I actually drank a very 'hot' Shou Puerh recently on a boiling, humid day here in Taiwan and proceeded to sweat like a sumo for the next five hours. Lesson learned! Wu De also encourages us to 'talk to the tea' as we select it and sense which tea wants us to drink it right now. This might sound a bit whacky to some, and I certainly do not possess such Jedi powers yet, but I intuit what he is pointing towards. In the sense of meditation, I can stand by the teas and let my awareness turn inward as I ask the teas which one to drink. Along with my intellectual and experiential knowledge of which teas go well with hot or cold weather, or which teas are more yin or yang, I can pause in that embodied space and see what emerges. That's where I'm at anyway. I'll leave it to those who have gone further to talk from their experience.

And what about music? We can use the same process here as with tea selection. Don't just un-pause the iPod from its last outing. Tune in and see which music feels *right now*. What will go well with the tea you have just picked? What will balance your current mood? Or is it actually a day for silence? Again, go into the body and try to develop those Jedi powers. Turn off the rational computer and *Use the Force, Luke!* What music does the tea actually want to be drunk with? Notice if there is the tendency to avoid silent tea sessions. These are valuable too. Drinking tea is a good way of sort-of-doing-nothing. It is an excellent medium for being with uncomfortable emotions. There is something about the ritual and the warmth and the magic of tea that allows us to go further into this space than normal without getting overwhelmed, so *Steer to the deep!* and turn off the MP3s from time to time. I'll often sit down before I reach for the kettle and see if there are any issues that I need help resolving. I'm not advocating getting into a heavy inner-dialogue while you drink. Rather, notice what is there and acknowledge that it is an issue for you right now. Then let it go and trust in the tea. It's rather like dropping a pebble into a deep well. You can trust it will find its way to the bottom.

And finally, we can go and draw the water. For some of us, this will mean a trip to the sink or unscrewing a bottle of Evian. Not all of us are lucky enough to have an Yixing jar of fresh mountain water in our tea room. But how we approach our water can make a considerable difference to our tea. For a start, all water, even tap water benefits from sitting in a jar of nice clay for some time before we use it. If that jar is placed near some good vibes, like where we meditate, then all the better. This requires more preparation, of course, but it is really worth it. Like us, water thrives when it settles and mingles with boosting influences before the tea session begins. And besides, the best water will be at the top of a jar that has sat for a while, so we can draw it from there, if we give it sufficient time. We can also add some crystals to the jar or some old broken clay teapots, if their quality exceeds the clay of our jar. Again, we can use our Jedi powers; this time to infuse the water with love. At the Tea Sage Hut, we

sit with our hands on the Yixing pot and send our love and thanks into the water and ask it to perform whatever miracles each guest needs. As Eomoto has demonstrated, water crystals change into beautiful, shiny manifestations when they are infused with positive energy. So do we! This is why the positivity that we generate from mindfully preparing the tea space is so important.

So, let's pause until next time, kettle in hand. I will be back next month with some tips on the body, meditation and tea...



TEA WAYFARER

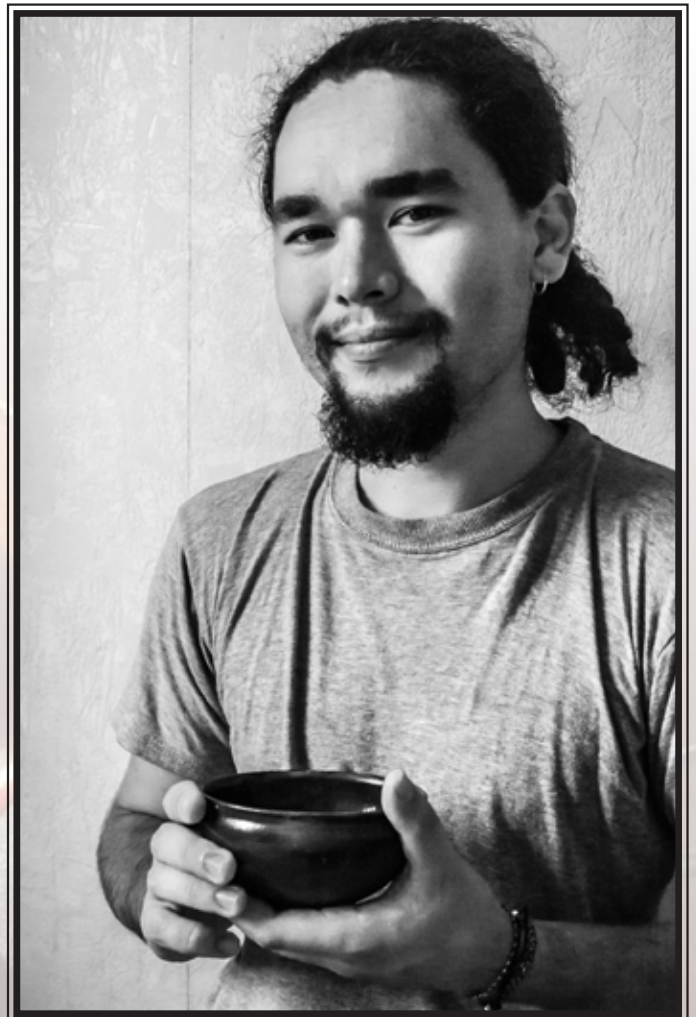
We plan to introduce one of the Global Tea Hut members to you each month in these newsletters. We hope that this helps us all get to know each other better. It's also to pay homage to the many manifestations that all this wonderful spirit and tea are becoming, as the tea is drunk and becomes human. The 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. This month we travel with Wu De to Russia so that we can introduce the brilliant and generous Ilyas Jetybayev. Though he lives in Russia, Ilyas is from Kazakhstan. He's another amazing member of this Hut that we hope you all have the honor of sharing tea with one day..

Hello, my name is Ilyas and I am Teaholic. Seriously, though, let me introduce myself: In between tea sessions, I am working as a postdoc in the Novosibirsk Biological Institute. I was born in Almaty, former capital of Kazakhstan—a beautiful country of nomadic people. Connection to tea in our culture is very strong. Tea is the first thing that is offered to guests in every house there. However, my first cup of Tea was in Novosibirsk, where I moved to study, at Novosibirsk State University. I don't know what it was that made me curious about tea, but as soon as I started to seek for it, doors opened. Somehow, friends of mine told me about a teashop two steps away from the university that had been there for a long time. So I bought my first *Bi Luo Chun* there (and over-brewed it terribly). Still, the first sip of that extremely bitter tea was like a breath of fresh air to me. Later, my first tea teacher appeared and it also happened effortlessly. In fact, everything in my life connected with Tea has happened by itself as it is truly my Way. It took seven years of ups and downs, periods of fun, love and some kitchen drinking before I met this Tradition. During that period, I always knew that Tea is much more than a beverage, though.

I remember when I first met Wu De at a workshop last year. It was two days of deep immersion in Tea, and I received a lot of messages, but most precious was that, “there is a Tradition”, and this Tradition resonates with me. That message changed my vision of Tea and my attitude to Tea. Wu De inspired and encouraged me to make a lot of changes. Cha Dao became much more than beautiful words. At the end of the workshop, Wu De said that we would drink tea together again one day. I had no doubts because I felt so too. (And we have, both in Taiwan and again in Russia!) I was really grateful to my brother Maximushka for inviting Wu De at that time.

I always wanted to have a Tea club: a space for tea people to gather together to appreciate tea. I've made several attempts to organize such a club, but always failed. So I kept dreaming about it, until the seeds that Wu De planted in my soul started to grow. In September of 2012, I finally started to serve tea in my apartment. I did not have enough resources to buy or rent a special place for tea gatherings, so hosting them in my home was

the only way to move forward towards my dream. Even a small step towards a dream is better than constantly whining about insufficient resources, I think. Since that time, my tea space has attracted many beautiful souls and we gather twice a week with rare exceptions. Since I joined GTH, I always have special GTH gatherings where we all drink the monthly tea together with all of you around the world. My tea space is open to everybody. Sharing Living Tea and holding space for people is a great joy and practice. Wherever I am I will keep serving Tea for sure! In case you pass by Novosibirsk and feel a little cold, I will gladly warm you with a cup of tea. Just write me on Facebook. Otherwise, know that even in the remote corners of the world—even in Siberia—you have a dear tea brother raising cups to your happiness and health!



The Global Tea Hut website has a forum, 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 a great video series online now. There are many videos about this tradition, tea brewing, the center and Wu De's travels and work. They are all very inspiring to watch. 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 all the time so check back!



There are currently 170 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) says that things are abundant nowadays so we should all live happily everafter, forever and ever! Membership will be limited to 250ish members!



If any of you are interested in seeing these newsletters in full 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 peek 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 may have to change all the shipping to unregistered post due to an inflation in the cost of Taiwanese shipping. We are probably going to experiment this month, and maybe the next. What this means is that you won't have to sign for GTH anymore; it will just be left on your door or in your mailbox. This may mean that some get lost, and we can't track them, so you will have to let us know if you don't get your GTH.



Wu De' is in LA this month. He will be doing workshops in Venice, Ojai and even a trip to the Hopi Reservation in Arizona. Joyce is also coming, making this trip extra special. If you are interested in participating contact Colin "The Hudinator" Hudon! (303-842-4660)



As you can see we are shifting our GTH services around: changing the format of these newsletters. (Hopefully you see this as improvement—we do!) We also had to switch envelopes, as the post office doesn't make the old ones anymore (but that means we can draw on the new ones). Please contact us or use the forums and let us know what you think!



Our center here in Miao Li, Tea Sage Hut, just got a new kitchen! As many of you know, this was a long time coming. The new kitchen is gorgeous, complete with a kitchen god, new cupboards, stone counters, a kuan Yin, and much more. Come over and share a meal!

www.globalteahut.org

www.teasagehut.org

www.the-leaf.org

Be happy!



Our Projects

Our center (Tea Sage Hut)

- ~~Expenses (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 storage “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 (Light Meets Life)

- ~~Mountain land (We got it! Check this one off)~~
- Building (we will need from between 1,000,000-2,000,000 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 need around 500 USD worth of equipment (contact us if you have some equipment to donate)
- We are also looking for alternative ways to better host/share our videos