



# Global Tea Hut

DECEMBER 2013





# 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](http://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](http://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](http://www.teasagehut.org)

## *Light Meets Life*

In December of 2012, 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.



# DECEMBER 2013

**I**n December, the world has turned dim, with our inner lights shining brighter than before. We find ourselves quieter, turned more inward, and our tea reflects this—sessions become quieter, softer and truer. This is a true practice, in harmony with Nature, which is becoming more and more Yin as the winter progresses, culminating in the solstice. More and more we turn to dark, aged teas and shou Puerh. We often boil teas, happy for the added warmth. At the center, we also switch from coconut-husk charcoal to the hardwood coal of the dragon eye (*long yen*) tree, which burns brighter and with a livelier flame that adds deeper heat to the water, a nice smell to the atmosphere as well as some added warmth.

In the lunar calendar, the eleventh month is called the “Winter Moon”. It is a time of retreat, as well as celebration of the Winter Solstice—the day when the sunlight is at its weakest. Yin is at its greatest on this day. There is therefore more of a movement inward. This is natural: people and animals spend more and more time indoors and travel less as the winter progresses. Inside, sequestered by Nature, it is a great time to practice more internal self-cultivation. The silence and tranquility of Nature encourages such work and helps lead us inward—the Yin energy of the earth supporting a quieter, more tranquil mind. The solstice is also a celebration of change, though, as we have reached the depth of Yin, which must also begin to recede—every subsequent day becomes more Yang from here on out...

Chinese people like to eat red bean soup for the Winter Solstice. Legend has it that a man's son died in a terrible accident on this day and his troubled spirit began to haunt people and make them sick every winter's Solstice. The man knew that his son hated red beans, and was afraid of them, so he taught the people to make this sweet soup every winter, chasing his son's spirit away. Without anyone to haunt, and with the prayers of his family, his son's soul finally found rest.

In the I Ching, two hexagrams are associated with the solstices. The 24th hexagram is the Winter Solstice. It is a single Yang line on the bottom, with five Yin lines above. It is called “Returning”. In the I Ching, the bottom line is the beginning and the top the end of the change, so this hexagram represents a situation almost completely in darkness (Yin), with a Yang line at

the “entrance”—light entering and returning to darkness, symbolizing the fact that days will only get lighter from here on. Winter solstice was seen as a time for rest and renewal. Nature is also dormant, resting and gathering strength. The sages interpreted this to mean that we also take it easy, gather our strength and return to health. Rest, care and forbearance are needed to move forward.

A big part of our renewal at this time of year is a reunion with our loved ones for the holidays. Spending time with your friends or family to celebrate this holiday season can be stressful or it can be a time of great ease, joy and renewal—deepening our love and connection to one another, and getting some much needed time together. This is a great opportunity to set down our busy schedules and work, take a break to really look at one another, making new memories with our loved ones and reminiscing the old. And don't forget, Tea can do wonders in bringing us together, healing wounds and finding connection in a heart space...

## *December Affirmation: What do I celebrate?*

*Nothing you acquire will be able to teach you how to celebrate. A million dollars won't show you how to celebrate; a million dollars is a reason to celebrate. Similarly, no experience—no trip or self-help book, no course or retreat—will show you how to celebrate. If you cannot celebrate what you already have, nothing you get will show you how. We must learn to celebrate the things that are already in our lives, if we are to celebrate when a new reason presents itself. If you cannot celebrate this breath, this sunny day or the newly fallen snow, you won't celebrate any windfall of money or an ecstatic experience (not for long, anyway). Ask yourself what you have to celebrate today. Remember when you were a child? Remember how easy it was to celebrate things? Children are always ready to celebrate (and so are puppies like Fiona). They will celebrate anything, even the color purple! This month, find your inner child. Rather than fighting grumpily the materialism of the holiday season, or anything else you don't like about it, rest in the spirit of celebration and bring a smile to the season—in the true spirit of the holidays! Be the change you want to see in the holidays!*





# YOUR TEA OF THE MONTH, DECEMBER 2013

*Spring 2012, Shou Puerh, Yong De, Yunnan*

**W**e humans have a bad habit of assuming that the categories and rational interpretations we make of the world somehow exist in the world itself. Of course, categorizing, analyzing and improving our lives is a huge part of how we have evolved, and not something to take lightly. Tea lovers are no different: often confusing what should help us clarify our understanding of different kinds of tea, and in the end only confusing ourselves.

It is important for our survival that we make quick, interpretive decisions. If I am walking down the street late at night in a foreign country and some rowdy men are coming from the other direction, it makes sense for me to cross the road. Such a decision dates back to when we were hominids in the grass, and learned—perhaps the hard way—that when the grass moves, you go back up the tree! It doesn't matter if it isn't a lion or just the wind. The men coming may just be happy because their football team just won, but I still cross the street. It is only natural for me to do so.

Where our problem arises is when we start to take our stereotypes, categories and analyses too seriously and view them as “real” or when this habit becomes too pronounced and we start making too many judgments based on artificial, and ultimately arbitrary, categories.

The ability to categorize the world should help us to first of all better understand Nature, and second to better communicate our understanding to others. Categories that fail in either of these ways are no longer useful, and should be abandoned for better ones. There's no use arguing about a mind-made category, for if it is causing too much debate it is no longer functioning as a rational clarifier or a communicative. And remember: our categories aren't real anyway!

You may be wondering what this discussion has to do with our tea of the month, but it does—very much so. This dysfunction is very true of the traditional six categories of tea. One of them confuses more than it clarifies, and requires too much extra explanation. For that reason, in my teaching, I always advocate a seventh, distinct category for Puerh tea.

Traditionally, Puerh tea is always put in the Black Tea category. As we have often discussed, ‘Red Tea’ is what is often mistakenly called ‘Black Tea’ in the West. Ordinarily, a name doesn't matter so much and we wouldn't even take the time to correct this age-old mistake, and most vendors don't. But in this case there is an important issue that a Chajin (tea person) will face if this

mistake isn't corrected: there is another genre of tea in China called “Black Tea”. So if you call Red Tea “Black”, then what do you call Black Tea? The problem began because early trade between Chinese and Europeans was limited to the ports, and most merchants/sailors didn't see the tea trees, farms or processing and learned what they knew in broken Pidgin English on the docks, and often from Chinese merchants who didn't care to correct them. Actually, Europeans used to call Oolong tea “Black Tea” as well, probably because it has the word “black” in the name (“Oolong” means “Black Dragon”).

Real Black Tea is characterized by post-production artificial fermentation. In other words, it is fermented with moisture, heat and bacteria after being processed. Now, as most of you will remember, there are two kinds of Puerh tea: Raw (Sheng) and Ripe (Shou). Shou Puerh is indeed a kind of Black Tea. In fact, the processing of Shou Puerh was based on years of research and experimentation based on Black Tea production. Sheng Puerh, however, is green and astringent when processed. It ages over time, slowly. A lot of tea authors just lump Sheng and Shou into the category of Black Tea because it is all fermented tea, whether naturally or artificially. And that system worked twenty years ago when everyone who drank Puerh tea only drank Shou or at least aged (and therefore fully fermented) Sheng. At that time, no one was drinking young, green Sheng Puerh. Aged Puerh is better, and wasn't so expensive in those days. Also, most Chinese people have cold bodies (“cold” in the Chinese medicine sense, not temperature) so too much young Sheng Puerh, which is cool in nature, is not good for them. Since almost all the Puerh consumed in those days was either dark, aged, fermented Sheng or artificially fermented (and also dark) Shou Puerh, it made sense to categorize Puerh as a Black Tea. It no longer does, though.

Nowadays, we consume a lot of young Sheng, Chinese and foreigner alike. Aged Sheng is very expensive, and though better, there is still a different kind of magic in drinking a young, brisk and green Sheng Puerh. And since Sheng Puerh is produced in much larger volume than Shou, and therefore represents the greater portion of Puerh tea, and since it is also the older, more traditional kind of Puerh, it consequently should no longer be put in the category of Black Tea. Why not give this unique category of tea its own place, especially if clarity and communication are the goals of categorization in the first place?

If we are too caught in our categories, or even the ability to categorize itself, we are lost in delusion.



Categorizing is like holding a net up between us and the world, using the squares to count and compare the size of mountains. But the squares are not a part of the mountains themselves, and are only useful for clarifying our understanding of the mountains, or communicating said understanding to others. This can't be stated enough. So, herald the category of "Puerh Tea", distinct enough from other kinds of tea to warrant its own category!

In the sixties, research on Shou Puerh began. Most books record 1972 as the beginning of Shou tea, as that was the time the major factories in Yunnan were licensed by the government to begin production. Before that, however, several experimental batches were made. The Puerh tea industry wanted to find a way to artificially mimic the many years it takes to ferment Sheng Puerh to a dark, rich and amazingly medicinal brew. They thought they could use modern science to speed the process up, which was of course impossible. What they did succeed in doing, was to create a new genre of Puerh tea—one that should be evaluated on its own terms. Comparing Shou Puerh to Sheng (aged or new) is pointless.

Most of the research that went into developing Shou processing came from Liu Bao, a Black Tea from

Guangxi. Through research and experimentation, the artificial fermentation process was tweaked to suit Puerh. Puerh is picked, withered, fried (*sa cheen*) to arrest oxidation, rolled to break down the cells and shape the tea and then dried in the sun. The partial frying (*sa cheen*) and the sun drying are particular to Puerh tea. Since the tea is only partially fried, many of the green enzymes that make tea bitter are still present, and this helps the tea to ferment post production. Also, Puerh tea trees grow in a vibrant, humid rainforest in Yunnan so the leaves are covered in bacteria and molds even before they are picked. These microorganisms have an ancient and profound relationship with Puerh tea, which is one the main reasons it ferments so much better than any other kind of tea.

To make Shou Puerh, the raw tea (*mao cha*) from the farm, which has gone through the process stated above, is then piled in a method called "wo dui". The piled tea is moistened and covered with a thermal blanket. Sometimes bacteria is introduced from previous batches of Shou Puerh production. The heat and moisture under the blanket speed up fermentation. The pile is occasionally stirred as it ferments for anywhere



## Tea of the Month

from one month to two, with most Shou fermented for 45 days. If the tea is fully fermented it will be darker, but often have a slightly “pondy”, ammonia taste that will mellow over time. If the fermentation is stopped earlier, the tea will still be greener and therefore have the potential to age, though it won’t be as good for immediate consumption. Obviously, this artificial fermentation process is very difficult, and requires a tremendous amount of skill, as well as constant monitoring of hygiene and other factors, since any fermentation process can potentially be unhealthy if the wrong microorganisms start thriving in the culture.

### Our Tea of the Month

This Shou tea from the Yong De Zi Yu tea factory has become one of our favorite Ripe Puerh teas. Yong De Zi Yu tea factory is one of our favorites. They produce tea in the “Five Mountain” area of Lincang that is the origin of all tea in the world. Though there is some debate as to where tea first arose, and many regions that would like to lay claim to this, we have found the Five Mountains to be older and more deeply connected to Tea than the other regions that make this claim. The Five Mountains are: Min Feng, Mang Fei, Wu Jia Zhai, Da Xue Shan, and Mei Zi Qing. Our Shou is a blend from several of these mountains.

Our tea of the month has been certified organic by the China Organic Food Certification Center (COF-CC). This tea is also special because instead of using inferior summer harvest Puerh for fermentation, first flush spring material was used. Shou tea is cheaper than Sheng, so inferior raw materials are almost always used. It is rare to encounter a Shou tea made of such awesome spring-harvested tea, as it means the Shou cake has to be sold at the same price as the Sheng. The fermentation of these cakes occurred in 2011, when the tea was harvested, but the tea was pressed in 2012.

This Shou tea is creamy and delicious and will warm you up this winter season. It has spicy notes and a warm, rising Yang Qi that then later descends and grounds you. Our gift this month is some organic orange peels. If you are in a festive mood, invite some friends over and boil and/or steep this Shou with just a few orange peels for a more delicious and generally grounding brew. You will find your respiratory and immune system activated by the combination. What a great way to spend some time with the people you love!

*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.*









# LANDSCAPING YOUR CHAXI

Article by Shane “McPhane” Marrs

In this Tradition there are Four Pillars upon which our tea practice is founded, three of which we have dedicated space to in the form of tearooms at our center in Miaoli. Upon entering the Tea Sage Hut, you'll first notice our main tea drinking space, representing the second pillar: Shamans and Daoist Hermits. Here, while serving tea, we pay homage to the tea sages of old, those who retreated to mountains and forests and who drank tea as a healing medicine long before She became a beverage, commodity or art. Then there is the Zen tearoom, representing the third pillar: *Dhyana* (meditation). This space acknowledges the sacred aspect of farming tea, first cultivated by the Zen monks of China and later preserved and enhanced by the Zen monks of Japan and Korea. Here, in this meditation space, we share tea more ceremonially. Lastly, there is the gongfu tearoom, representing the fourth pillar: gongfu tea. This pillar, and our tearoom, recognizes that tea is also about mastery, sensitivity and highly refined tea brewing skills. In this space we share tea in small company, using more modern methods of skillfully brewing tea as developed in Southern China. In all of these spaces the intention remains the same: to share the Spirit of the Leaf while promoting an awakening of harmony through Tea, without asking anything in return.

The first pillar is Great Nature. Of course, we must reflect on the fact that tea trees have grown in Nature for thousands a million years—long before encountering the Divine Farmer, Shen Nong. One reason we don't have a specific space for the first pillar is because Nature is indeed great, vast and everywhere! Rather than confining and defining a space representative of Nature, we can simply touch our hands together, or walk out the door and into the nearest bamboo grove or tree trove. In one sense, the Spirit of Great Nature is rooted in our tea space. The clothes we wear, the chairs we sit upon, the tea table and all *chaxi* (“tea stage”) elements are processes of Nature in seemingly static form. Separation from Nature is only an illusion. In that sense, there is no way to build upon or be removed from Nature at the tea table. This notion alone is beautiful. And yet, there are ways in which to incorporate components of Nature into our *chaxi*; or rather, components that remind us that everything *is* Nature.

While there are many such examples, there is one in particular that we often landscape into our *chaxi*: the bonsai, or small potted plant to use a more general term. Simply incorporating a smaller version of something

found in Nature is both appealing to the senses and adds a tangible living energy to the overall atmosphere of your tea space. It can blend in with the theme of your *chaxi*, highlight a particular color scheme, or cast its miniature shadow over an even smaller resting statue of a Buddha, bodhisattva, tea sage or the like. The more apparent living quality found in small potted plants also reminds us that all “objects” are also alive and in some state of growth or decline. So too, the teaware, cloth runner, wooden table, charcoal or flame, and especially the water are all alive, receptive to our consciousness and will. Orienting yourself in this way at the tea table can change your whole perspective on things, and bonsai highlight that shift beautifully.

We are lucky enough living in Taiwan to have access to miniature bonsai, a mini version of a small potted plant! We have one ten-year-old tree that fits roughly in the palm of your hand. Others grow on crag-like rocks, nestled in their tiny planting pots. Root systems undulate this way and that, crowns convolute in human-aided spirals towards the light. So grand, they stand in such small forms. Almost as if growing right out from the wood of our tea table, these tiny trees spring forth. Though their trunks, root systems and crowns are scaled down proportionately, there is something grand about their presence: the way they occupy space, the crooked curvature of their limbs, etc. They represent something much greater than the volume of space they fill. They inspire and act as a living, breathing symbol of our constant connection with Nature.

Like any element of your *chaxi*, the presence and energy of your small potted plant ebbs and flows. Celebrate it, consume and integrate its message, be grateful, and then change the landscape once again along with the rest of your *chaxi*. Meanwhile, you always have the added bonus of tending to the small potted plant until its next “season” arises. This is actually easier said than done; it can be quite challenging (in my amateur experience) to properly care for small potted plants, unless you naturally have a green-thumb or a disposition towards communicating with plants (or possibly they just need more water, as I learned the hard way...). Ideally, you might have a large variety of potted plants, bought or grown over the years, rotating them in and out with each new *chaxi*.

Of course, they are not always necessary and you might not have such easy access to buying or growing bonsai. Taiwan happens to be a place where growing bonsai is passed down from generation to generation, so there is an abundance of small potted plants available.





In lieu of these miniature landscapes, you can start to get creative, incorporating your own floral arrangements, small bodies of water, dried flowers or leaves, and other such examples of natural elements at the tea table. Keep things simple and seasonal. You'd be surprised what you might find right out your front door which when gathered and displayed makes for a balanced and beautiful *chaxi*. Inviting small potted plants or other elements of Nature into your tea space is also a literal expression of the old Chinese saying, "Tea brings Nature to society." Less is more; even a single flower can shift or balance the energy of your entire layout. It being autumn now, perhaps a dried amber leaf or two might delight you, your guests and Tea.

In any case, Nature is inherent in all that we do, in all the *chaxi* we create. Tea lovers have traditionally always been in favor of natural elements at the tea table, and in particular, small potted plants. There has been a great appreciation for them in our tea space as well. Be-

cause the illusion of disconnection with Nature is simply a matter of perspective, the more reminders we have, such as the bonsai, which shift our perspective towards a dialogue with Nature, the better.

*Tea is best when enjoyed in pleasant surroundings, whether indoors or out, where the atmosphere is tranquil, the setting harmonious.*

—**John Blofeld**





# GONGFU TEA TIPS

## December 2013

Last month we discussed that it is very important to have experiential understanding of how and why you brew tea in a certain way, at least where gongfu tea is concerned. “Gongfu” means mastery. It means doing things with great skill—in harmony with the Way they want to be done. The true artist must be one with the medium in order to achieve mastery. A great ballerina once said that in the best performances there was no music and no her—only dance. Similarly, the tea brewer should be just another aspect of the process, as natural as the growth of the tea itself. The tea grows in harmony with the farmer (ideally), who then processes it in a way that enhances its nature. All of this is one movement, and our brewing shouldn’t intrude on this natural process—from seed to cup—but rather be a natural extension of it. If we are to achieve such mastery, our skills will have to be a part of us. We can’t have a formula or a to-do list in brewing. It must be in our hands.

If our brewing is to be a part of us, in our hands, so that we could do it in our sleep, then we will have to experiment. We will have to know the history of various brewing methods, or aspects thereof, as well as teaware. When and why was this instrument introduced and what purpose does it actually serve? We have to ask this question and more, and then we have to experiment often so that the differences are experiential, so that we know firsthand what methodology is more in harmony with the tea(s) we are brewing. We shouldn’t take things on blind faith, or our tea brewing will be based on intellectual understanding alone. Always do the experiments and know with the body. “Tasting is believing,” Master Lin always says.

We promised that we would give an example of this last month. The perfect example is the pitcher, called either a “*cha hai*” or “*gong bei* (fairness cup)” in Chinese. Knowing the history of this instrument and what it does, and does not do, helps us to make a wise decision if/when to use one. Actually, the pitcher isn’t an aspect of traditional gongfu tea. It isn’t even Chinese. The pitcher was invented in Britain and was originally the creamer for milk. In the 1980s, a Taiwanese potter thought the pitcher would be more convenient and adapted it to Chinese gongfu tea.

As we mentioned last month, most of the adaptations in modern tea service have been made out of what someone has perceived to be quicker and more convenient, but such changes aren’t always in harmony with the spirit of tea, and don’t always lead to mastery. Sometimes when you rely too much on the implements to do the work for you, you can’t reach mastery—or at least do so much more slowly. The reason the pitcher is often called a “fairness cup (*gong bei*)” is

that the liquor that comes out at the beginning of the pot is not the same consistency as that which comes out at the end. The idea is that the tea is then an equal consistency for all the guests when you first put it into a pitcher. However, if you experiment you will see that this only works if you pour right away. If you let the tea sit in the pitcher for any length of time, the tea once again separates, with the heavier liquor sinking to the bottom. Furthermore, the same principal holds true in traditional gongfu tea, which divvies out the tea from cup to cup without a pitcher—the ideal in this method is also to make each cup equal in amount and consistency. The difference is that moving around from cup to cup in the traditional way requires skill, it requires gongfu! To pour the contents of the teapot into a pitcher requires very little skill, but moving from cup to cup and leaving each one equal requires a lot of practice—mastery, one might say.

In the most basic gongfu experiment, which we have repeated here twice, you take three equal cups and fill the first with tea; then you dump half of that in the second cup, and half of that into the third. Then you taste the three cups together, noticing the changes from cup to cup. You will see that each cup is different. There is a progressive loss as the tea touches more surfaces. Now, you can do a version of this with a pitcher:

To do this experiment, you will need two identical cups, a teapot and a pitcher. Place a cup and the pitcher side by side and pour back and forth from the teapot into one of the cups and the pitcher. Then pour the liquor in the pitcher into the second cup. You now have two cups of tea, one in which the liquor was poured directly and a second which went from the pitcher to the cup. Taste them side-by-side. How are they different? Is one better? If so, how is it better?

That deals with the external aspects of the pitcher, but what about internally? On the spiritual level, the coming and going of the cups to the center of the tea space is the breath of the tea ceremony. It represents the truth of our existence: we are one, but we are also apart. Our energies are in the cups we use, and having them mingle together in the center of the table brings us together.

The unity in this practice is apparent. Over thousands of tea sessions we have observed with great consistency (not 100%, but almost) that when a pitcher is used, and the tea thereby divvied out to the guests separately, conversations tend to break up—people start having many conversations, in other words. However, when the cups return to the center every steeping, in the traditional way, we find the whole table united in one, single conversation. There are exceptions to this, of course, but this is a trend. And having one time/one





space together is valuable indeed, and makes our tea gatherings so much more rewarding.

The reason for the difference is obvious: everyone's attention is repeatedly drawn to the center of the table. They follow the tea as it breathes in and out, rather than having it brought to them, separate and distinct throughout the ceremony.

This is not to say that we don't ever use a pitcher, we do. A pitcher can be nice in certain situations, like when you have a large group sitting around a bigger, square table and bringing the cups in and out would be extremely inconven-

ient, or when serving gongfu tea to larger groups. But understanding the history of the pitcher as well as its function, apparent and true, helps one to understand when to use it and when not to. But don't take our word for it. *Do the experiments!*





# ALWAYS BREWING TEA

*Article by Kaiya*

**F**or those of you unfamiliar with American festivals, November is the month of our Thanksgiving holiday, when we take a day to eat a big meal with our families and count our blessings. This year, Wu De reminded us of something that touched me deeply: in a world where so many lives are filled with sickness and pain, the greatest honor we can pay them is to celebrate our comfort and health as often as possible. I realized in that moment that I do not pay you that honor often enough. I often forget what a miracle this Global Tea Hut is, making our life and service possible. If I spent every minute of the day in a constant state of gratitude for the chance to share this tea with you, it would be a life well-lived. So in the spirit of the season, I'd like to thank all of you for being such an integral part of the abundance here. It is an endlessly resounding affirmation that fills not only this center but all of my heart with joy and energy. I then pour that into the bowls of you and countless other travelers who come this way. Knowing you are out there reminds me to stay true to my path, work hard with intention, and steadily grow through my struggles. How blessed I am to have this incredible opportunity to share and be shared with. I look forward to meeting you for the first time, or sitting down together once again.

Tea comes to our assistance when we find any quality in ourselves that is in need of cultivation. There is a saying in this tradition that we are “always making tea”. I recall how strange that sounded when I first arrived. I remember how at that time, the entire reason to make tea was to drink tea. In the same way, I cooked so that I could eat, I cleaned so that I could live in a clean house, I worked so that I could have money, and so on... All the time spent and all the work done leading up to those goals were merely the means to the end, something to get over with as quickly as possible in order to “arrive”. It's no surprise then, that when I heard the saying, it simply passed through me in a brief blip of confusion.

The mistake in this attitude is that the tea is only in the mouth for a second, my house is only clean for a day, the money is soon spent, and the food is a feeling of fullness, its flavors a memory. In relating to the moments of my life in such a way, I valued only a tiny fraction of my life, and took all the rest of it for granted. But imagine the savor with which a starving person would look in that refrigerator. Or the reverence a homeless person would feel sweeping the floor of their first home. There is nothing in my life that wouldn't be a cause for deep joy to someone in this world; somewhere someone would sing praises for the rest of their

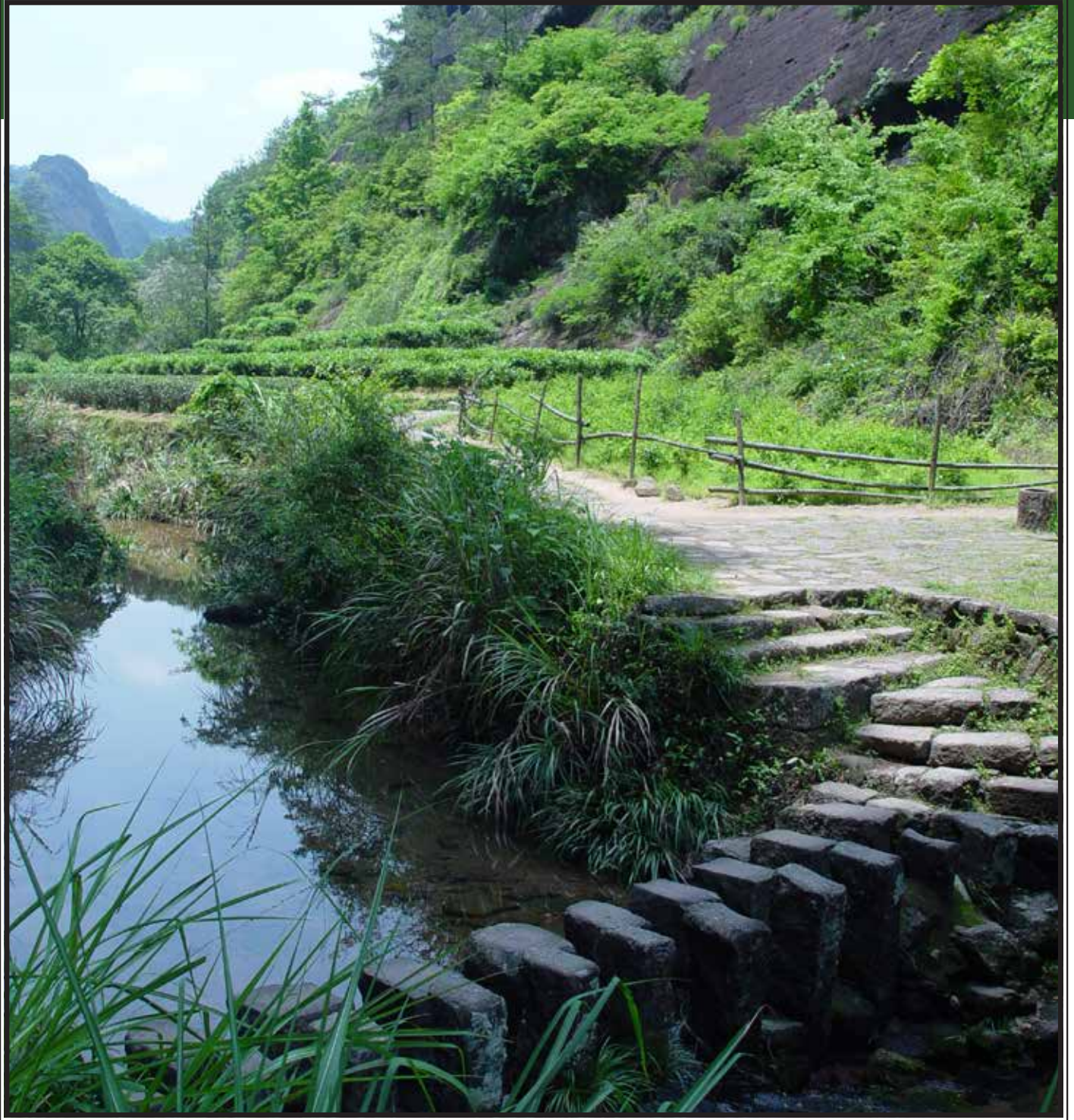
life if given my eyes, my ears, my health, or this bowl of tea to drink. Even the physical pain in my bad shoulder would be greatly valued by a man with no arm, and he would be grateful the rest of his life for that pain. I realize now what a spoiled brat I am when I forget gratitude itself.

Not long ago, I saw that I had finally made some real progress in this. We are often told that Cha Dao is eighty percent cleaning, both inner and outer. And so, when I first began this tea journey, I did find myself cleaning more and more, meditating, and becoming increasingly scrutinizing, particularly when it came to my tea space, and eventually the whole house. Over time, I began to see that the whole house was tea space. After a year, I found that I could no longer in good conscience sit down and begin tea until the space was clean. It was a necessary step. I preferred to sit down and drink the tea over the cleaning, and “necessary” isn't a word I reserved for the things I love.

Later, I remember practicing to work without thought, simply observing sensations and breath as much as I could while cleaning. As I improved, I found I no longer viewed the cleaning as a step at all, but rather as a part of the process of making tea, enjoyable in and of itself. The idea of “always making tea” didn't sound so strange anymore. But this was more of a realization of the mind than an actualization of the spirit. The sense of trying to “get to the tea” was still in the energy and thoughts that arose in between my moments of awareness, especially if there wasn't a lot of time. Those thoughts were evidence that I still had a lot of internal cleaning to do. I couldn't just clean the house and be okay with the possibility that there might not be time for tea afterwards. The act of drinking still held more importance, more savor, in my mind, than any of the rest of the process.

Recently, without any intention on my part, something changed. I was dusting the table before changing the *chaxi*, and I realized I was relating to this moment in exactly the same way as the moment of lifting the tea to my mouth for a drink. There was no hint of trying to get anywhere, finish anything, or the seeds of dissatisfaction with certain results. I had already started to drink tea, so how to treat this moment as a means to the end of drinking tea? Obviously, I am doing a poor job trying to put something wordless into words. I don't know what to say other than that I was fully drinking tea in that moment, and for the first time, after these years of practice, the phrase of “always drinking tea” crossed the border from the intellectual to the actual. There just wasn't anything about it that felt like this act was any different than the act of drinking tea. It's a feeling that has stayed with me and occurs more and more often as time goes on.





Of course, I still have a really long way to go. I feel this is only the first step. All the work up to now was searching for my footing, shifting my balance, adjusting my pack, reading the map, and finding the beginning of the path. Having expanded my sense of drinking tea from the tea table to cleaning the space around the tea table isn't very far. It also could extend into grocery shopping, driving my scooter, teaching English, showering before bed, or waking in the morning. But it doesn't yet, not to the same degree. And as I paid homage to in the beginning of this article, it must extend that far, lest I dishonor all of you, as well as all those who are not as fortunate as I am—those who would never treat these moments with anything less than reverence and

gratitude. May I learn to infuse all my acts with harmony, with reverence, and purity. May they lead to and arise from stillness. May they all be tea!

Wu De often reminds us that there isn't any guarantee that walking around with a lightning rod in your hand will get you struck by lightning. Lots of people get struck by lightning even without lightning rods, but carrying one increases the chances. One person might drink a single bowl and be struck immediately with a wisdom and insight of the deepest kind. (I've seen it happen.) Another person might have to follow all the "rules" and work hard for years before achieving the same. It's beautiful to know that we all live in a universe that contains this kind of

## *Always Brewing Tea*

Grace, but it's also good to approach our tea with some kind of intention as often as possible for the best results.

A good point of entry into beginning to actualize "every moment making tea" is boiling the water. It's a bit more directly, obviously involved in the tea preparation than cleaning the tea space is, so this might work better or be easier at first. The boiling of the water for tea was traditionally a time of meditation and stillness. Most of us are probably more familiar with the saying "a watched pot never boils." This speaks to the dis-ease of the mind as it waits impatiently to get to the moment it wants more than this moment. When boiling the water, in order to make tea, impatience arises. I am not boiling the water, I am waiting for the water to boil, so that I can get on to the next thing! The mind wants the water to be boiled right away so that tea drinking can begin. It wants to check the kettle again and again, so as not to "waste" its time. The irony!

Often, we make tea for large groups of people, or perhaps visitors who are intensely uncomfortable with silence. Tea is the perfect bridge between the meditative mind and the uncomfortable one, as it appears to offer an uncomfortable mind something to "do" while coaxing it into the place where the need to do anything is forgotten. We usually use two kettles, and keep a constant stream of water and tea flowing through the pot. Guests then ask if they "need" two kettles as well. My advice is to have two kettles to be prepared for every situation. But, taking the time to drink tea with only one can be a great practice.

When I drink tea alone or with one or two tea friends, I often use only one kettle. I approach the session with the intention to not treat the moments waiting for the water to boil as a means to an end of drinking tea. Instead, I simply sit with the sensations of the heat of the kettle nearby, the vibrations in the handle, the progression of sounds that it makes, or contemplating the connection between this act of boiling the water and the lifting of the bowl to my lips. All the actions in this session are one continuous process, and every one is equally deserving of my reverence and gratitude. None is less or more. I am so fortunate right now to be sitting here, feeling the warmth of this kettle, listening to the 'wind sighing in the pines'.

Every act of every day is a part of the process of making tea. Just as tea is a part of the process of all of those acts as well. Where is the separation? And beyond this it is important to see that these acts are all a part of the process of life itself, none of them are a means to an end. Every one of them is already the point, a potential entry point into gratitude for the life they all elicit in us. There is no moment in this life when we are more alive than another. It is a terrible waste of life to discard any moment in order to get more quickly to another, equally alive moment.

Personal growth is the same; it is a process. The way we relate to the moments in our lives determines the outcome. Lightning strikes from time to time and we grow whether we meant to or not. But growth is the reason we are alive, so why leave it to chance? Approach tea with intention, and you will find that where the acts of each day

felt totally separate from the tea, they have now become preludes to tea, and then finally that they've become tea. Before long, these simple moments of practice and intention sitting at the tea table add up and overflow into the rest of the day.

Finally, I have come to see that I owe it not only to you and those less fortunate than me, but perhaps most of all I owe it to myself. Or rather that I can't have one without the other. After all, how can I hope to increase the happiness and healthiness of this world if I am not happy or healthy myself? How can I be, if I am taking for granted that which so many would be so grateful for? How can I sit upright at my death and say farewell to this world and all the people I love knowing that I did not make the most of our time together? Just as all of life is tea, and all tea is life, so too is your happiness my happiness, your health my health. We are in this together. For that I am deeply grateful.









# Light Meets Life

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It is very important to us that we make this new center a global vision—that it is *our* vision! We are building a free tea center/school because we believe in it, and also because we believe that it is wanted and needed in the world. The hundreds of guests we have here every year, and the way their lives are changed, is testament to that need. We hope to continue to provide life-changing experiences for more and more people, as well as free lessons in Cha Dao, meditation and self-cultivation. We also hope to be an example for other intentional communities, establishing how to create authentic communal life and do so sustainably, and in harmony with Nature. These goals are valuable, indeed. The world hasn't seen a free tea center in quite some time, and with the way wisdom moves nowadays ours will be even more abundant than the old schools.

These are our aims, simply: community, Cha Dao, meditation and sustainability. We strive to awaken harmony through tea: harmony with Nature, self and others.

We want this to be your vision, too. So many of you have shared time here at the Tea Sage Hut and know firsthand what we do, while others of you are still on the way (we know you'll get here eventually). Since this center belongs to all of us, and it is our job to build it and maintain it for future tea lovers, it is important to us that we be frank, open and honest with all of you (our tea community) about what we're discussing for the future and why.

We have been having a lot of Light Meets Life discussions recently, and we wanted to fill you all in so that

you can add any input, advice or suggestions; and so that you know that we are responsible stewards of your donations—that we are working hard to make this common vision a reality. More and more discussions have been motivated recently because we can feel the energy at the Tea Sage Hut increasing all the time, and we can see that soon we won't have the structure to contain it. It would be a real shame if we had to have reservations and a waiting list at the Hut. It would make us cry to turn anyone away. So far that isn't a problem, but it could be if we don't continue working towards making Light Meets Life a reality.

Another reason we have been talking and making plans recently is that our advisors have told us that the number one problem growing organizations face is that they don't have enough foresight: they aren't thinking ahead and putting structures in place to handle greater energy when it comes. We want to be ready for growth, having enough space to put the greater abundance in when it arrives, so that it is celebrated.

One of the problems we have with all our current models of getting the money and building the new center is that they depend too much on Fate. While we know that some Fate will be involved no matter what, it is hard to sit around and talk, talk and more talk—doing nothing—while we wait for a donor(s) to show up and give us the money to build. The plan of waiting for donor(s) isn't much of a plan at all. We want a Plan B that is based on





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our own hard work, and that has a light at the end of the tunnel—a success that we can see, even if dimly.

Because we want to have a plan that doesn't involve a few donors giving us millions of dollars, we are currently discussing lifting the cap on Global Tea Hut. This has its positives and negatives. From the beginning we have often said that we would limit GTH, because we want it to stay personal and intimate. We still feel that way. What is driving us to question that and think about compromising is that GTH could potentially be what builds our new center. Remember, as of now these are just discussions. Nothing has been decided. And if you have any input on this issue, please post it on the forums or send us an email. The question, put simply, is: Would you be willing to lose some of the intimacy and personal touches in Global Tea Hut if it meant building the new center?

What does 'losing personal touches' mean? We aren't sure, to be honest. It may mean less handwriting on the packages. It may not. We guess it would depend on how many helping hands we had. Of course, GTH would still be a newsletter, Living Tea or Organic plantation tea and a gift. We are uncompromising on that front.

Most of the people we have talked to so far have enthusiastically said they would love for GTH to fund the new center, and some have even commented that it would be way better energetically if the center was built by all of us together, rather than one or a few donors.

That brings us to the second main point, which is this: If we do decide to lift the cap on GTH and go from hundreds of members to one or two thousand, would you all be willing to help spread the word so that we could do that more quickly? If this or any of these issues are things you feel opposed to, enthusiastic about or anywhere in the middle, please let us know. Now is the time to make yourselves heard. *We want to hear from you!*

[\(Contact us\)](#)

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## TEA AS ART: PART II

*Article by Lindsey Goodwin*

In last month's newsletter, I discussed ways in which the process of making art and the process of serving Tea are one and the same. This month, I'd like to shift my focus somewhat to address how the process of creation can elevate the act of serving Tea from the aesthetic and conceptual domains into the spiritual realm.

While art and the spiritual have long overlapped, becoming one, becoming two, merging and splitting again and again over the millennia since the earliest of cave paintings and carvings, this is a time in which mainstream societies typically view art and spirituality as two separate arenas. However, art still remains one of the primary ways in which people connect to the Divine, and through Tea and a variety of other media, there is a strong potential to reunite the spiritual and the artistic.

This reunification holds the potential for enormous societal and spiritual growth around the world. This is especially true now, when codified religions benefit people and societies less and less, and an increasing number of people are seeking a more personal (and, non-dualistically, a more universal) approach to the Divine. Today, more than ever, spiritual art has the power to shift our focus from the transient, material and conceptual worlds to the Source, to infinite love and to ultimate reality through mystical experiences and transformative works. Tea as art is no exception, and as an interactive, time-based medium it holds extraordinary potential for initiating powerful shifts in consciousness.

From my current perspective, I believe that there are three main methods in which Tea servers (and artists of all kinds, for that matter) can elevate their art into the spiritual realm. The first is setting intention. The second is self-cultivation. And the third is effectively transmitting the inherent wisdom and love of Tea, of Life and of the Divine.

One note before I proceed: Although I have written this article with Tea as the focus, these words are not meant to exclude, and for the most part they can be applied to everything from painting and calligraphy to dance and music. Whatever your art forms may be, it is my wish that these words help you along your path toward realizing your artistic visions, as well as toward a personal and universal healing through art.

### *Intention*

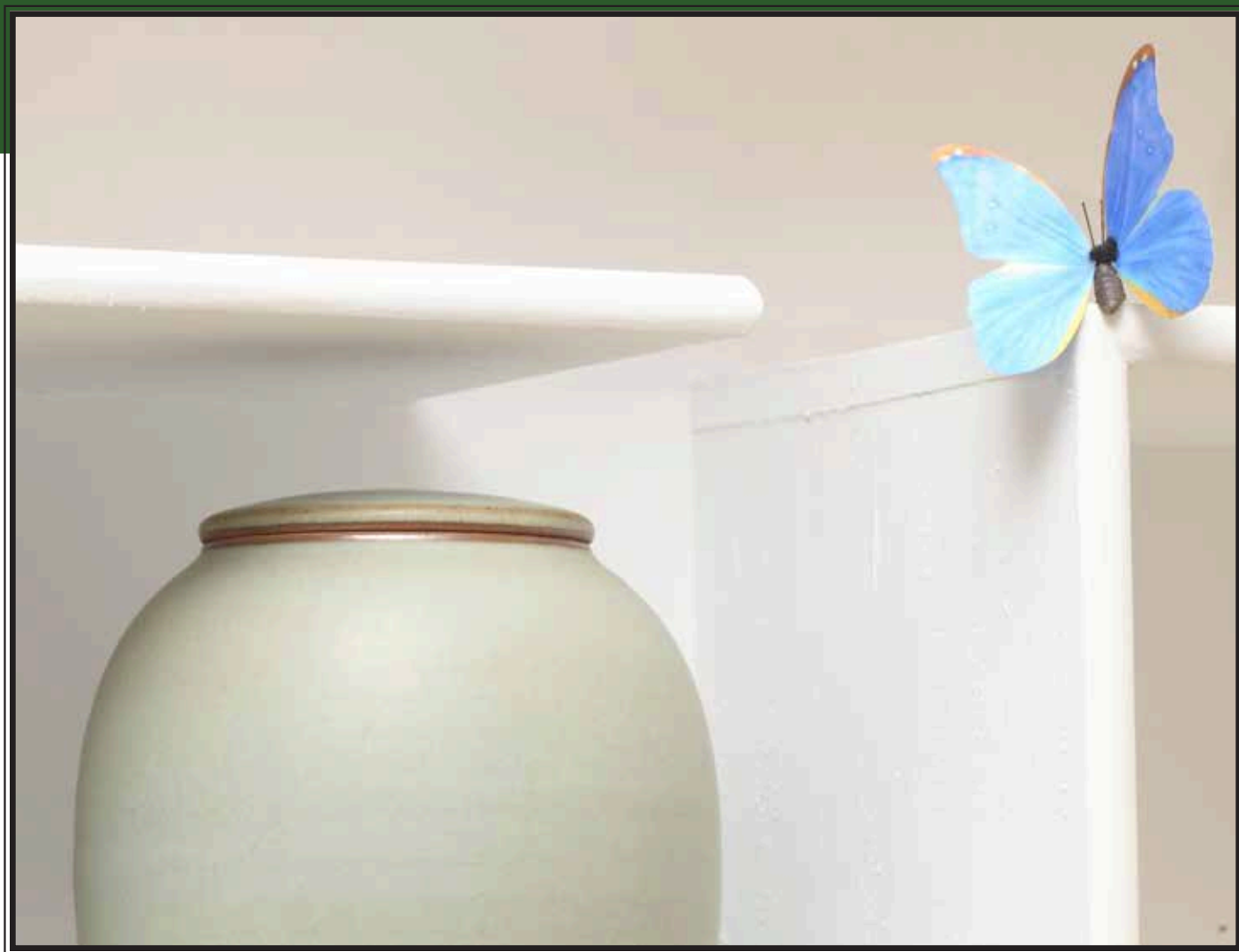
As with any spiritual practice, setting an altruistic intention in serving Tea leads to advancement, while the presence of a selfish intention or the absence of any clear intention leads to less inspired and inspiring results.

Self-serving intentions cannot lead to enlightenment and cannot result in the highest of art forms, nor can they result in transcendent Tea sessions. If your intention is to impress others, earn money or otherwise work on an egoic level, then your practice will automatically be stunted. You could think of this as instant karma, or as the drying up of a carelessly used spring, but no matter how you think of it (or avoid thinking of it!) the result is the same—there is unavoidable diminishment in the quality and growth of your practice as the creative spirit which once nourished you withers away into dust. In popular culture, there have been many examples of artists (musicians in particular) who have experienced this kind of loss of creativity, and it often ends in tragic results. With Tea, the pressure to serve Tea extraordinarily well (or in a way that is appealing to the masses) is not as high as it is in certain other art forms, so results may be less extreme for Tea people who lose their way. Still, the impact is there, and it is a small tragedy for all those who remain untouched by the spirit of Tea as a result.

A lack of intention creates its own limitations in the creative process of serving Tea. If you do not know why you serve Tea, then how will you know the best ways in which to serve Tea? Basic questions, such as which teaware to use and which teas to select, become difficult to answer, and are too often answered based on flimsy reasoning or emotional attachments rather than on deep truth and wisdom. This is the kind of Tea serving that lacks any real drive beyond the superficial, and which stifles genuine improvement in skill and wisdom surrounding Tea. To me, this is the sadder of the two unskillful approaches to intention in one's practice, as it echoes the Socratic message that "an unexamined life is not worth living." When drinking Tea as a mere beverage in this way, most of what could be recognized in Her (the wisdom, the deeper beauty, etc.) is lost... poured down the drain, so to speak.

Setting a clear intention in serving Tea can elevate your tea sessions tremendously. For some, this could be an intention that spans all sessions and all Life, such as the Buddhist intention to work for the happiness, peace and liberation of all beings. Or it could mean more specific intentions for each unique tea session, such as a bringing about of peace, connection or healing for a given group or situation. Any of these intentions guides each step of the creative process behind serving Tea and increases the





frequency of the entire session (and perhaps even the lives of its participants far beyond the session).

Regardless of your intentions, it is important that you not become attached to results during the process of serving Tea. Setting intention is not about a craving for something in particular to arise. Getting attached to specific results (especially results which require other people to change) is a doomed endeavor. Instead, setting an intention and then allowing space for whatever arises can lead to deep transformation for you and your guests, especially if you focus on charging your tea with the energy of transformation. Setting intention for a tea session is about developing an expectation of a positive and meaningful tea session without defining, limiting or otherwise preconceiving the exact forms that positivity and meaning will take. For example, you could ask the Divine to fill your tea session with peace without expecting silence, wisdom without expecting speech, or healing without expecting a specific improvement in health. Setting any one of these intentions is a catalyst for change, yet it does not involve any delusions of controlling the uncontrollable and it makes space for the universe to find the best path to beauty and truth through transformation. (I assure you that the universe is much better at this than we are!)

## *Cultivation*

A successful work of sacred art is an adroit messenger of wisdom. The sending of this message is Transmission, which I'll address later. For now, let's talk about successful work and wisdom, and what they mean to the process of creation.

Honing your craft and cultivating wisdom both take work, and lots of it. Certainly, there is the building of technical skill, which is unique for each medium and each artist. But beyond the perfection of pouring from your Yixing pot or hitting the chords just right on your instrument of choice or getting your use of color down pat, there are certain lines between skill and wisdom which get blurry as one refines technical skill to a high degree. One of these is what artist Alex Grey calls the "difference between looking and seeing." He writes, "Seeing the subject inquires, motivates, determines every aesthetic decision and leads to a recognition of meaning." In my own experience and in stories shared with me by professors and peers in the art world, looking beyond the surface of subject matter and understanding its true essence is often borne out of a more formal analysis of the subject itself. For example, drawing an apple 500 different ways gives you unique insight into

## Tea as Art

its very nature, and once you truly see it, you can then convey that essence more effectively through your art. Similarly, preparing the same kind of tea many, many times can help you to initiate a sort of dialogue with that tea, and to help Tea express Herself through you more fluently. When you no longer look at Tea as something tasty that you drink or 'something interesting' because of its longstanding cultural significance and you begin to see Her for who She is, there is a certain shift that occurs in your Tea serving, and your sessions may be profoundly changed as a result.

The transformative insights arising from this shift in perspective improve your technical skill, certainly. More important than this side effect is what they are in and of themselves. They are an enriching and proliferation of your Tea wisdom. Seeing Tea for who She is initiates a deep transformation in which Tea becomes a spiritual practice, and a bridge between the spiritual and the everyday. This change is not an on/off switch for most people, and making the shift to Tea as a spiritual practice often takes a lot of work. However, over time, there is the development of insight and of an ability to tap into universal beauty and truth through Tea. It is a process of learning to play and to draw upon the wisdom of Tea at any moment.

As the philosopher Alan Watts once said in a lecture, artists must learn to "play" (to connect with the Divine and express it fluidly) on demand, and to repeatedly contrive the "controlled accident" of allowing the universe to express itself through them. Watts emphasized the importance of self-cultivation in this process. He said, "To spread joy, you have to have it. To impart delight, you have to be, more or less, delightful [by doing things which delight you]."

As a *Chajin*, you could think of it more like this: "To spread a love of Tea, you must have a love of Tea. To transform others through Tea, you must allow Her to transform you." As you embrace the love of Tea and a personal transformation through Tea, ask yourself how you can change your own consciousness and lifestyle in order to convey the love and transformation inherent in Tea. You may be surprised where this line of questioning takes you...

## Transmission

When approaching the process of serving Tea (or otherwise creating art) as an act of devotion, incredible things begin to happen. Alchemical things. Magical things, even. A large part of this is the transmission of Divine wisdom to participants (or, in the case of certain other art forms, viewers or listeners).

Wu De recently gave me some advice about this. He said, "Ask yourself what the difference is between when I make tea and when other people make it. It's different, yes, but *what* is different? How is it different?" As far as I can tell, the difference is transmission of wisdom and love. He fills his Tea sessions with love and devotion to Tea. As his Dao, this way of Being overflows into all areas of his life. As Wu De describes it, he "gets out of the way" and lets Tea

work through him. Or as Grey puts it, "The masterful artist transcends the limited sense of self and becomes an active channel of universal creative spirit." Grey adds that when experiencing work from a masterful artist (like Wu De), the "rational facilities are transcended and the ego seems to dissolve into an awe-filled timeless presence." People's eyes are opened to physical beauty. Their minds are opened to archetypal beauty. And then all that is transcended; their hearts are opened and wisdom flows in.

This act of "letting Tea flow through you" appears to be something which cannot be held onto. Like a meditative state, the tighter you try to grasp it, the more it slips through your fingers; it is a releasing into the void rather than a clinging to the material. As the inimitable Leonard Cohen writes, "Magic would not tarry. It moves from arm to arm." From what I can glean from Wu De, it is something that is practiced again and again until it can be summoned. It is about the creation of space through which the creativity and wisdom can flow unhindered. Again, Cohen, referring to Magic: "It rests in an empty palm. It spawns in an empty mind."

As Grey says, "The deeper the individual artists penetrate into their own infinitude, the more they are able to transmit that state." Wonderful, beautiful! But how do we actually achieve this? Meditation helps. So does yoga or other energy work (such as *Dao Yin*, which we practice here at Tea Sage Hut). Changes in your day-to-day life make more difference in your Tea practice than you'd guess. In your Tea serving and in your life, making every effort to merge into Love is transformative beyond compare. So is working to dwell in Being. To disappear into the eternal Now to find the Medicine of the moment. To become one with Tea, Guests and all of Life...

Ultimately, your Tea practice, your spiritual practice and your daily life get all blurred together. And this is marvelous for all three of these aspects of your life. After all, spiritual art and the art of living are often informed by the mystical experience. Serving Tea rids the artist of this false division between the mystical experience and the creative act or the daily routine—the art form, the mundane and the mystical experience are one, and the sessions are every bit as shamanistic as they are artistic and ordinary! This oneness leads to intense growth, fractal-like, strong and intensely networked in the psychic and emotional frameworks of a Tea session's host and guests. And the higher your vision of Tea as an artistic and spiritual medium, the more elevated your transmission of spiritual and aesthetic beauty becomes. Like an accomplished musician wielding a simple instrument and microphone to captivate a crowd, even the simplest of teaware and tea can take on a mystical, transformative quality when prepared with love, devotion and wisdom.









# BAISAO PART I: THE EARLY YEARS

*Article by Nick Dilks*

Imagine yourself a pilgrim in the early 18th century, strolling through Japan's cosmopolitan city of Kyoto. All around you pink and red plum blossoms fall like snow. Scholars sit around small tables drinking tea whilst debating Confucian literature. An exquisite array of small artisan shops greets you as you amble by. You join the myriad locals heading across the beautiful Fushumi Bridge on the eastern bank of the Kamo River. It's the weekend and an exodus of bright, expectant faces are departing to visit a waterfall or the Shingon temple or to tarry a while in a cool forest grove. Imagine your surprise as you pass a tiny shop no larger than a snail's dwelling. Above, in beautiful calligraphy, is etched: "The Shop that Conveys You to Sagehood". But it's the proprietor who really makes you stop in your tracks as you squint through the doorway. Dressed in a white garment bordered in black, a "Crane Robe" favored by Daoist recluses in China, he's the thinnest person you've ever seen. He must be about sixty or so. You immediately feel sorry for him. When he notices you, he greets you with the brightest smile and the warmest eyes that you've ever encountered.

*Brewing tea in a cluster of pines  
customers one after another  
imbibing for a single sen  
one cupful of the spring;  
Friends, please don't smile  
at my humble existence  
being poor doesn't hurt you,  
you do that on your own.*

Captivated, you go inside and sit down. His face lights up further as he begins to brew some tea in exquisitely exotic bowls you have never seen before. They must be from faraway lands. The brewing method is like the other street vendors, but this man has a loose-leaf tea that smells like the essence of Nature Herself. He smiles again, showing the three teeth that haven't deserted him. To your left, you notice painted on a bamboo tube the following words:

*The price for this tea is anything  
From a hundred in gold to half a sen.  
If you want to drink for free, that's all right too.  
I'm only sorry I can't let you have it for less.*

Poet, tea-master and calligrapher of bygone days, Baisao exists today not only in our imagination, but as one of the tea heroes who inspires and guides our tradition.

For instance, every month the community here travels to an organic market in neighboring Taichung to offer tea Baisao-style to curious wayfarers (for zero *sen*!). And any of you who left a donation at the Tea Sage Hut will remember the rustic wooden box by the front door. Here we pass on money to the next guests, so that they may enjoy some days in Baisao's shop too. If we could read Chinese, we would see inscribed on that box the same verse as Baisao's tube.

Baisao's integrity, austere Zen practice, love of Nature and generous tea spirit are an inspiration to us all. Over the next three months, we will chart his life, and we'll start by following the first half of Baisao's journey and all that led up to his decision to abandon the traditional monastic life in favor of becoming a tea seller.

Baisao was born in 1675 in a castle town in the smallest province of Kyushu, Japan. He became a novice Zen monk at eleven, entering a monastery of the newly formed Obaku sect. This school was heavily influenced by Chinese Zen, so young Baisao immersed himself in traditional Chinese literature. He was well versed in Confusion classics and ethics, and also rigorously trained in calligraphy and etiquette. Under the abbot, Kerin Doryu, he took on the religious name Gekkai Gensho. The main practices of his tradition were sitting in zazen, studying sutras and precepts, and repeating the mantra of Pure Land Buddhism: "*Namu Amida Butsu* (Homage to Amida Buddha)".

Gekkai quickly bonded with Kerin and became his attendant on travels around Japan. In his twelfth year, he toured famous sites and temples in Kyoto, giving him his first experience of the city he would grow to love so much. Throughout his teens he furthered his travels. Then at twenty-one, he set out on a Zen pilgrimage to train with other teachers around the country. When he returned six years later, it seemed like Gekkai was an ardent young monk. Regularly seeking out isolated spots in cloud-hidden mountains, he strove to achieve the decisive breakthrough. However, in a letter to a friend after a ninety-day session his progress was still "not to his satisfaction". He must have been doing well enough, though, because at thirty-two he became *Tenzo* (cook) of a monastery nearby, a position of extreme importance in the Zen life.

At forty-five, his Master became incapacitated and was confined to his bed. Apparently, Gekkai never left his side, showing great devotion to the old priest until the master quietly passed away. Instructions were left for a younger student, Daicho, to be the old master's successor. However, he was on a pilgrimage, so Gekkai became acting abbot—a position which he did not relish. In fact, evidence seems to suggest that he had turned down the role before Daicho was





asked. Humble to the end, Gekkai lived by the ethos of the following humorous Japanese verse about self-effacement:

*Don't beat the drum  
Don't blow the flute  
Don't be the front  
Be the lion's rear!*

Gekkai seems to have been desperate to leave, and wrote to Daicho twice that year reminding him to return quickly to his duties. The second time he even sent the absentee his *Kesa* (the symbol of transmission) with the letter!

Finally, to commemorate the anniversary of his teacher's death, Daicho came home. Once the new abbot was installed, Gekkai was free to begin his new life. At the age of forty-nine, he headed off in the direction of his beloved Kyoto.

At that time, much of Japan's social structure was extremely rigid and repressive, but in the old capital, Kyoto, a more lenient attitude towards individual freedom of expression prevailed. Kyoto, therefore, was the destination for many young writers, artists, and scholars. As was fashionable at the time, many shared an infatuation for all things Chinese. There is little doubt that Baisao (as we shall

## Baisao

now call him), with his profound knowledge of Chinese literature, skills as a poet and calligrapher, and unconventional lifestyle, had a strong influence on these young men. But perhaps the most important factor was his way of life. In a time when the average monk would do anything to fill their belly, Baisao's strength of character and austere Zen were seen as a denunciation of the decaying religious and social values. As Norman Waddell points out in his excellent biography, *Baisao: The Old Tea Seller*:

*"In a society characterized by lockstep conformity, many citizens respected and deeply sympathized with the genuine nonconformity of a man like Baisao, who had chosen to take a different path to fulfilling his Buddhist vows. His depth of attainment was clearly reflected in his face and demeanor, and his cheerful and seemingly carefree way of life penetrated all his activities, including his tea selling. Given the esteem in which he was held by the young scholars and artists at the core of Kyoto's intellectual community, it is not surprising. . . that so many attempted in various ways to emulate his example."*

This austerity is clearly seen in this extract from Baisao's *Opening up Shop at Rengeo-in*:

*Life stripped to the bone  
I'm often out of food and drink  
yet I offer an elixir  
will change your very marrow*

Originally, when Baisao set off from the monastery, he had planned to lead a wandering life as a mendicant priest, subsisting on donations. But as we shall see later, Baisao became increasingly reluctant to accept donations, so after ten years of increasing hardship, he decided to settle in Kyoto and sell tea for a living. Baisao was now sixty, and it is around this time that he adopted the name we all know, which means 'old tea seller'. This sobriquet was commonly applied to tea peddlers who roamed Kyoto's streets selling an inferior grade of green tea. This was typical self-deprecation from Baisao, who liked nothing more than to poke fun at himself, as this extract from *Three Verses of Self-Praise* shows:

*Ahh! This stone-blind jackass  
with a strange kink in his brain  
he turned monk early in life  
served his master, practiced,  
wandering from place to place  
seeking the Essential Crossing.  
Deafened by shouts  
beaten with sticks  
he had a hard time of it  
weathering all that snow and frost  
still couldn't save himself.  
Growing old he found his place  
became an old tea seller  
begged pennies for his rice.*

In reality, Baisao knew he was an accomplished tea master. His tiny shop was called "*Tsusen-tei* (The Hut which Conveys You to Sagehood)", which is also the name of our center, so he knew his tea was special. We can see his confidence in several of his poems, including the following extract from *Twelve Impromptu Poems* (Wu De's favorite):

*Set up shop this time  
on the banks of the Kamo  
customers sitting idly  
forget host and guest  
they drink a cup of tea  
their long sleep ends  
awakened, they realize  
they're the same as before.*

So, we'll thank Baisao for the tea, maybe drop a sen or two in the bamboo tube, and leave our friend to his new shop for now. Next month we'll backtrack a bit and examine his monumental decision to start earning his own livelihood, actually a serious breach of the monastic precepts. We'll also follow him round Kyoto and his travels across Japan as more and more of his Zen and tea became one flavor.









# THE THREE DAOIST TREASURES: PART I

Article by Wu De

The three treasures of Daoism have been passed on as much in the words of the Sage as they have in Tea. Lao Tzu's words have been translated into every language in the world, but not ever spoken as often as in the steam of all the tea bowls drunk, then to now. And he would have liked that his message was passed on without words, bowing to the stillness Tea speaks from. Maybe he himself learned these three treasures from his own tea practice, articulating something even older and more pure than his own great classic.

In the next three issues, I thought we could explore these three treasures together one by one, reflecting on some implications they can have on our lives and our tea practice. Each one of these treasures is actually a vast trove, like three pirate caves full of loot, and we can only take the time to pick up a piece here and there and reflect on it. A lifetime wouldn't be enough to explore every gem, goblet and coin in each of these treasures, though the attempt wouldn't be a waste. Let us, therefore, stroll into this kingly treasure the Sage called "Simplicitea"; and therein, like good Zennies, start from the middle...

*"Everyone says that my Dao is great, seemingly different from others. Because it is great, it seems different. If it were not different, it would have vanished long ago. I have three treasures which I hold and keep. The first is compassion; the second is simplicity; the third is not putting myself ahead of others, which causes discord and jealousy. From compassion comes courage; from simplicity comes generosity; staying behind ensures maturity and fulfillment. Nowadays people shun compassion and try to be brave; abandon simplicity and are wasteful; do not believe in humility, instead always trying to be the first. This ensures death. Compassion brings victory in battle and strength in defense. Even when Heaven helps people it is because of compassion that She does so."*

—*Dao De Jing, Verse 67*—

The majority of our time on this planet is spent doing simple things. And if we wait around for extraordinary experiences, we miss the pith of our existence. The moments of extreme excitement, pleasure or emotional gratification come only once in a while. Most of our time here is spent cooking, eating, walking, buttoning our shirts and drinking tea. These simple acts make up the true value in our precious lives, not the greater more easily remembered deeds. The one who can love doing nothing—and Chajin *always* love doing nothing—can find joy

in any activity, no matter how exciting or boring. Tea is simplicity.

Tea can reduce life to the simplest things, connecting us with our body and spirit and bringing into focus the most minute gestures. Through this subtle sensations take precedence over excitement and life begins to slow down. Tea teaches to appreciate every experience in our lives.

Every experience has something to teach us, just as every activity has its own joy—no matter how mundane you once thought it was. Tea teaches us to celebrate the ordinary, to revel in the simple. In that way, we find great magic and beauty in the way sun streams through an askew curtain, magic in steam and depth in the shallowest bowl of tea. We can learn as much about life from approaching ordinary activities with presence and mindfulness as we can from reading scriptures, meditating or practicing other forms of spiritual cultivation. And most of our daily acts have to be repeated anyway. We have to brush our teeth ten thousand times in a life, so why not master it? Why not find joy in it, rather than seeing it as a means to an end: getting clean teeth. We are lucky to have toothbrushes and toothpaste; not everyone has. That alone is to be celebrated.

Most people treat the majority of moments in their lives as a means to get somewhere else, though most of us know there is nowhere to get to. As soon as you rush from this moment, you find yourself on a downward slide towards your own death. This moment is special. It is magnificent! Tea teaches us to revel in the simple, ordinary act of drinking, to appreciate unadorned pottery, and to rest in a quieter state while taking slow sips from the day's bowl of tea. Slowing down and being present, we find the world more magical. Then, we can learn to enjoy all our activities, even doing nothing. The one who can enjoy sitting and doing nothing will have found the key to enjoying life, including the more painful parts of getting sick and dying.

In Zen there is a saying that 'true purity is beyond the pure and impure'. The goal of all cultivation, in any tradition, is ultimately the end of cultivation. In other words, the highest prayer is when your every act is a prayer to God. The enlightened being sees no distinction between Samsara and Nirvana. When you have transcended the differences between sacred and profane, then all is sacred. When Bodhidharma brought Zen to China, he was summoned to meet the emperor, who asked him three questions:



## Thanksgiving at the Hut



“Will I get merits for all the temples I’ve built?”

“No!”

“Is there such thing as the Buddha?”

“No!”

“Who are you?”

“I don’t know!”

Bodhidharma says there isn’t a Buddha because if you are looking for the Buddha outside, you have yet to realize your Buddha-nature inside. And if you *have* found your Buddha-nature, resting in it you will see no Buddha because you are the Buddha. If you are looking with Buddha eyes, in other words, *all* is Buddha!

If we cannot find the sacred in this world, and all its so-called “ordinary” glory, we won’t find it in imaginary Heavens either. Our ancestors found magic in the things they couldn’t explain. Nowadays, we have better explanations for how things work. We know that the rains aren’t a result of angels opening doors in the sky to let the primordial waters in; we also know Heaven isn’t a city in the clouds. For that reason, a lot of people have abandoned mythology and myth-making altogether, thinking that our rational explanations can replace them. Science can indeed replace magical explanations for what causes things, and we shouldn’t ever deny the proof before our eyes. Rain is caused by clouds, air pressure and temperature, etc. But the myths had another function as well: they left people with a reverence for the Sacred,

immersing them in the awe of magic. As a species, we seem to have thrown the proverbial baby out with the bathwater.

Modern magic isn’t about how we explain things, but in shifting our orientation towards the ordinary things, whether we can explain them or not. Myths, stories, poetry and art don’t have to be used just to explain the causal relationships between phenomena. They can also help shift our perspective. ***We needn’t use magic to explain things in order to live with magic.*** In Tibet, I stayed in a temple on a cliffside where mysterious lights can be observed hovering nearby at night. If a meteorologist comes along one day and explains why this phenomenon occurs, that explanation doesn’t make the lights any less magical. Why does knowing the cause of something reduce it to the mundane? Isn’t “mundane” just a concept? Would a rock call itself “mundane”? “Mundane” is, in fact, just a way of looking at a situation or thing. It isn’t real. And it is the purpose of myth and magic to give us a new way of looking at things, and the magic need not argue with the scientific explanation in order to do so.

Let’s take the ordinary act of tea drinking, for example. Just sitting here, I could see this as an ordinary day and be bored with the silence. And I don’t need to invent a magical fairyland of unseen elves under my tea table in order to find this moment magical. It *is* magical! *Every aspect of it is!* Firstly, I am sitting on a giant blue

## *The Three Treasures of Daoism*

ball that is full of fire, and whizzing off into unknown galaxies at thousands of kilometers an hour. And I myself am a miracle as well: the odds of there being a Wu De are astronomical in but a few generations. The odds that one particular sperm would meet one particular egg are already millions to one; then, the odds increase drastically when you add the likelihood of my parents—each single sperm out of millions—and so on to my grandparents. After just a few generations, the odds that I would be here drinking this cup of tea are incalculable. If that isn't magic, I don't know what is! And beyond the Earth and me, there is this beautiful bowl: all the colors and textures. There is the tea itself, so miraculously delicious!

Einstein said that the scientist who doesn't experience awe when observing Creation either isn't a real scientist or isn't really looking. We can find a sense of the Sacred in anything we do. And Tea teaches us to see the world in that light, celebrating the ordinary until there is no more concept of "mundane"—everything is Sacred.

This issue cannot be over-discussed: modern mythology should not be used to explain natural phenomena, rather to reinterpret our perspective in a way that recognizes how miraculous the world/Nature is, whether we understand it or not. Having a solid scientific explanation for why something in the natural world occurs is no reason to dismiss the power, majesty or breadth in that phenomenon. And if we cannot worship Nature, and attune ourselves to it, what is left to worship? If the Truth is not Sacred, how can we invent imaginary spaces to play in, pretending we are Sacred?

The new Sacred will be the simple. That is Zen, and that is Tea (they are 'one flavor', after all). Everything around you in Nature is sacred: the birds and the plants, and the way they work together in harmony. The Web of Life, the great and majestic order of the universe—from gravity to the flow of water—is oh-so worthy of our reverence. We don't need to invent Heavenly realms anymore, and most people cannot participate in myths that are meant to explain things that science can explain in a more efficient way. But everyone can recognize the miracles in all things, whether we know why they occur or not. An explanation does not reduce any thing to "mundane" unless you choose to let it do so. Understanding that killer whales were once land mammals, similar to wolves, and that they returned to the sea—understanding all that, doesn't make it any less magical! Knowing the chemical composition of tea doesn't mean it isn't Sacred.

Without a connection to the Sacred, a human life is incomplete. And to be complete, to be 'whole', is to be healthy. We, therefore, need myths. We need to be transported, connecting to the spaces and energies beyond. Myths and the rites that surrounded them have served this function for millennia. But the myths must lead from one's own context and worldview to the transcendent. Part of the problem is that we've stopped writing new myths and often rely too heavily on outdat-

ed myths from millennia ago. Those myths were written to connect people *at that time* to the transcendent, to attune them to Nature and to the Sacred. Since most people cannot relate to the worldviews of that time, the myths no longer transport us in the same way—they no longer convey most people to the transcendent.

We need new stories and rites, practices and self-cultivation methodology that orients us from the *world we live* in to the Sacred, conveying us from *here* to there. And it is apparent that the new myths cannot be written as explanations for natural phenomena, especially the phenomena we can explain so much better with science. Our spirituality need not be based on the gaps in science—shifting around as new discoveries are made, and always walking on unstable ground. The new myths will be about Sacred Earth, our home, Sacred Nature—in ourselves and in the world—and also on reinterpreting our perspectives to the most ordinary aspects of our lives.

If you want to be more spiritual, and have more sacred space in your life, you needn't do more of a particular activity. Being more and more centered in the Sacred is about redefining what you call "spiritual cultivation". If you define cultivation as the one hour you meditate every day, then life is not very spiritual at all. Open up your definition and you grow spiritually. This isn't just semantics. It isn't just an intellectual exercise. You have to actually *be* in sacred relationship to more of what you do in order to increase your spirituality in this way: The more aspects of your life you treat in a sacred way, the more cultivated you are. The more you walk, sit and drink tea spiritually, the more spiritual a life you lead. You needn't pray more, sit more or do more yoga to be more aware, but rather bring awareness to all the other activities as well. As long as you define the sacred, you bind it, collapse it and delegate God to certain places and activities. God is everywhere, and in all things. If you want to be with God more, it isn't about spending more time in church, but seeing God in all things. Gandhi said, "he who can't find God in the next person he meets need look no further."

It doesn't matter what words you use ("God", "Dao" or "Sacred"), the truth is that we needn't define self cultivation in certain terms, limiting who is cultivated and how to be more awakened. This is the same as pursuing exciting experiences on a worldly level—ignoring all the so-called "mundane" moments to get to the thrilling and pleasurable ones. True progress actually heads in the opposite direction: in celebrating the ordinary; in making sacred space around the bathtub, the toilet, raking leaves and eating lunch.





## *How to Simplify Your Tea*

The easiest and simplest way to make tea easier is to reduce your teaware. It's easy for tea lovers to get caught up in buying too many pots, collecting rather than relating to our teaware. The best teaware is the teaware we actually use, appreciating and glowing as it is seasoned. In fact, seasoning teaware has always been one of the greatest joys of the tea lover. And the pots, cups or bowls that you aren't using would be a treasure to someone else. Rather than collecting dust on your shelves, why not give them to someone who will make them the centerpiece of their shelf, and appreciate them every day. The best way to show respect for teaware is to use it.

Simplicity in tea is also found in reducing unnecessary teaware. There is a lot of teaware that has been invented quite recently which doesn't serve much of a purpose. Over-complicating tea brewing not only results in an inferior brew, it complicates the mind. Make simplicity a regular character in your *chaxi*. Help your guest(s) find peace and tranquility in your tea space, and not be distracted from the tea by fancy tea brewing.

The best way to simplify your tea practice is to reduce your mind during tea. Try drinking tea in quiet, or at least discussing more meaningful topics, and always with plenty of pauses for presence and reflection. Honor the tea by paying attention to it, focusing first on the flavors and aromas, and then on the changes to your whole being. In this way, we learn to appreciate more and more of the small things in life. If you can enjoy a simple bowl

of tea, you can enjoy anything. There is no need to view things as "mundane".

Tea can help reduce, and eventually erase the whole idea of 'mundane' from your life. The tea spirit is simplicity. Tea teaches us to clean and reduce. Tea teaches us to celebrate simple joys, like sitting quietly with people we love and enjoying some leaves in water. In that way, our sense of the sacred expands from the temple to the forest, from the beach to the city. In that way, our meditation grows legs and gets up from the cushion and walks upstairs, gets dressed, washes its meditative face...

*Next time, we will discuss what is usually translated as "humility", the third of the old Sage's Three Treasures. When our lives are simple, naturally we begin to live more and more in the natural flow, letting things be what they are and not imposing our will on them, allowing humility to flourish in our lives and infuse our tea...*



*Each month, we introduce one of the Global Tea Hut members to you 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 thought you should meet the most inspired and inspirational tea lover in Estonia, Siim Loog.*

My name is Siim Loog and I originate from Estonia. I am a seed-propagated and Living human. For the past one and a half years, I've been drinking/learning tea and finding my roots. Tea came into my life and rearranged everything: She changed the way I eat, the way I clean, the way I relate to things and humans, and most importantly She showed me how to connect with my true self. Also, I think She came to show me the power of community, like this one we've got here! I think it is very important for us humans to get along and feel connected, don't you think? We all want to matter to someone, like Wu De has said so often.

Writing this, sipping tea and watching my cats have a gentle fight, I am grateful that my path in this life has become interwoven with Tea. Looking back to where it all started, I see a cocky, confident, young Siim who thinks he is *All Mighty*. He thinks that by the age of 30 he will be super rich with the help of some kind of a pyramid scheme and then retire. But life had different plans in store for me: Tea came and showed me another perspective and gave another meaning to the word "rich".

I still remember very clearly my first 'I have fallen in love' moment. It was at the restaurant *Ribe*, where I was working back in 2011. I made a Darjeeling Red Tea for some customers. For some reason, I took off the lid from the pot and smelled the freshly steeped tea. It was like Heavenly butterflies were flying around in my tummy. It seems like yesterday, so clear and powerful is the memory of that feeling. After that, I spent a year in Australia, traveling and working. Tea was always with me, as real leaves (Steve kindly gave me some for my trip) and also in my mind. I never forgot that first moment. Something deep down said that Tea would have an even more important role to play in my life. After a year of carefree living, I came back; I started to work at Steve's teashop here in Estonia.

Now for the last one and a half years I have walked my walk and danced my disco dances together with Steve (article writer and all-around funny dude) as well as Triin (beautiful teawayfarer in the June issue) here in Estonia. I work together with them in a cool teashop and help build a tea community here in Estonia. I truly hope you can all come to visit us; it's beautiful here. We do not have big mountains or very hot weather, but we

have something special, something earthy and deep, calm and steady—good ancient energy. You will feel it when you get here.

Until then, I will learn to serve, serve and learn, and when you arrive there will be a nice community waiting here for you—growing bigger then to now, I promise! Much love to you and big thanks for making this project as powerful as it is. If any of you should find your way to Estonia, please do not hesitate to ask for help... Love to you all!

[loog.siiim@gmail.com](mailto:loog.siiim@gmail.com)





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](http://www.globalteahut.org/forum)

*(We are also on Facebook and Twitter now!)*



We have a great video series online. 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. We are launching videos all the time so check back!



There are currently 215 people in Global Tea Hut from all around the world: countries including Spain, Thailand, Russia, Estonia, Ukraine, Australia, Norway, Holland, 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! We are contemplating and discussing lifting the cap on GTH. We will let you know by next month. We like the idea of using GTH to build the new center...



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](http://www.teasagehut.org)

We have changed all the shipping to unregistered post due to an inflation in the cost of Taiwanese shipping. 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 not traveling to Estonia, Ukraine, LA or anywhere else. He is hanging around the center smiling huge ear-to-ear grins while making tea, working on his books and contentedly laughing from the belly!



As you can see, we are shifting our GTH services around: changing the format of these newsletters and the printer. (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, has a new Shennong. He was the last tea sage we needed! We have Baisao, Bodhidharma, Guanyin and Rikyu. Now with an awesome Shennong, all the traditions are represented. It is masterfully carved in clay and cast in copper sometime around 100 years ago in Japan. Come and see!

[www.globalteahut.org](http://www.globalteahut.org)

[www.teasagehut.org](http://www.teasagehut.org)

[www.the-leaf.org](http://www.the-leaf.org)

***Be happy!***



## Our Projects

### Our Center (Tea Sage 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 (Including landscaping, Tea and vegetables for eating)

### Publications

- *The Leaf, Tea & Tao Magazine* (Online and free at: [www.the-leaf.org](http://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
- We are also looking for alternative ways to better host/share our videos online