



# Global Tea Art

國際茶亭

TEA & TAO MAGAZINE

February 2016

茶禪一味

FIVE ELEMENT TEA

ZEN & TEA  
ONE FLAVOR

# Contents

Issue 49 / February 2016

GLOBAL TEA HUT

Tea & Tao Magazine



## ZEN & TEA

This issue marks the realization of two long-standing goals: to send out and discuss a Five Element tea and to devote an entire issue to the relationship between Zen and Tea. This month's "Zen Blend" is one of the most unique teas we've ever sent! Wu De has spent years practicing in order to create this special blend, making this a very happy Lunar New Year.

*Love is  
changing the world  
bowl by bowl*

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Kent Steedman, Australia



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# From the Editor

**I**n February, we celebrate the Lunar New Year, often with a special-occasion tea like this month's. We've been going to the hot springs every week, warming our bodies from the inside. We like to mix shou puerh with red tea in the mornings and to drink aged or roasted oolongs in the afternoon. A great aged sheng is also nice around this time of year, especially in the evening or at night—warming you through and through and encouraging a cozy, warm and peaceful night's sleep.

We honestly feel that Global Tea Hut is well on its way to becoming the best tea magazine in the world! And of the qualities that set it apart, the holistic breadth of topics we cover is arguably this magazine's defining feature. You can find tea magazines that discuss tea events, industry, and even some coverage of production, but we also bring you translations of tea experts, modern and ancient, history, folklore and, perhaps most importantly, the spiritual dimension of Cha Dao. Sometimes you can even find all these topics in a single issue of Global Tea Hut. Other months, like this magazine, focus on one area of tea. And if you are more interested in linear topics, the next issue may highlight just that.

There is an ancient saying that "Zen and Tea are one flavor," which is why a tea lover should have some understanding of Zen, at least as an important context for the evolution of tea culture over time. Throughout the following pages, you will realize that Zen is much more than a sect of Buddhism. In its essence, "Zen" refers to the meditative mind itself. And as such, Zen is non-sectarian. All of us have access to a meditative mind. It is therefore unnecessary to read this issue in terms of Buddhism, though the teachings of the Buddha may be discussed. We aren't promoting a religious view, in other words, but rather exploring the historical relationship between Zen and Tea, the essence of what makes tea so beneficial in a life of meditation, and then sharing some experience from Chajin who are using a tea practice to live more mindfully.

The best way for all of us to experience the Zen in Tea (and Tea in Zen) will be to brew up a strong bowl of this month's "Zen Blend" and repose into that still place where words cannot intrude. If Global Tea Hut educates the mind, fills the heart with warmth and connects people around the world, it will indeed find its place amongst the greatest tea publications ever printed!

And speaking of connecting to each other, we have some big news for the coming few months. Starting

next month, you may notice that the next few envelopes will be a bit lighter. Don't shake them up and down looking for the gift to fall out; there isn't one. We have a much better gift in store: *a new website*. We have been brainstorming for months and months about how to connect this huge global community, especially since so many of you are always emailing us and asking, "Who are the Global Tea Hut members in New York?" Or wherever else you're traveling. We now have a good idea of how we can facilitate this and even have a team of web designers to get it done. The next phase of this process was to discuss the funding for the rather complicated website we are building, featuring a live stream of conversation and events, member profiles, messaging and much more. Eventually we realized that the best way to pay for our new site was with the gift money. Consequently, we are going to use a few month's worth of gift money to give you one big gift. Those of us who have a birthday in December, like me, will understand the concept of getting a bigger gift for two celebrations rolled into one. We are very excited about the new site and all the wonderful friendships and tea sessions that will result from it. We can't wait to see how it unfolds, improving the lives of Global Tea Hut members around the world!

We'd like to introduce another great improvement to every issue of Global Tea Hut! From now on, you will find a list of articles at the bottom of these Letters from the Editor. We've put together a list of past articles that will make reading this issue much more rewarding. Refresh your understanding of useful terms and ideas, or read some background information for the first time. Either way, this list will help enrich your learning this month. You can find all the past issues you'll need on our website for free:

## Further Reading

- 1) *The Production & Processing of Puerh Tea*, Issue 32, September 2014, pp. 15-24
- 2) *Puerh Tea Leaf Sizes*, Issue 35, December 2014, pp. 7-8
- 3) *Factory Codes*, Issue 32, September 2014, pg. 35
- 4) *Tea of the Month*, Issue 12, January 2013, pp. 2-3
- 5) *Living Tea*, Issue 39, April 2015, pp. 17-22
- 6) *Fire, The Teacher of Tea*, Issue 43, August 2015, pp. 9-14
- 7) *Greg Wendt's Teawayfarer*, Issue 2, March 2012, pp. 13



# Tea of the Month

## FIVE ELEMENT PUERH BLEND

**M**any of you have come to one of the events we host around the world and tried some of the amazing Five Element tea that Wu De often blends. These tea blends are deep, relaxing and often result in some of the most transcendent sessions we've ever had. There are probably a lot of lasting, lifelong Five Element memories being evoked here in this Hut now as we read these words. We are very excited to share the first ever Five Element tea in Global Tea Hut. We hope that this tea rekindles some nostalgia for the great memories we've shared together around the world. And for those of you who have yet to drink one of these teas, introducing new tea to you might just be our greatest joy! You'll soon understand why this is indeed a very special month of Global Tea Hut.

A Five Element tea like this month's is a blend of five different dark puerhs, like aged sheng, shou or aged shou, and sometimes black teas, which are mixed together based on their energetic frequency, flavor and mouthfeel to create a balanced liquor that will center you in your heart. When blended well, a Five Element tea will cause palpable

movement towards your heart-center from your extremities. You should feel the Qi flowing towards the center of your being. This is a very comforting, warm and balanced feeling. People often feel more grounded after such a session, with a clarity and lasting smile that changes one's perspective on the world and a life lived in it.

In the beginning, Wu De developed Five Element tea blending as a way to extend the lifespan of very rare aged sheng teas. It is great to drink these teas on their own, but then their very powerful medicine has a much narrower reach—fewer people will ever try them. While we do brew such magic old teas unblended at the center, we also like the option of making a Five Element tea. And we can do that more often, sharing great, transcendent sessions with all our guests and not just drinking such rare teas on special occasions. Though this was the impetus for starting, as we began blending and sharing Five Element teas and grew more skilled at blending them, we've found that they are beneficial for many other reasons besides just conserving aged teas. As we mentioned, they balance the

energy of the body and evoke a harmony with Nature, which is also moving in and through the Five Elements.

Since ancient times Chinese sages have separated the material world into five elements called "*Wuxing* (五行):" wood, earth, water, fire and metal. These principal elements influence all aspects of Chinese culture, philosophy and spirituality—from Daoism to Buddhism, *Fengshui*, Traditional Chinese Medicine and even tea. Lu Yu himself inscribed symbols representing the *Wuxing* on all of his teaware and spoke of the way they all combined fluently in the brewing of tea. There is a very real way in which tea is an alchemy, combining these five elements into the sacred libation that heals the soul. Harmony through alchemy has always been central to the aesthetics and philosophy of tea culture, whether clearly expressed by ancient Daoist mendicants, or left unstated, yet recognized by the modern tea drinker who intuitively knows when a tea set functions well, when a tea is brewed properly, or when something in the process is off. And that alchemy is also our cultivation.



“Zen Blend”



Yunnan, China



Puerh Tea Blend



Han Chinese/Aboriginals



~1000-2000 Meters

*Check out the Tea of  
the Month video to  
learn more!*



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



As we refine our tea brewing, sensitivity, skill and discipline, we also change ourselves, turning our own lead into gold.

Master Lin often says that the highest skill in tea (gongfu) is when your sensitivity reaches the point that you can discern each and every leaf, “for Heaven creates no two leaves alike!” This is a lofty goal indeed, and reminds us that we can always improve and continue honing our skills, even unto our last day on this beautiful planet! If you re-read what he says, though, you’ll also find other deep truths.

The issue of single-region versus blended tea in puerh is still an ongoing debate, and most often you will find tea lovers favoring single-region. From a certain perspective, this may be justified, but not always. Any given blend may be better than any one single-region cake. Also, Master Lin’s aphorism speaks to a greater truth, which is that all tea is actually blended. Living tea is seed-propagated, and that means every tree will be unique. Like people, tea trees share genetic similarities, as well as some likeness because they grew up in the same terroir, but ultimately every tea tree will be distinct. This means that tea mixed from even a few living tea trees is a blend of different teas. In the concrete, however, even tea from a single tree is actually a blend. The east and west side of a single living tea tree will receive a very different amount, kind and hue of sunlight and therefore be different in every way. (We say “living” tea here as opposed to plantation bushes, which are often so crammed together that such influence is subtler. They are also cloned, not seed-propagated.)

### **Blending the Five Elements**

In order to blend a Five Element tea, you have to know your teas very well. The fact is that most teas can play any of the five roles, depending on which other teas they are

blended with. Amongst his circle of friends, Gary is the fire—he’s the wildest of the bunch. They all say so. But then, one weekend, Gary hangs out with a new circle, only to find that in this group he is the tamest of all—the earth, grounding everyone. Most often, the role a tea plays will be relative to the other four, and you will have to know the teas well to choose.

This is a bit like casting actors for a movie. Good actors can play any role—if they’re good enough, gender doesn’t even matter, like Cate Blanchett’s amazing portrayal of Bob Dylan in *I’m Not There*. Other actors need to be typecast; they are more suited to play one or two roles. Still others only seem to be able to play the same character in every film they make, but they are rare. Similarly, most teas can play any of the five roles, and you will have to decide which will be more suited to be water, for example, in any particular configuration. Other teas, like Ember, as you can guess from its name, are much more suited to be fire in every configuration. All of this requires knowing your actors (your teas) very, very well before you try blending them.

After you decide on your five teas, the skill of blending Five Element tea deepens with *amount* and *order*. The amount of each tea will be extremely important, as this is what will truly balance the Five Elements with each other. Certain teas can quickly overpower others, and need to be added in just the right amount. There is no real formula for doing this, but one bit of advice is to add the tea in small increments, as it is easy to add more and difficult to take tea away. You will have to be sensitive to the tea. The more advanced method is to put your hands over the bowl you are blending in, close your eyes and try to feel the tea, asking if it is balanced. This obviously requires some spiritual affinity for the teas inside. The slower method is to blend and then try the tea, adapting the blend

the next time you try. And before you get disappointed, Wu De says that he uses both these methods: “Even after years of blending Five Element teas, I still have to combine a sensitivity to the teas with a trial and error approach, especially when combining teas I haven’t ever blended before. For that reason, I always take teas I am extremely familiar with, and have blended many times, when I am blending for public gatherings. Otherwise, getting the blend just right takes a few tries. When you hit the bull’s-eye, you will know it. The tea will shine, and everyone will be glowing—centered and grounded the way people look at the end of a meditation retreat.”

As with amount, there is no all-encompassing recipe for the order in which the teas are added. This will depend on the kinds and amounts of tea one is using. However, a good system to start with is: water, wood, fire, earth and metal. This is the easiest and most natural system, since this is how the elements transform in Nature. Water is absorbed by trees, for example, which are burned to ash, becoming earth, where metal is forged and then eroded into water...

We know that many of you are probably very interested in trying your hand at Five Element blending, so we thought we would give a very basic starting point, discussing each element one by one. Of course, we want to emphasize that if you lean too heavily on this formula, you will prevent yourself from developing the sensitivity you need to blend nice Five Element brews that transform guests. We suggest starting with blends just for you and close friends, and then critically discussing them afterwards. This starting guide is just that, and this point cannot be overemphasized.



**Water:** Start with water. In a Five Element tea, water is the binding force. It holds the structure together. It is most often the foundation of the blend, though it is worth repeating again and again that this isn't always the case—you may want a fiery or earthy blend, for example. The water tea will most often represent the largest portion of the blend, maybe even by more than half, like this month's. You want a nice, solid tea in this place—one that can take in the energy of the other four and hold them within it. You want a solid tea that is Yin and will yield to the other four.

**Wood:** Obviously, any tea can play the role of wood, since tea is a plant. This is the easiest of the five to choose. However, this can mean that beginners don't think enough about this tea, especially the amount. You don't want this tea to take too much from the water. Wood teas are also the easiest to choose since you don't need to rely so much on energetic, spiritual means. It is easy to taste when a tea is woody. And when you are learning to blend Five Element tea, using strong examples of each tea will make the process easier, as your refinement will then be about order and amount.



**Earth:** The earth element in a blend is the grounding force. It holds the whole structure down. If you find that the session is flighty, and your guests describe the experience in terms of visions, feelings of being distant or far away, trippy experiences, etc., then you didn't have a strong enough, or large enough, quantity of your earth element. Sometimes you can tell this has happened because your guests aren't drinking their tea; they forget to even pick up the bowl! (This could also be too much metal.) Of course, a great tea session is a little transcendent, but you don't want to ever lose the tether with the ground, the present moment. This should be the kind of tea that you drink when you want to read or study—the kind that perks you up and keeps you focused.

**Metal:** In Five Element tea, metal is the spirit of the blend. Metal is the power and Qi—the spiritual force of the blend. This should be your oldest, strongest tea. This tea comes last, and should be added sparingly. It is the spark that makes the Five Element engine take off. (The fire is the fuel.) This tea is the spike in the punch, the kick, the dose of medicine mixed with the sweetness that helps wash it all down. This will be the energetic power of the whole blend.

**Fire:** You must be very careful with fire. It can easily upset the balance of a blend. We often use very little of the fire tea. This tea should be warming. Think of the tea you naturally go to when the weather is cool. Most of us will have a particular shou or black tea we turn to when it is cold. Try drinking some of your shou teas, aged sheng or black teas and feeling if any are warming in the stomach/chest. This tea must also be an energetic activator. It must catalyze the other four, making them move. Heat is the conveyer of tea. Without heat, the essence wouldn't be extracted from the leaves or move through our bodies. In the same way, the fire tea makes the blend move. Therefore, this should be the most Yang of your teas, with the ability to stimulate and motivate energy.

## The First Five Element

There are two main reasons why we have been reluctant to send out a Five Element tea up until now. The first is that, as you can see by reading through this very cursory introduction, this topic is advanced, deep and very complicated. This isn't to say that our community isn't skilled enough to explore Five Element brewing or that it is "too advanced"—whatever that means—but rather that we wanted to explore some other topics first. None of the teachings in our tradition are secret or esoteric. You don't have to pass through hurdles to learn. We will gladly share all that we know with anyone. That doesn't mean that there isn't a proper order to learning them. While you can pick up the fourth *Dune* book and open to chapter seven—it isn't a secret only for the initiated—it is much more rewarding to get to book four, chapter seven by reading from the beginning to there.

The second reason we haven't yet sent a Five Element tea is related to the difficulties of blending one that can survive the journey. Blending this month's tea required overcoming a great challenge, which is also the main reason why we haven't shared a Five Element tea in Global Tea Hut before. The reason that Five Element teas work in the first place also renders them un-storable, un-ageable and really un-sendable in Global Tea Hut. *Five Element tea functions because tea is so absorbent, physically and energetically.*

Tea is an amazing plant, with one of the most adaptable energetic structures in the natural world, which is why it is so responsive to different processing methods, creating the incredibly vast array of teas we love. The tea world is, in fact, so huge that a single lifetime isn't enough to explore it. Even after decades of drinking tea, the seasoned Chajin still discovers new teas, new tea-growing areas and kinds of tea worth exploring.

In some parts of Yunnan, the aboriginals plant camphor trees interspersed amongst the old tea trees to help keep the bugs away and increase yield. In ancient times, this was a deeper and more sensitive method of tea blending—much more profound than the Five Element blending we are discussing here. Shamans knew that all of Nature is in a state of interbeing, in which the various organisms in an ecology all influence the others. In other words, the chemical and energetic structure of a plant is influenced by the environment. Of course it is. This is why tea changes so much from terroir to terroir. With a deep understanding of this, one could explore the influence one plant has on another, and plant different medicinal plants in the same area to change the efficacy of each one. Indigenous vegetable gardens were also arranged with this in mind. Aboriginals mapped out the location of different vegetables and spices so that each would grow more abundantly and healthily, and influence the energy of those around it, especially its immediate neighbors. One plant replenishes what another takes from the soil, for example, while other herbs change the strength or kind of medicine of a neighboring herb. This is why camphor was originally planted near tea: it changes the medicinal quality of the tea, which is helpful in certain situations (digestion, mostly). But as tea was commoditized over time, the primary motivation to continue this practice was as a kind of natural pest deterrent, increasing overall yield.

Though we digressed a bit to discuss the interesting blending of herbal energies planted near one another, the main point is that the tea *tastes like camphor*. By having a camphor tree a meter or so away, the tea absorbs some of its aroma and will forever taste like camphor. And this is also true of the harvested leaf, which is how scented tea is made.

Tea will take in the flavor of flowers that are put near it. If you want this to be quick or strong, it requires some processing. But if you leave a single rose blossom in a huge jar full of tea, the tea will eventually taste of roses. *Tea is incredibly absorbent.*

And this is as true of its energy as it is of aromas. We have done several experiments storing puerh tea in different environments and then tasting them blind, including tea stored in different countries. In one such experiment, we stored a *tong* (seven cakes) in two homes, a tea shop and a cave in which three monks were living and meditating. After five years, around forty people tasted the teas blind. Our first experiment was to see if we could all find the one from the monks' cave. Everyone had a paper to circle that tea. Amazingly, one hundred percent of the people present accurately determined that tea!

That brings us back to what makes Five Element tea work and why it is so difficult to blend in a way that you can send it out in Global Tea Hut: Tea's ability to absorb the energy of the other four teas is how they fuse and flow. It is also why it is important to choose the right teas and get the amount as well as the order you add the teas all tuned to the right frequency. Different teas allow aromas and energies in at different speeds, in different amounts. This is akin to the way the aperture of a camera lens allows more or less light in. And that is why farmers who want to scent tea with jasmine or other flowers choose certain varieties and processing methods, since those teas allow more aroma in at a quicker rate, depending on their moisture content, thickness of leaf, etc. This is also one of the reasons Yixing jars are so great for storing tea, since they absorb the aroma/energy of the tea and echo it back so that the tea, in essence, reabsorbs its own essence over time.

*Since the teas fuse more and more the longer they are together, a Five Element tea should be blended right before the sessions and then drunk right away.* This is because you want the elements to fuse a little, but mostly maintain their individual characteristics. Otherwise, it won't be a Five Element tea, it will be one element! In other words, if you were to age this month's Five Element tea, it would slowly move away from being a Five Element tea, and more and more, as time passed, become a single tea of its own. Most aged loose-leaf puerh teas are blends. They were blended during production, and people also add tea to them as they are passed down the line—sometimes for a good reason, like improving the tea, and at other times for business, in order to increase the amount. But the good ones don't taste like many teas together; they taste like a single tea. This is because they have fused over

time. The ones that are imbalanced haven't yet fused. This may be fixed by aging them for longer, but may also take many decades if the teas in the blend aren't very absorbent and/or have conflicting energy frequencies.

Consequently, the reason we have never sent a Five Element tea in Global Tea Hut before is that we didn't know how to blend one that could survive the journey. How do you blend a tea that can go a few weeks before it is consumed and still have the five teas be divergent enough to maintain each element distinctly? Wu De says that he thinks he needed a few more years of relatively constant practice to be able to do what he has done this month. We are going to describe each tea in a moment, but the general principle that guided his blending was that he needed the teas to be clear representatives of each of the five elements. He needed the kind

of actors that can only play one kind of role, as opposed to the more fluid ones who can do anything depending on the other four elements in a configuration. If you put malleable teas together, they quickly become one tea. This is like a group of very acquiescent, easygoing, easily-influenced people hanging out together: they will very quickly become a single group that works well together. That may be what you want in a certain blend. But not this blend. We needed a group of very strongly stubborn, individualistic people who don't work well in groups and maintain their distinct personalities for longer. This required a lot of work and many tests—many trials and many errors. A lot of Wu De's time and love have gone into this month's tea!

*On the next page you'll find a description of the five teas in our "Zen Blend."*



*Tea absorbs all of its environment. Actually, every leaf is absorbing different light and nutrients, so all tea is, in fact, blended.*

### **Wet with Rain**

Our water, and base tea, which will hold and take in the energy of the other four teas, is a spring 2014 shou puerh we call “Wet with Rain” (in honor of Van the Man). It is a special grade of shou (Te Ji), which is slightly larger than the all-bud grade often called “Gong Ting.” The tea was harvested in the Menghai area. It is smooth and thick, with a medium level of piling. These days, most shou puerh is fully fermented over forty-five to sixty days, which means it cannot age and loses much of its essence. Wet with Rain, on the other hand, has some characteristics of sheng puerh, since the artificial fermentation is only partial. Energetically, this tea is smooth and yielding, and very Yin. It will make a fine base for this month’s tea, especially since its flavor, aroma and Qi are so consistent from steeping to steeping. This tea is strong enough to be the water in a Five Element tea that is meant to last a bit. This will represent the largest percentage of tea in our Zen Blend.

### **Bindbole**

The spirit (metal) of this blend is an early-1980s shou puerh that we call “Bindbole,” named after the oldest forest in the Shire. Back in the day, shou puerh was often only artificially fermented to around forty or fifty percent. This meant that the tea was rougher, with some astringency when it was new, and more potential for aging as time went on. Many such teas behave a lot like a sheng, though not as strong. This tea is no exception. Bindbole ignites the Qi, helping to lift the whole blend up. It works especially well with these teas—Ember in particular.



### Chopping Wood

Though any tea can be the wood, we needed one that was decisively wood. There could be no better choice than “Chopping Wood.” We actually shared this tea in Global Tea Hut a long time ago (January, 2013). It is a late 1990s 7572 shou puerh. The third number, “7,” ensures that this tea is made from large leaves. These mature leaves, sometimes called “huang pian,” ferment quickly. They are very woody, reminiscent of the leaf piles you jumped in as a child.



### ZEN BLEND FIVE ELEMENT TEA



### Ember

The fire for this blend had to be the fieriest tea we know, “Ember.” Many of you have tried this amazing tea. It is a sheng/shou blend from the 1980s. When you drink Ember, you are immediately filled with a warmth that feels like your chest and stomach are a stoked furnace. Guests take their sweaters off when we prepare this tea, though in the winter it is very comforting. We had to be careful about putting too much of this tea into the blend.



### Greg's Galactivation Serum

Our grounding force, and the earth of this blend, is a lovely tea that many of you will by now be familiar with—the workhorse early-1990s shou puerh we all know and love, “Gregg's Galactivation Serum,” named after our very own Greg Wendt. This solid tea can be spacy when it is drunk alone (hence the name), and so you may think of it as a metal. However, we have found that it is very grounding when blended with other teas; it is extremely earthy, in fact. This is as mysterious as its namesake!

# Zen Blend

*Like so many of you, we also sit down with friends to share the Tea of the Month. And though we drank this Dong Ding oolong at a different time than you, we are reminded once again of the interconnectedness we share within this global tea community. Just as we set out altar cups in acknowledgment of our tea brothers and sisters the world over, we also drank this tea with all of you in mind, knowing that somewhere under this global, thatched roof, you'll likely be doing the same! And just as you might discuss your experiences drinking this tea with your friends, we did the same:*

茶 This tea wants to be in communion; it wants to warm you. The liquor is dark and smooth, and the reflection of the Tea Sage Hut reminds you that you're in a place of tranquility. The tea travels down your body, warming you and flushing out toxins. The Zen Blend draws you inwards to a place of harmony, and you sit... **-Ryan Shaw**

茶 This tea was truly a pleasure to drink. It was thick and delicious. I felt it activate my mind and soothe my body. I also noticed an increased sensory focus spreading to the room, and to the others around me. **-Tertti**

茶 I reflected on the idea of blending five elements together harmoniously. I knew in one particular bowl, that a carefully thought out method was a part of this blend because nowhere in my spirit, body or mind did I feel unbalanced. It warmed me from the center of my chest and focused my attention. Surely this tea is a good measure of Zen. **-Shen Su**

茶 From the moment we sat down, I became very centered. During the session, I became very aware and connected to old friends who I have missed dearly. It felt like the tea was trying to provide a stillness for us to be in each other's company. The intensity fluctuated, as my monkey mind loves to interrupt. Beautiful tea; beautiful experience. **-Toby Gibb**

茶 I immediately felt a meditative experience, a presence in the moment. Because I like dark teas, I enjoyed the thick, beautiful brown liquor of this tea, which grew brighter near the edge. A sweetness and camphor aftertaste came on after some time. A pleasant aroma arose from this tea and the Qi concentrated in the central channel, rising to the top of my head. The tea flowed down the throat like oil. I felt emptiness. Words and thoughts dissolved of themselves. Everything began to feel like fireworks and explosions of joy. **-Denis Mikhaylov**



Check out the video on  
brewing tips now!



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

## Brewing Tips

**A**s you can guess, the most important tip we have for brewing this month's tea is to drink it as quickly as you can. Ordinarily, we suggest letting Global Tea Hut teas sit for a week or two. A tea's energy is disrupted by flying around the world, just as yours would be. And just like a person, it needs some time to get over jet lag. But since we want to drink this tea when each of the five teas is still as distinct as possible, it may be better to let this one sit for just a day or two and then have your session.

This month's tea can be drunk either gongfu or in a bowl. We recommend carving out at least an hour or two to fully enjoy this tea. Five Element teas are strong and deep, and can help you to release physical and emotional trauma. This session may be the deepest and most lasting peace you've experienced in some time, and that isn't something you should rush.

On a practical level, make sure that the water you use for this month's tea is very hot. You need strong, martial heat to draw the five elements up and fuse them all together. If you can, use charcoal. Even otherwise, make sure the water is very close to boiling, with constant steam. You want to pour into the pot quickly, with a thick and fast stream, so that the pot is filled as quickly as possible, and then immediately covered. Shower both before and after if you are brewing this tea gongfu.

Aged teas like this are forgiving, which means that if you put in too little or too much, steep them too short or too long, etc., they still turn out nice. Still, we would recommend putting a lot more than usual into your pot. Ideally, you should use the whole can for one session. This should be easy if you are brewing bowl tea. If you decide to brew this month's tea gongfu, you may need a larger pot to use it all. Five Element tea should be strong and black, with a kick!

**Z**en is no ordinary religion. It has no prevalent dogma, rites or rituals; there isn't even any coherent soteriology—Zen is an experience! And throughout the ages, masters have used a wide variety of techniques to help instill that certain sensation in students: a recognition of the fact that the so-called “self” is an illusory construct of social programming and of rational, as well as linear, linguistic thinking. This experience cannot, however, be easily described or conveyed in words, concepts or ideas; it must be lived through. As a result, many of the methods used to catalyze this awakening were also non-verbal; and all too often even when they taught in words, the teachers of old used illogical nonsense meant to show the practitioner the absurdity of trying to achieve a linguistic Zen. More often, the transmission happened quietly and subtly, and

wasn't recorded in books or treatises, occurring instead within the realm of personal experience—the space between master and students. And in imagining these ancient gardens, monasteries and forests where intuition was passed on from master to pupil, we invariably find steaming bowls of tea nearby; for since ancient times, Eastern mystics have utilized tea to transmit understanding. After all, what could be more substantial and experiential, as well as symbolic and philosophically profound, than the master brewing his mind into a cup that is passed steaming to the student, who then consumes and absorbs it, physically and spiritually, literally and metaphorically?

They say that the flavor of Zen and the flavor of tea are the same, and without an understanding of one, there is no mastery of the other. The affinity between tea and Buddhism, especially *Chan* (Zen), is a friendship dating back more than

a thousand years. In the beginning, tea was an aspect of spiritual well-being and healing, used first by aboriginal shamans and then later by Daoist mendicants. Learning from these Daoist sages, the early Buddhist monks would also come to adopt the Way of Tea as an important aspect of their tradition. They would then be the first ones to domesticate tea, and also develop much of the aesthetics, pottery and brewing methods that would mature into the artistic appreciation of tea by royalty and literati. All of the famous tea mountains in China also have Buddhist monasteries on them, and this is no coincidence: sometimes the monks or nuns were drawn by the wizened tea trees that grew wild there, while at other times they brought the tea with them.

When tea was eventually brought to Japan by monks who had traveled to the Mainland to study Zen from the masters there, it would also

## AN INTRODUCTION TO ZEN & TEA TASTING THE ONE FLAVOR



develop into a symbolic expression of the Zen mind in the tea ceremony, called “Water for Tea (*Chano-yu*).” These monks came back with Buddhist teachings, tea wisdom, teaware and even seeds and saplings as a testament to the fact that tea was such an essential aspect of practicing Zen at that time that they couldn’t establish Zen in Japan without it. But what was this “Zen” that needed tea to take root?

There was to be a sermon on Vulture Peak, but the Buddha only raised a single blossom and held it poised in his fingers. And thus, as Mahakasyapa understood, Zen was established. There is a metaphysical distinction between the “Buddhist” tradition and this mind-to-mind transmission of wisdom, which came to be known as “Chan” in China and “Zen” in Japan, after the Southern-Chinese pronunciation. Despite this division, the ineffable, living Zen is not necessarily mutually exclusive with the tradition of Buddhist ideals and philosophy that shares its name. Many masters have found their wisdom wearing monastic robes, and chosen to keep them on afterwards as a way of exemplifying ideals and sharing their understanding with others. But unlike most spiritual traditions, Zen masters have always been extremely aware of the limitations within their own, or any other, tradition—as if to say: “Zen isn’t in the robes, bowls, rituals or even sacred scriptures. Don’t look for it here. And yet, if you look carefully, all this somehow points to it.”

The life of Zen was unique because it was more about the tea than the usual “sacred” stuff going on at other monasteries. And by

“tea” I mean farming and processing, working and sweating, as well as the more poignant preparation of the steaming bowl that was passed around Tang Dynasty monasteries every evening. The real pith of Zen was only real when it was in your marrow, and it only circulated that bone-deeply after years of muscle memory—thousands of buckets of water and stacks of chopped wood. And isn’t the Way of Tea the same? There’s no reading about how to make a cup of tea that shines with both the deepest wisdom and most ordinary thirst-quenching satisfaction. There is no way to say—not with all the ten-thousand words—what precisely it is that tea conveys beyond its flavor and physiological relationship with the body. It takes years of coal and water—kettle after kettle—until the ceremony sinks in and merges with life itself. And yet, it is right here in this beginner’s kettle, too. It was there all along.

When the ancients said Tea and Zen were the same flavor, they didn’t mean tea as a kind of Buddhist ritual. They were talking about that wordless hush before the Buddha raised the lotus on Vulture Peak; they were talking about Bodhidharma’s marrow, given to Hui Ke for the perspicacity of his silent bow, and about Hui Neng’s sieve. They were saying that the essence of Zen is more easily communicated through art and life than it is in words, though it can indeed be catalyzed by language. You could say that Zen has always been based on the intention of the Buddha and all the masters that followed to cast the light of that one primal illumination: *our true self is not this egoic I-subject, and there is no-thing apart*

*from Mind*. All the meditation techniques, the moral precepts, the slaps and whacks, the nonsensical gibberish and all the pots and pots of tea have steeped in this truth, since before anyone ever said the word “Chan.”

And so, if tea is Zen and Zen is tea, then this can’t be a magazine about “Zen Buddhism.” We can’t just discuss the historical relationship between tea and that tradition. There’s nothing wrong with taking an interest in the history of the Zen tradition, or in tea lore for that matter, but if you get too caught up in collecting information you can flounder.

The “Zen” that is in tea has nothing to do with learning about the dates different teas were grown on which mountain and by which lineage of monks, however intriguing that information might be to the intellect. Neither is it a memorization of old scriptures or biographical sketches of masters.

The Zen of tea is a direct, existential change that is changeless, as it leaves no trace. Try to catch Zen and—like a boy playing with the wind—you’ll find yourself staring down in wonder at an empty palm. And this Zen has been around forever, eons before the Buddha held up that flower, just like tea has been here since long before anyone plucked and steeped its leaves. There were giant tea trees looming over antediluvian forests with graceful Buddha-eyes long before the first human voice shattered the tilthen incomprehensible *sutras* being chanted by wind-rustled leaves and yellow warblers.



# THE ZEN IN TEA

## BREWING AWARENESS

-Qing Yu

*Our beloved Qing Yu (Colin) finally decided to take out his dried-up brush and write for us. And what a debut! There is a lot say, and then unsay, about Zen and Tea. It is difficult to discuss; and yet Qing finds a way of guiding us into the stream. His personal anecdotes, wit and charm help bring Zen to life with the character that you always imagine wandering the old monasteries in great form, poking and prodding awakening to arise.*

The assignment was to write a three-page paper on the topic, “What is Zen?” I pondered this question for a couple days, reflecting on the books and lectures from my university course, conceitedly asserting, “This should be easy, I’m an Asian Religious Studies minor, for God’s sake.” Yet, the more I banged my head against the question, the more I leafed through lecture notes and lengthy academic tomes, the more difficult it became. My entire grade for the class, which at the time I took very seriously, depended on this one measly paper. After multiple false starts and minor headaches, I taped a piece of string cheese to a blank sheet of paper, wrote my name at the top, and turned it in. “This could go one of two very different ways,” I thought to myself. With an almost imperceptible smile, my teacher returned the paper with an A in the corner, but suggested that I write an explanation on the back. One of the obscurities that I recall writing was, “How long until the rat is hungry again?” The teacher returned the paper,

with the A crossed out, and a B+ (a lower grade) next to it. Alas, one of my first lessons in Zen.

One month prior, our teacher, a well-respected author and authority on Buddhism in the Kathmandu Valley, had brought his students to his beautiful home in Holden, Massachusetts, for an informal tea gathering (*chakai*) and meditation by a stream. I recall sitting on the floor, admiring the tea bowl (*chawan*), tea caddy (*natsume*) and tea whisk (*chasen*). The wares appeared archaic and worn, objects whose very existence evoked a sense of curiosity. Sitting on tatami in his small tearoom (*chashitsu*), admiring the hanging scroll that I now realize was meant to allude to the season (early spring), I found myself more attentive to the impressions I was receiving without the usual interference from my thoughts and feelings, standing at the threshold of an unknown experience. Everything went into slow motion, every movement became infused with significance and grace, the senses opened and the rapture of being alive was

more accessible. Perhaps this was the first moment I fell in love with Tea.

After the tea ceremony (*Chanoyu*), we all ambled quietly into the forest behind the house in search of a meditation nook. I discovered a boulder in the center of the stream with a perfectly flat top, where I settled into meditation and a newfound communion with the environment, with myself and with life. Even today, fifteen years later, I recall the shafts of light piercing through the trees and reflecting off the ripples in the stream. I remember a small blue bird that hopped curiously in the trees, humming a mellifluous song, and eyeing this unfamiliar visitor with a heightened awareness. The leaves of the maples moving in the wind, the rush of cold water over ancient stones, the cloudless sky—it was all happening, all at once, and it felt like the first time I had noticed the suchness of a moment. I was aware of my awareness for the first time: exactly where I was supposed to be, doing exactly what I was supposed to be doing.

A close-up photograph of a hand holding the lid of a traditional Japanese incense burner (koto). The burner is dark, possibly black or dark brown, and has a textured surface. The lid is being held up, and a plume of white smoke is rising from the opening of the burner. The burner has a decorative band around its middle with intricate patterns and a ring handle on the side. The background is softly blurred, showing a person in a dark garment and a blue object in the distance.

*If asked  
The essence of Chado,  
Say it's the sound  
Of windblown pines  
In a painting.*

*—Sen Sotan*



I was manifesting my purpose in that moment. And I realize now that this manifestation is at the heart of Zen.

Zen master Shunryu Suzuki, a direct spiritual descendent of the great 13<sup>th</sup> century master Dogen, puts it like this, “You may think that if there is no purpose or no goal in our practice, we will not know what to do. But there is a way. The way to practice without having any goal is to limit your activity, or to be concentrated on what you are doing in this moment. Instead of having some particular object in mind, you should limit your activity. When your mind is wondering about elsewhere you have no chance to express yourself. But if you limit your activity to what you can do just now, in this moment, then you can express fully your true nature, which is the universal Buddha nature. This is our way.” (*Zen Mind, Beginners Mind*)

This was my first introduction to Zen and Tea, and this experience was the inspiration for the string-

cheese paper one month later. The minute I offer you an explanation, my grade starts plummeting, so I will only point my finger at the meaning. Zen is beyond words, beyond concepts, beyond the rational mind. It accounts for the totality, while not losing itself in the void. One definition of Zen is: doing one thing at a time. In the Way of Tea, this means brewing tea with your whole being, with all of your awareness, with your mind and body unified in the art of the ceremony.

Most tea lovers have at some point in their journey with the Leaf encountered this beautiful passage by the Indian mystic and teacher Osho: “To make tea a meditative ceremony is just symbolic. It shows that any mundane activity can become meditation. Digging a hole in the garden, planting new roses in the garden... you can do it with such tremendous love and compassion, you can do it with the hands of the Buddha. There is no contra-

diction. The tea ceremony is only the beginning. I say unto you: Your every act should be a ceremony. If you can bring your consciousness, your awareness, your intelligence to the act, if you can be spontaneous, then there is no need for any other religion, life itself will be the religion.” (*The Everest of Zen, with Basho’s Haikus*) Thus, tea is a Zen practice because it is a time in our day when we set everything else aside—to be fully with this act, this moment, this way... The practice of anything implies that you do it repeatedly, and this act of repetition reinforces and cultivates a special quality. Some of the qualities we are working for in Zen are continuous awareness, consciousness, carefulness and respectfulness. If treated this way, the practice begins to bleed into our prosaic lives, our work, our relationships, our entire existence. To live with and to embody these qualities is to live with Zen.

Osho uses the phrase, “Do it with the hands of the Buddha,”



and this is a wonderful place to start. When brewing tea, we might task ourselves with bringing tremendous awareness to our hands. It is, after all, our hands that carry out the tasks of our intention and attention in brewing tea. Can we sense our hands, the energy and fine movements required to brew a cup of tea? We can start here, by feeling our hands with great attention and paying homage to the Leaf, by mindfully handling the leaves, the scoop, the kettle, the pot, the cups, the setting of the *chaxi*, the serving of the tea and the cleaning of the wares afterwards. One might say, “Well, this approach sounds like self-awareness or self-consciousness, and I thought Zen was all about overcoming this obsessive self-consciousness, this ‘self’ altogether...” Here, we must remember that Zen maintains through all of its art forms, including tea, a deep reverence for spontaneity and naturalness. We must remember these qualities as a backdrop when considering

the disciplined regimen of Japanese Zen monasteries. In the words of the great Tang Dynasty master Lin-chi: “In Buddhism there is no place for using effort. Just be ordinary and nothing special. Eat your food, move your bowels, pass water and when you’re tired go and lie down. The ignorant will laugh at me, but the wise will understand.”

Oftentimes, the ideal state of being in Zen is described as a perfectly tuned instrument. If the instrument is too tight, like a person too intensely self-conscious, the strings will break. Whereas, if the strings are too loose, the instrument will not yield its intended harmony. Thus, we seek to maintain enough tension, enough tightness, to remain alert, mindful, present and aware, while also remaining loose enough in our body and mind to take in and respond to the entirety of our experience. If we are too tight, how then will we consider and feel the heart of our guests, as advised by the 16<sup>th</sup> century tea master Rikyu?

Too loose, and we become lost in life, adrift in daydreams, imagination, images, words and emotions—lost in an existence that is not the reality of this moment. Too tight, and we become unable to relax, which is a prerequisite for naturalness, spontaneity and the open reception to other forces in this great Life. Thus, in this subtle balance, this space between, there is a crack through which the light of Zen shines through our tea. There is a difference between the state we experience in quietude and our state in the activities of life. The practice of Chado, of Zen and Tea, is the cultivation of a continuum between these two states. Through continuous practice, our tea becomes infused with Zen. Eventually, this extraordinary quality becomes our way of life—the possibility of awakening and the greatest gift we can offer another human being: *Presence*.



# Gongfu Experiments

## WHAT'S IN A CUP

-Sam Gibb

*Learning to test and evaluate teaware, as opposed to just choosing your wares based solely on aesthetic values, is of the most important assets you will need to grow in gongfu tea, and to expand your understanding of tea in general. This month's experiment sets a foundation for exploring your teaware further.*





Edward Brown, a Zen priest and former *tenzo* (monastery cook) at the Tassajara Zen Mountain Center, once said, “In the course of life we get banged up. We don’t treat each other respectfully and kindly. Somehow the thing that captured my attention, of all things in the kitchen, was the teapots. There is some quality to them that continues even though they are banged up and tarnished. They still seem so willing to carry tea and water; and to serve the people who were using them. And so I would look at those teapots and I would think, ‘If you can do it, I can do it, too.’ We can be inspired by teapots!” There is something beautiful in an antique. While they are never perfect, it is through their imperfection that beauty shines. The small chips, the deep tea stains, the soft glow—these all make up a small part of the magic in an old piece of teaware. They can transport you to another time, when people *were* their profession. When their father and their father’s father all had the same vocation. If you close your eyes when you hold an antique cup, you can imagine all the other people who have held it over the centuries: those

who have cared for it, used it and passed it on. And if you do the same, you’ll be holding something that will outlive you, and perhaps in some small way convey your tea spirit to those left sharing tea after you have gone...

While such poetry is nice, the experiment section of Global Tea Hut asks us to focus on a less subjective approach. I still feel licensed to nostalgia before experimenting with an antique cup, though. After all, the tea table is not a laboratory. We don’t don white coats before conducting these experiments, as complete objectivity is never the aim. (Let alone engaging in a philosophical discussion about whether complete objectivity is even possible.) But in an attempt to move from the subjective to the objective, we do focus on mouthfeel for the purpose of these gongfu experiments. In our experience, and the experience of our teachers before us, this gives a much greater degree of concordance. And that means we have a much sturdier diving board from which we can leap into a dialogue on quality. It also means we have a more accurate means to gauge our progress.

This month we compared a Qing Dynasty cup to a new Taiwanese porcelain one. You can use this methodology for comparing any of your cups at home, so do not feel you cannot participate in this month’s experiment because you do not have a Qing cup. Alternatively, you could test the shape, size, glazing or any other aspect of two different cups. In fact, comparing different cups is one of the most important of all experiments. All too often, we find that tea practitioners gravitate towards the cups that they find to be aesthetically pleasing, as opposed to those that make the best tea. But as Master Lin always says, “Over time, you realize more and more that the cups that make the best tea are always the most beautiful ones as well, for they possess inner beauty.” Learning to love the teaware that elicits the greatest potential from our tea is a huge aspect of gongfu tea.

## What you will need

You will need two cups you wish to compare. In our case we used a Qing Dynasty cup and compared it to a modern tulip-shaped porcelain one, made here in Taiwan. It is important to note that shape can be as important a factor in the quality of the tea liquor as the caliber of the material. You will also need a brewing vessel. We used an Yixing purple-sand (*zisha*) pot. Normally we use a less-oxidized oolong for these experiments—brewed lightly, which helps us focus on the differences between the two variables, as we are less likely to get distracted by flavors or aromas. However, this time we used last month's Old Man Dong Ding, as we have been enjoying it so much we couldn't resist!

## The experiment

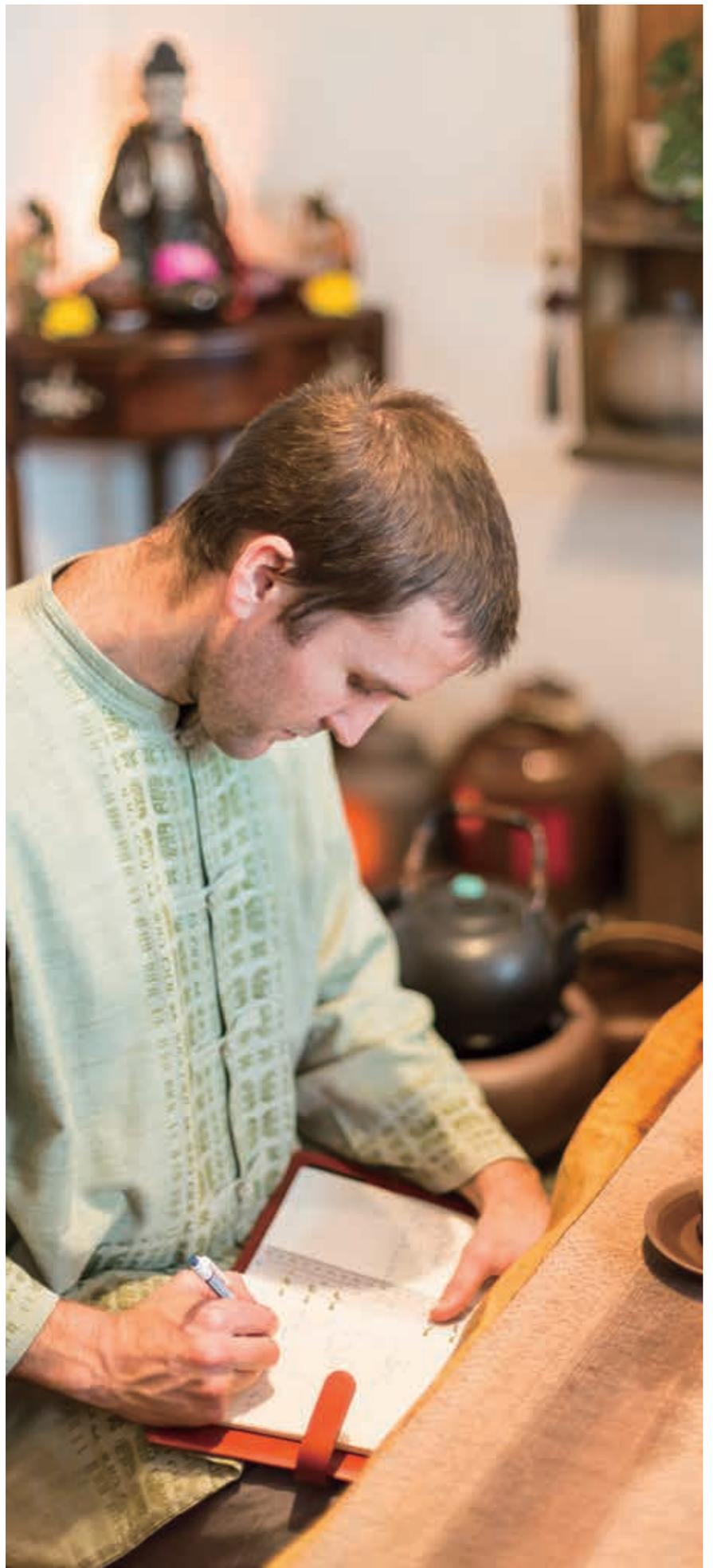
Place both the cups side by side, as if you were brewing normally. Rinse the cups, the pot and then the leaves. Warm both cups and then lightly brew the tea, pouring evenly back and forth between the two cups. Take one cup in each hand, starting with the new porcelain one, and move back and forth between the two. Do this in silence, even if you are doing the experiment with another person. Have a notepad on hand to write down any differences you notice. You can also consider temperature—not just the degree but the quality of the heat. Is it scalding or penetrating? You can also notice aroma—not the specific fragrances, but how high it rises, and whether it fills the nasal cavity or

not. As always, focus on the mouth-feel. Is the tea smooth or rough? Does it go back on its own or do you have to swallow it forcefully? Does it pinch the throat? Is it coating? By focusing on these aspects, you should be able to determine which cup improves the tea liquor. Try asking the tea which cup it wants to be in. This may sound silly at first, but even asking it quietly in your mind opens up new doorways of experience and sensitivity.

You should repeat this process at least three times, making notes and noticing the changes from cup to cup, steeping to steeping.



*We would love to hear about your results comparing cups. We have an amazing discussion board on our website, and you will find that one of us is always standing by to reply to your questions or comments. Share your insights with the community and us, and help make this Global Tea Hut extend beyond these pages!*





# ZEN TO TEA

## THERE AND BACK AGAIN

-Wu De

*Zen is often a kind of apprenticeship. You learn in through watching and participating. Tea is much the same. You have to watch and learn. This is one of the main reasons that we have created a new multi-media Global Tea Hut. Still, there is a lot we can learn from someone who has been trying, failing, falling down and getting back up for many years. Wu De's wisdom is a good starting point for entering the Zen of Tea, and Tea of Zen...*

Once served tea at an event where a master shakuhachi player filled the room with Zen noises whilst I boiled a Five Element Zen Blend akin to our Tea of the Month. We all rode the wind through that bamboo, up and down, bowl by bowl, over the mountain vistas of our mind's eye. At times, it was hard to remember to stay focused and serve the tea. The flute was really that powerful. It was also remarkable to feel a kind of feedback loop between the flute master, myself and the tea: he would drink the occasional bowl and play what the tea inspired in him, which would then enter my ears and change the way I poured the next bowl... The tea and wind danced together, and the thirty of us fortunate enough to be caught up in this exchange felt the tranquility of a leaf spun through the trees, passed from breeze to breeze, and then gently set down onto a quiet stream. Even now, years later, I can only approach the memory with a brush full of more poetry than ink...

The organizers of this event wanted me to speak at the end. I tried to politely wiggle my way out of it, suggesting that the tea and flute spoke all the Zen that was worth saying. I honestly felt like anything I said would be an intrusion; but they were adamant, so I obliged. I really had no idea what to say. If the strong tea hadn't been enough to still my mind, the flute had blown any remaining ideas from my mind. Surprisingly, when it came time to talk, the words that came out are the perfect intro for a discussion on Zen and Tea—so perfect that I have often used this anecdote to start Zen and Tea workshops. I looked up at all the Zen-filled eyes there and with a heart full of gratitude said, "I would like to celebrate something amazing, which is that this gloriously talented brother and I are fortunate to have a way of expressing our Zen that doesn't require words." And with that I asked the master to play an encore while I served one last sweet and watery bowl to wrap the night

up with the same Zen with which it had begun.

Since that evening, I haven't lost that feeling. I often pause to smile with gratitude for Tea and the grace that brought this wonderful medium into my life, through which I can take all the meditation and cultivation of my life and express it to others in a very pure form. As many of you know, I often start the conversations we have after tea with a reminder that all I really have to say about Tea or Zen was already stated in the silent, ceremonial space we just shared... And I'd like to do that now as well... Though the flashing cursor moving across the screen as I type this may not have the power of a deep glance after finishing an hour of silent tea, I've just paused in my typing, put my hands together and inhaled some deep stillness before setting my fingers back on the keys again—all in the hopes that these words, and the thoughts they will catalyze in your mind, will convey some of that Zen to you now...

*The Way of Tea—  
Follow it, and ever deeper it leads on;  
Like the endless fields of Musashi,  
Where the moon is most lucid,  
Its depths draw us onwards.*

*—Rikkansai*

*Watch the Zen and Tea  
video now!*



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



## What is Zen?

In the West, we often think of Zen as a kind of Buddhism. It can be thought of in that way, but it isn't just that. "Zen" is the Japanese word for the Chinese "Chan," which was pronounced "Tsan" in the south of China and then translated to "Zen" in Japanese. The word "Chan" is also a translation, so you actually have to follow the etymology back to Sanskrit to understand its essence. "Chan" is how the Chinese translated "*dhyana*," which is at best understood as "the meditative mind." It's actually deeper than that, but "meditative mind" will do. So "Zen" is *the meditative mind*. Besides the etymology of the word "Zen," we can also look to the origin myth of Zen in order to further the idea that Zen is not just a religion or kind of Buddhism, but that, in its pure form, it is the meditative mind itself. Zen traces its origin back to a time when the Buddha held up a lotus instead of giving a teaching and something unspoken was transmitted through that flower to

his student Mahakasyapa, who was enlightened. (It is interesting to note that the Buddha also did not teach Buddhism. The word "Buddhism" was first used by a British author in the beginning of the nineteenth century. Asian society traditionally didn't have the strong sense of religious affiliation or identity that is prevalent in the West. Even today, people often see no harm in praying at Buddhist, Daoist and folk/Nature temples, as well as visiting a church on Sunday.)

There are four foundations of Zen, and in contemplating them, you may see why tea has played such an important role in the Zen tradition over the centuries:

- 1) *Non-verbal transmission between teacher and student.*
- 2) *No non-provisional, lasting view; no dogma, no doctrine, no scripture or philosophy.*
- 3) *Must lead to the heart of a person.*
- 4) *Must reveal the truth of Nature as it is.*

不立文字 直指人心  
教外別轉 見性成佛



## Not in Words

Since the transmission is non-verbal, and not doctrinal or dogmatic, Zen is a difficult thing to share, or even talk about. Zen Buddhism can be a basket that carries and encourages Zen (the meditative mind), but it can also get in the way. “Religion often hinders the religious experience,” as Osho often said. For that reason, Zen masters have always used art as a tool to encourage transmission and awakening, as often as they’ve used more traditional Buddhist practices like chanting, scripture, philosophy or other life teachings. The martial arts were born in this way. Calligraphy, painting, poetry and music—like the flute of my session—have all been used to transmit Zen over the centuries. But no teacher has spoken as prolifically on Zen as Tea!

Tea has sat between master and student for millennia. And there’s an easy experiment you can do to understand why. It’s really simple: in the middle of a session, switch brewers! Same tea, water, same teaware,

but different brewer. I am going to spoil the experiment and state the obvious (But you should still try it, in order to understand yourself. Don’t take my word for it!): *The tea is very, very different.* The heart-mind of the brewer influences the tea. This should come as no surprise. We can hand two different musicians the same sheet of music, and even the same exact instrument, and they will play two very different versions of the song. In art, the creation comes out saturated by the colors of our soul, like water passed through a freshly dyed cloth.

Once you understand that the brewer influences the tea more than the water, teaware or brewing methodology (not just because you read it here, but because you tried the experiment), then you can begin to understand why tea has been so important to teacher/student relationships throughout history. If the mind of the brewer is in the liquor, then what could be more poignant than for the student to literally and metaphorically consume the teacher’s mind? There could be nothing more Zen. And this works the other way, too: the student makes tea and offers their heart-mind to the teacher, an acceptance of which symbolizes a taking of that student into the tradition.

The second foundation of transcending dogma, doctrine or philosophy is actually one of the most endearing aspects of tea. If you invite a Buddhist, Hindu, Christian and Muslim into a room to discuss their worldviews, chances are they will argue. But if they go into that same room to drink and discuss tea, they will emerge brothers. I have seen it happen! This is a huge measure of the gratitude I expressed at that shakuhachi gathering, and every time since: that I can express my heart, free of any ideas or concepts. Language can be a barrier, because it represents ideas and concepts, so the listener/reader can

either agree or disagree, believe in or not believe in the ideas expressed. As I write this article on Zen, I know that some of my readers will agree with it all, some will agree with a portion and disagree with other parts, while still others of you will disagree with it all. (You know who you are!) But when I make tea, I can express my heart free of doctrine or philosophy. And while you could say you don’t want the bowl of tea I offer you, it would be absurd to say that you don’t agree with or don’t believe in it. You don’t agree with a bowl of tea; you drink it!

## Tea and Zen

Tea is moving meditation. It is devotion in motion. And that is another reason that Tea and Zen are one flavor. Tea encourages, leads into and then expresses the meditative mind, which is Zen. It is a meditative bridge that acts as an ally to those trying to begin a meditation practice, as well as to the seasoned meditator looking to further the meditative mind in their life. Tea is a bridge built of Zen.

Over years of meditation I have come to find that I really don’t have mindfulness issues. Like most people, I once complained that I couldn’t remember to be mindful, hoping to find practices that would help me be more mindful throughout the day. But then, one day, I realized that I have a great capacity for mindfulness, as does everyone. I learned this by watching the concentration habits of my young students (I was once a school teacher). I realized that when they had respect for something, they naturally and easily became focused and mindful and that this sometimes would even last for longer periods than what you would ordinarily think possible for small children. It dawned on me that I didn’t have mindfulness problems; I had respect problems!



And it is easy to have respect challenges in a world where everything is mass-produced by companies that don't respect the Earth, or even their customers—by workers who don't love or respect what they do. Things are made to be used and discarded these days, not respected. Through tea I rediscovered my respect for all areas of my life, and my mindfulness—my Zen.

My teacher used to say that you can tell everything about a student's Zen by watching the way they treat their shoes. I would say the same about tea: you can tell a Chajin's relationship to tea by the way they treat their cups and bowls, pot and kettle, and even the tea they jar for later. This doesn't mean you need to buy the nicest, most expensive teaware. That is just one way of showing respect. But in finding your respect for tea as plant medicine, for the guest if you are the host, or host if you are the guest, you will have found the mindful, sacred center of tea—the place where tea and Zen meet. With respect, a tea practice naturally leads into the feeling of sacred, the still place in the center of the heart. The transformative magic of a tea session is dependent upon this respect, like most all relationships one has in life.

Aside from respect for guest and host, respect for tea as plant medicine and for one's teaware, there is also respect for the practice itself. Never underestimate the power of repetitive practice! We are creatures of habit. We learn through repetition. And when it comes to a moving meditation like tea, there are many subtle changes that come from brewing the tea upright, with intention and mindfulness day after day, month to month and even for years. Muscles change, energy begins to flow differently, and you may even see the world differently. This is taking the tea bridge from life to Zen.

The bridge also leads from Zen to Tea. As meditators, we often find a strange sense of dichotomy



developing over years of practice, in which you are peaceful on the cushion, but feel as though much more of the insight cultivated in meditation could somehow be translated into your daily life. I've certainly felt this way. Sometimes you lose all your meditation in a moment's anger, for example. If you already have a meditation practice, you will find that tea facilitates the meditative mind in daily life. If you prepare tea after meditation, you may find that more of the insights and transformations realized on the cushion start to find their way into your day. As you move through the ordinary activity of preparing tea with a meditative mind, you learn to bring that mind to other activities as well. And this is the secret to having more Zen in your life. The key to being more spiritual is not necessarily in doing more of a particular activity like yoga or seated medita-

tion. That may work. But ultimately, the real way to make your life more spiritual is to start doing more things with sacred intention. Walking up and down stairs, brushing you teeth, eating—these can all be meditations! And tea encourages this. Through this practice, I find myself closer to living the way I long to. I am closer to the one I wish to be.

### **Why Zen?**

Let's have one more bowl... Before we wrap up this session, and with your permission, I thought I'd share my three favorite aspects of Zen, and why I have devoted so much of my life to a Zen practice and way of life. The first thing I love about Zen is its irreverence. For example, there is a tradition of writing witty graffiti on scriptures,



like Hakuin's commentary on the Heart Sutra. This is something very powerful. Zen is special for not only publically acknowledging, but celebrating its own limitations. There is a very real way in which this thing we call Zen is not the "it" we are seeking, nor even the "it" we are learning from. Zen is not what we are looking for. It may show the way to the truth, but it isn't the truth. One of my favorite Zen sayings demonstrates this: "Zen is a stall selling water by a river."

The truth is all around us. And our minds, our ideas and philosophies—our explanations of our world—are all a part of this world, but they aren't to be confused with it. The finger pointing at the moon is not the moon. All views are provisional. The scientific method demands that. You cannot understand the way things are, only how they are now as seen through the

limitations of whatever lens you are looking through. Later, others may have a better lens and see things from a clearer perspective. Science grows and expands upon itself in this way, and so does Zen.

And that brings me to the second thing I love most about Zen, which is that, like science, it never stops growing. If you remember the foundations of Zen we discussed earlier, you can see that the third and fourth principles of Zen put the focus on experiential truth. With such an emphasis on experiential wisdom, Zen has always encouraged new expansions and expressions of truth. In other words, there is a never-ending stream of new Zen literature and some of it is as good as the great scriptures of old. I am as inspired by Shunryu Suzuki's books as I am by the Platform Sutra of Hui Neng. In some ways, Suzuki's modern work is even a better read, as it

is not as difficult to understand and perhaps helps me to better understand how to live a life of Zen in the modern world. Since the emphasis is not on a particular dogma, doctrine or scripture, Zen encourages any expression that facilitates the meditative mind, and that means an up-to-date flow of poetry, calligraphy, art and scripture, ancient to modern.

Finally, the thing I love most about Zen is that, as this article has demonstrated, there are always many and more excuses to drink tea. I love that tea helps me to find the meditative mind when I have lost my respect for the world. And I also love that once I am centered, I can then use tea to express my meditative experience to others. If they weren't serving so much tea, I never would have found my way into a Zen center...



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和  
花

# ZEN & FLOWERS

-Shen Su

*As you learn chaxi arranging, you quickly discover that so many other art forms are relevant to making a nice chaxi that transforms your guests. And no art is more important to chaxi than flower arranging. Flowers will always be a part of tea, which is why we asked Shen to explore the relationship between Zen and flower arranging for this issue.*

Flowers are said to be the enlightenment of the plant kingdom. Since ancient times, they have been offerings on countless altars, for what better gift could one present to the Divine than the enlightened aspects of this world, symbols of the very pinnacle of Nature's glory? The Buddha also recognized the power of a single flower. It is said that upon Vulture Peak, the Buddha stood before a large congregation of monks, nuns, and laity. Perhaps in stark contrast to the expectations of the assembly, the Buddha remained silent, and instead held forth a flower. The respectable Mahakasyapa smiled unto this and became the first patriarch of the Zen tradition. Though Zen has developed and changed over the course of time, flowers still play an integral role in the life of any Zen practitioner.

Flowers were beautiful long before any humans held them in their hands. But beauty that *knows* it's beautiful is more powerful than beauty alone! That is what human consciousness contributes to the equation. We cannot perceive of beauty unless it is inherent within us, and so to look upon this world through that lens of awareness is to bring great joy to the world itself, as the beauty in us now sees its reflection in Nature! And that was a small

part of the deep understanding the Buddha saw in Mahakasyapa's smile. In that moment, Mahakasyapa was flowering, and the flower was smiling.

When we realize the deeper meaning of our actions, we are less likely to sacrifice their essence to a surface level convenience. For example, while it is nice to arrange flowers to make a space more beautiful, one might use fake flowers to the same effect. This would be more convenient. But if I think of each of my flower arrangements as an offering, like the Buddha made during his sermon, then flower arranging is not *just* about beautifying a space anymore, but about creating the opportunity for someone to awaken, or at least rest in the stillness that flowers so miraculously grant us. My orientation towards flower arranging means everything; it's the difference between a chore and a Zen practice. If what we do is connected to something greater than ourselves, it becomes something greater than just a task; it becomes art, or even something sacred—it becomes Zen.

When arranging your own Zen flowers, remember the impetus they played in the very flowering of human consciousness, and let that motivate you to make each arrangement your best one ever, for

it might just cause someone to smile in Mahakasyapa enlightenment! And in such a practice, the flowers are fulfilled. The sacrifice made by them, in growing and dying for us, is meaningful. Their lives are properly celebrated by such a sacred act, and we are then worthy of having them in our space.

And so, like anything, we get back what we put into it. We get awe-inspiring flower arrangements when we show up with an awareness and appreciation of that flower the Buddha held high in the air. This awareness inspires us to make flower arrangements with the same power, as if every blossom we ever use were that mythical one. And in an absolute sense, they are!

There is no particular style to Zen flower arranging. It is not a method or a pragmatic approach to arranging the flowers themselves. It is a celebration and a welcoming of our true selves, our guests and Nature. The space in which the flowers are arranged and the quality of the mind arranging them are the primary considerations. In our center there are different spaces and occasions that call for different flower arrangements. Some are very elegant and intricately arranged, while others are more rustic or even simply scattered about.

*When you ask of the dark,  
The master shows you the light.  
When you ask of the light,  
She shows you the dark.  
Forgetting shadows and suns,  
The world rolls away—  
Blossoms bloom, blossoms fall.*

*—Wu De*





Certain arrangements represent abundance and others are made to express humility. Most important, however, is that we follow the stem into the water of Truth all flowers drink from...

At our center, we arrange and offer fresh flowers in different spaces. In our main tea hall and meditation room, you will always find orchids on display. They symbolize abundance, and this is certainly an abundant center—thanks to you! We are so grateful for your support and we celebrate that with offerings of Nature's enlightenment. On the tea table itself, we often arrange simple flowers or sometimes

scatter wild ones to suit the theme of the *chaxi*. In the window peering into our gongfu room, we often display a variety of flower arrangements, ranging from elegant and floral, to austere and even flowerless. You will also notice homey arrangements offered in and around the kitchen. And, of course, we adorn many of our altars with beautiful, abundant and fresh flowers. We keep these flowers changed throughout the week as needed to welcome our guests, beautify our Tea and Zen center, create opportunities for stillness, and pay homage to the roots of this tradition, in the flower that began it all.

The living and dying of flowers before our very eyes is a beautiful reminder of the fleeting impermanence of all things, including this very life. In them, we find our own mortality, and an ability to celebrate the present moment. Flowers are fully awake, from the moment they open to the moment they die and become something else. In Zen, we do not throw our used flowers away. We bury them, burn them, place them in a stream or dispose of them in some other ceremonious fashion—thankful for all they have taught us on their way to becoming soil, and flower again...



Your ability to arrange Zen flowers need not depend on books, videos or guidelines. Like a good tea session, in which the most important element is the one serving the tea, the most important aspect of a flower arrangement is the arranger. Average tea served with heart will always be better than the best tea served without any intention at all. While great teaware and skill are ideal in conjunction with great intention, the latter is primary. So too, a variety of vases and abundant flower sources are great, but keep things simple in the beginning. Let your intentions motivate you to

start arranging and viewing your own Zen flowers.

Zen, after all, is a state of mind, and so the Zen flower is akin to an open state of mind, one that is empty and receptive, like a good tea bowl. If a flower arrangement reminds you of that truth, it has done its job well! Beyond that, flowers point to the still space, into which no words may follow...



Let these flowers remind you of your own potential for awakening. View them carefully and pay attention to not only the flowers and fillers but the spaces in between. There must be space to honor each flower, just as we must create space in our lives to make room for growth and welcome change. Notice how you feel when fresh flower arrangements surround you in your environment. Make a practice of both arranging Zen flowers and of viewing them. Look towards Nature for inspiration. A Zen flower arrangement might be found in the most unlikely spot if you are open to seeing it.



*Watch the Zen and  
Flowers video now!*



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



**W**alking down this tea path, it can feel more and more like a labyrinth. As straightforward as learning about tea can seem, especially with a marvelous guide like the *Global Tea Hut* magazine to help clarify things, the actual experience of a life of tea unfolds in a deep, multifaceted way over time as one digests it. Tea leaves in a bowl eventually lead to gongfu sets, which themselves start out utilitarian and eventually shed themselves into finer clays and richer porcelains of greater benefit to a subtler tea liquor. A few cups of red tea here and there lead to everyday pots of belly-filling shou puerh, which in turn leads to special and rare aged sheng puerh or CliffTea sessions that alter one's sense of self far more than we would think possible at the outset. But then the simplicity comes back; it always does.

As we grow in the knowledge of tea history, production, terroir and preparation, we simultaneously deepen our tea wisdom. This becomes especially clear in light of the rare issues of this magazine that focus on and elucidate Tea as a Way, as Cha Dao. Because the impact of Cha Dao is much subtler than receiving a gift of tea this and every month, it may not yet be completely obvious or important, even to long-term subscribers, that there is a physical place one can visit, a center in Miaoli, Taiwan, called "Tea Sage Hut," which functions as the epicenter of this publication; and within which its residents practice this Way of Tea every single day! Indeed, it is only through the cultivation of Tea as a Way at Tea Sage Hut that *Global Tea Hut* could even exist in the first place, as the production of this magazine arises as an outpour-

ing of a desire to share this Way with others!

This summer, after the cab driver dropped me off in near hallucination at the front gate, I had the great fortune of walking into Tea Sage Hut myself. The journey left an indelible impact upon me. It would be very easy to explain the value of my stay in terms of the hospitality I received: delicious meals, cozy accommodations, endless tea ceremonies and boundless love. But the most valuable thing, indeed priceless to me, was my experience of the "secret sauce" underpinning all of the activities at the Hut. And that secret, the most confusing of them all, is called "Zen."

If you are anything like I was prior to my visit, the meaning of this word "Zen" remains quite elusive, and it is hard to find its pulse. By contrast, Cha Dao is much



# A REVIEW OF WU DE'S BOOK ZEN & TEA ONE FLAVOR

-MIKE BAAS

more tangible to me: *Do everything you do as if you were serving tea.* But this begs the question: How do you serve tea? The package of tea that arrives each month, the water used to brew it, the kettle and the teapot employed in the service of brewing—all of these things are so hands-on. And in fact, many people who drink tea relate solely to these graspable attributes, such that tea service is so obvious as to not warrant deeper thoughts: pour the hot water on the leaves, pass cups around and drink! But is this actually the process being performed? Is tea so simple? On closer examination, one will find that along with the leaves there is some judgment about their quality; along with the pouring of water is the stream of a mental checklist of things to be done that day; and along with the kettle and teapot is the desire to get

a more high-quality setup! Knowing these impulses well, the residents of Tea Sage Hut set their minds each day to achieving the true simplicity of Tea in all that they do. What I learned during my stay is that the way in which they “set their minds” to this achievement is Zen.

As Wu De writes at the outset of his book, *Zen & Tea One Flavor*, “It is said that the flavor of Zen and the flavor of tea are the same, and without an understanding of one, there is no mastery of the other.” Therefore it appears mandatory that those practicing the Way of Tea would concurrently practice Zen in order to achieve anything resembling mastery. You only have to take one short tour around the Tea Sage Hut to know that something approaching mastery is in full effect. There, the heart of Zen is beating everywhere if you know how to feel its pulse! For-

tunately for all of us with the desire to visit Tea Sage Hut, Wu De has provided a guidebook we can read well ahead of our visit in order to prepare us for what awaits. Let’s get into some of its finer points now...

The format of *Zen & Tea One Flavor* has us alternating between figuratively “having a cup of tea” and reading a commentary “while the next one steeps.” This metaphor is helpful to understanding the profound philosophy of Zen and Tea, since it reminds us to do just that: drink tea while we read, and contemplate between steepings. Anyone reading *Zen & Tea One Flavor* (or any book for that matter) would be wise to follow its tea drinking guidelines, as they serve to properly pace the reading for optimum digestibility. And more so than many other books, this one *must* be digested to be understood.

It is important in Zen that this wisdom becomes “one’s own wisdom.” Wu De’s transmissions in this book are imparted in such a way that an open mind, colored by Tea, can easily embody it. He himself says that actually imbibing tea along with his literary cues to do so is not necessary, but I highly recommend it! Although any chapter in the book can be read at random, Wu De describes the book in his introduction as a “twenty-one cup session,” suggesting a slow digestion bowl by bowl—equal parts book and actual tea!

As the first chapter asks us to approach Tea and Zen with an empty, ready-to-learn mind, it helps to start reading this book in the same way. There he poignantly describes a tea session as “a basket to convey something deeper.” The book, like a tea session, is pointing at something ineffable. Tea and Zen are too big to be spoken; yet Wu De can’t help but utter many, many profound things throughout this book, weaving a succinct and poetic fusion of traditional Zen sayings into his own wisdom. He is not trying to feed you this wisdom as a means to fill you up, though. The point is that if you come empty-handed (and minded) to the book, your own wisdom will arise spontaneously. This happened to me while reading it and during my stay at the Hut, and I have been forever changed as a result.

In the second chapter, Wu De explains that to a tea sage, “the pots, cups and utensils are there to promote *Samadhi*, one-pointed mind.” So here we learn that at least part of the “something deeper” promoted by a tea session is a certain quality of mind. He goes on to suggest that this mind is really “no mind at all.” And those of us who have spent our lives chasing down this no-mind in meditation know how consistently elusive it can be. Does the book finally reveal the secret to attaining it? Wu De explains that, in order to have a chance, we’ll have to prac-

tice “celebrating the ordinary,” and take this party to the *n<sup>th</sup>* degree, i.e. every opportunity in every moment. Complete Zen and Tea mastery is never going to be found in a single session or even in the epic “twenty-one cup session” of this book. This is why the residents of Tea Sage Hut have configured their center, both in schedule and in *Fengshui*, as a place to make everything happening inside its walls a big celebration. A sign hanging next to the front entrance of the Hut reads: “No Entry Except on Party Business!”

Subsequent chapters unfold the terms of the celebration: cleanliness and purity, equal vision towards that which one experiences, full participation, removal of judgment and comparison. There is definitely a “way” to Zen just as there is a “way” to Tea. As Wu De’s writing circuitously defines the way in which we can actually celebrate continuously, not just in fits and starts or only while having a formal tea ceremony, he enables us to see that these terms aren’t arbitrarily set forth. Constant one-pointed mindfulness becomes more realistic, along with a foundation for practicing Zen through tea. Tea gives us the perfect platform upon which to cultivate this foundation, and Wu De’s constant clarification of Zen avenues to masterful tea preparation stands us in good stead.

“Leaves and Water” is one of my favorites chapters because it describes an important roadblock to accomplishing the promise of a constant Zen party: *the progression of your own life!* Here Wu De takes a step back from tea and looks at all the other elements that comprise the life of a Chajin: one’s own health, artistic impulses, hopes and dreams, the uniqueness of one’s own journey, etc. Reconciling and harmonizing everything that one is becomes another term of the celebration. As Wu De puts it, “After some time, when art and life consummate, you realize that you are drinking Zen.”

Lest we start jotting down the prerequisites to a proper Zen life in

order to start applying them, Wu De soon reminds us that no checklist is ever going to help us, really. “To understand the essence of Zen,” he says emphatically, “you must be Zenless.” Once you arrive here in the book, having established a sense of foundation, you will hopefully see that the engagement with the very book you now hold in your hands is the very opportunity to practice letting go of the foundation you built up reading it! The reading suddenly becomes a great opportunity for direct experiential wisdom! Will you put the book down, stunned, in order to pour another cup of tea in an attempt to get to the bottom of it, only to realize that Tea itself is just as bottomless!? I realized that just as Tea Sage Hut is a center that *is* a realized expression of Zen, this book certainly meets Wu De’s aspiration that it *be* an expression of Zen art rather than *be about* Zen art. Applying the transitive property, this book is then also a realized expression of Tea. Therefore, *quod erat demonstrandum*, if you *really* want to understand that package of tea that comes in the mail each month, you must read this book. Then sometime shortly after you read *Zen & Tea One Flavor*, you must visit Tea Sage Hut in order to celebrate!

To close, I would like to end this review expressing my deep admiration for Wu De’s take on the famous twelfth-century ox-herding pictures, remade as “The Lost Tea-brewing Pictures,” that conclude the book. The images and story contained therein left me with a thoroughly satisfied feeling that I had just traveled through a supremely special work of art. May you be as happy as I was when I first finished this great work!

*Turn the page to read a sample chapter from Zen & Tea One Flavor..*

# Zen & Tea One Flavor

ZEN & TEA ONE FLAVOR



Aaron Fisher  
無為海

Aaron Fisher  
無為海

## THE FIRST CUP

### EMPTY IT ONTO THE GROUND

#### *Have a cup*

One of the wisest professors at the University of Punditry had reached the end of a long and prosperous career, with an alphabet of letters after his name and a paragraph of awards to put in the small biographies printed on the backs of his many books. He smiled and accepted compliments, pretending to be modest while his face betrayed the fact that he was basking in it all. Despite his intellectualism and the fact that he had lived so disembodied that most ordinary people couldn't understand what he was saying—despite his “elephantiasis of the ratiocination organ” (as he himself would call it), he did deep down wish to understand the Truth, the world and even perhaps himself. He wasn't really content.

He had spent twenty years seeking answers in the library, discussing and re-discussing his ideals over and over again in the jargon he and others had created. They sent memos—and later in their careers, emails—arguing the nuances of what “Truth” itself meant (because, of course, one had to establish all that before any real understanding could begin). Now, however, at the end of this long, winding path through academia, he still felt hollow, as if he was in fact no closer to understanding why he was here or what life was about.

A friend of the family was over for dinner one night and described a recent trip to the mountains. He mentioned meeting a monk who lived way up a winding trail in a small temple. He said the monk had become quite famous in the region for his wisdom and perspicacity. The scholar's ears perked up. Perhaps one such as this would have the answers to life. What did it all mean? Is there

a God? What happens when we die?...

As he planned for the trip, the scholar made lists of questions—crossing some out with red ink and rewriting them. He then paced his study memorizing them, as it would be unseemly to bring the actual list before the monk. He insisted that his family stay behind in the small village, hiking up the trail himself. After a long, grueling trek, he found the small temple and adjoining cottage.

The monk invited him in. When he said that he had come from far away to ask the monk some questions of the utmost importance, the old man asked him to sit down and insisted that they first drink some tea. This made the impatient scholar a bit peeved, as he had waited so many years and was anxious to test the wisdom of one who hadn't read nearly enough books, but he agreed out of politeness. As the water boiled the old monk glanced out the window at the mountains, and the scholar thought he was being ignored. He used the time to organize his questions in his mind, silently counting them off on his fingers.

When the tea was ready, the monk placed a bowl before the scholar and leaned over with the teapot. His wizened hands were perfectly steady, and the stream of tea poured so smoothly it appeared soft in the dim light—it poured, and poured and poured. Soon the tea reached the rim of the cup. Then beyond. It spilled over the table and splashed onto the mat next to the scholar with a resounding, “Hey! What are you doing?!” The old monk set the pot down gently and gestured to the brimming cup with

*You devas should know that all such forms are taught by buddhas according to the ways of the world and not according to their inexpressible meaning.*

—The Buddha

his eyes, “Your mind is like that cup, so pray tell me: Where am I to pour the wisdom you seek?”

#### *While the next pot is steeping*

Is your cup full or empty? Do you come to your tea as 5.2 grams of puerh tea harvested by the Menghai factory in 1997 using the 8582 recipe, with slightly larger leaves... or are you empty? Can your cup hold the tea you wish to drink, or has it too become something you've filled with ideas, opinions, questions or comments? And can we really enjoy the aroma, the flavor or the comfort of a cup of fine tea when we've made of it but another topic in our libraries?

There is enough to think about, worry about and debate in our lives without making the times set aside for our relaxation into something serious. Instead, let tea be just leaves and water. Approach it with an empty mind, ready to learn from the liquor itself rather than from a book on tea processing, history or other trivia. Some of that is fun and we're all curious; it can also be useful when purchasing tea, for knowing about tea production makes one an aware consumer. However, now that the tea is before us, let us wash away all the intellectual traps, whether about tea, Zen, spirituality, the Way we should live or even the Way we should drink tea...just leaves and water.

There aren't any questions about yourself to which you don't already have the answers. There is nothing about the tea you need to know which isn't taught by the liquor itself.

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There is no need to record the moment with an internal dialogue—no need to describe the tea. There is just leaves and water.

When asked how to practice Zen, the master responded: “Drop all opinions!”

Don’t approach tea as the scholar in this cup-story. Don’t come to the mountain hermitage of your tea space with a lot of questions in the form of words. Instead, sit down before your cup of tea with a clear, relaxed mind—open to any wisdom it brews. This is, in fact, how the Zen adept approaches life: as if each moment was the master, and there was something to learn from every blade of grass.

The tea sessions, like any words that could describe them, are just “fingers pointing at the moon.” They are a basket to convey something deeper. And that is why Japanese tea masters have often called tea books, tearooms and even their disciples by names like: “forgotten Basket (Bosen)” or “Abandoned Bas-

ket (Hosen).” After the basket carries something, it is abandoned.

Dump out your cup. Throw out all you have learned about meditation, tea or the Way. There is no need to understand tea when we can let the tea understand us. A simple, empty cup or bowl resting on the table as it awaits tea is the perfect symbol of the Zen mind: always beginning, always humble and waiting.

Lao Tzu often said that it was the spaces between a house’s walls that made it useful, the hollow part of a pitcher that held the water; and, we may add, it is the freedom of the empty cup that makes it beautiful: I am that cup, humble and indiscriminate. The cup doesn’t object. It holds great and mediocre tea alike. It also remains untainted after the tea is drunk. It is filled with a tea for some time and then releases it without a trace. Thoughts also pass through my mind, like tea through this cup; and let them also leave no traces to taint my future tea sessions. Let my mind also spend the major-

ity of its time empty, so that when the tea is finally poured it will be fresh and new, unaffected by any cups I’ve drunk in the past. The tea I had before doesn’t matter—only this cup! The moments that have gone or are yet to come also are not in this cup here before me. Without judgment, plain and unadorned wisdom is poured into me, emptied again, poured, emptied... If your mind is too full, empty it; and if it’s empty, fill it. That is the natural and skillful use of a cup: empty... full... empty. full...

Your cup is now empty and awaiting the tea that will soon be poured, filling you with wisdom and Truth more palpable and real than any concept of an experience can ever be. Each sip is pure, unadulterated living wisdom and monumental presence, here and now. This is your life, it isn’t elsewhere and there is no need to think about it, rationalize it or analyze it—just drink it!



每日  
打坐  
喝茶

# DAILY MEDITATION & TEA PRACTICE

-Rich Allum

*Earlier in this issue, Wu De spoke about how tea is a bridge between Zen and Tea that leads both from the profane to the sacred and the other way as well. Rich decided to do this experiment to journal what would happen as he drank tea and then meditated, versus meditation and then tea drinking. While there may not be a decisiveness to this approach, his daily journal chronicles a life of tea and Zen worth reading. He shares in his experience, challenges and difficulties, as well as his insights and hope.*

**W**hilst staying at the Tea Sage Hut in Taiwan I was talking with Wu De about my desire to begin writing again. Other than the occasional haiku, I haven't written much of anything since my school days, despite having a desire to. Quite simply, I had no subject to write about or any reason to write about it! Wu De then suggested that I could conduct an experiment involving tea and meditation and write about that, as there are many readers of Global Tea Hut magazine out there who are just as inexperienced in these matters as I am, and may be interested to hear the views of a like-minded person. The experiment was to see what the difference between meditating and then drinking tea or drinking tea and then meditating had on one's morning practice and day in general.

I decided that I would dedicate an hour each morning for two weeks to this experiment: half an hour in meditation and half an hour drinking tea with mindful awareness, swapping the order after one week. As they are both daily activities for me, I immediately saw the bene-

fits of doing such an experiment. I felt that the best time to conduct this practice was first thing in the morning, with the hope that in the years to come I'd be able to extend this practice of experiential analysis and then habit reformation into the rest of my life. Sharing this personal journal of my experience will hopefully be useful to others with a tea and meditation practice.

## Day 1

Since it was the first day, my mind was distracted with the myriad of things I thought I needed to pay attention to and look out for, to notice and to write down. It took what felt like a lifetime for my mind to be calm enough to even consider myself meditating. As usual, the thoughts of last night's TV shows, the work schedule for the day ahead and the coming weeks' jobs to be done periodically filled my head, coming and going like waves of distraction lapping at the shore of my mind. Then I noticed a recurring idea: "It would have been better to

drink tea first." I told myself, "I can't concentrate, this isn't working!" I do usually drink tea prior to meditation in the morning, so on reflection my reaction made sense. In that moment, I was shocked at having seen the fixed view I had gained from a mere six to eight months of conditioning. Also, I had meditated without the aid of tea for over two years beforehand, so my craving for a specific order to things was certainly surprising. The tea session that followed my meditation was a contemplative one: "How often do I behave out of conditioning and in what circumstances?" I wondered, already knowing the answers. The tea itself, though, was a disappointment. There was no magic, no connection and, on a sensory level, no enjoyment, although it was a tea that I love! I vowed to try again tomorrow with a beginner's mind.

## Day 2

I think my whole being needed to meditate today. No sooner had I sat on my cushion



and straightened my back than my whole body relaxed—my mind quieted down and my concentration deepened. Throughout the session many thoughts appeared as always, but today they merely came and went. I clung to none of them. Needless to say, my tea session afterwards was a complete contrast to that of yesterday. Everything about it seemed different, seemed deeper. The steam coming from my bowl danced before me in a way I've never noticed before, the liquor was a beautiful gold, shimmering in the morning sunlight. The mouthfeel was exquisite, and I noticed how easily the tea passed down my throat, warming me from the core. I ended the session with a strong feeling of quiet contentment, ready for the day ahead and feeling much more open to meditating before tea!

### Day 3

I woke up tired and yet the prospect of meditating didn't seem off-putting. I sat on my cushion and spent half an hour sitting without too much distraction. When it came to drinking tea, I wasn't expecting a repeat of yesterday's heightened awareness, making the assumption that an uneventful meditation would lead to an uneventful tea session. On the surface I was right; my senses didn't detect anything extraordinary in the bowl or my surroundings. However, my internal experience surprised me! I'm far too inexperienced to talk of Qi, and I'm not even sure I could describe what it feels like as it moves within us, but I definitely experienced something today that I hadn't felt before. As I drank the first bowl my attention was drawn inwards, to a feeling that was radiating from my core upwards towards my head. I felt more alert and energized, but calm—it wasn't like the adrenaline kick of too much caffeine or sugar; it was more subtle...

### Day 4

My meditation felt short today. Perhaps it was because I felt particularly absorbed. I attended a meditation workshop last night that focused on working with sensations within the body, from the gross to the subtle. These sensations were the focus of this morning's session. When the time came for tea I was still very centered, calm and alert, and the difference it made to my tea experience was quite apparent. As soon as I lifted my bowl, I could feel the heat and energy through my hands and arms, much like the day before but much more intensely. I don't mean simply that the bowl was hot; it felt like I could feel the vibration of the heat transferring from the bowl and then through my body. I took a sip and again I could feel that energy as it moved down my throat. I was also amazed at the taste of the tea! Although I love the purple-red tea that I was drinking, it had never tasted like this before. There was an amazing sweetness to it and a depth of flavor that lingered for minutes after each bowl (*bui gan?*). I've read that this returning on the breath is a sign of a good tea, but it had never been so noticeable to me before. I finished my session with an overwhelming feeling of peace and contentment.

### Day 5

My meditation this morning was full of distractions. All manner of thoughts, coupled with a monstrous feeling of hunger, made concentration very difficult indeed. I'm sure we're all aware that hunger has a huge impact on our mental well-being, and this morning was testament to that fact. I couldn't settle or concentrate and found myself becoming quite vexed until the sound of my kettle snapped me out of my negative spiral. As I touched the handle, I remembered Wu De's golden rule from a previous issue:



“Never ever (times ten!) pick up the kettle until your heart is still!” And just like that, I was transported from my negative space into the present moment. I waited a minute or two until I was sure and then poured. Unlike most days this week, today it was the turn of Tea, and perhaps more importantly the ritual of brewing, as I am learning to practice it, that calmed and centered me. Today, tea *was* the meditation, rather than merely an activity for after meditation. As I finished my tea session, I found myself thinking of a quote from Shunryu Suzuki's *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*: “Not two, not one. This is the most important teaching. Not two and not one. Our body and mind are not two and not one.” Although I know he was not talking about tea and meditation when he said this, I couldn't help but feel it was relevant to me at the time...



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### Day 6

I returned to my bodily experience today, concentrating my mind on my *hara* during meditation and on into my tea session afterwards. I noticed something strange: by keeping my mind on my body experience and less on my physical actions during tea, my movements became more fluid. I felt a union between my left and right sides, like everything worked well together. I also felt a sense of harmony. I believe that most of the time my brain is too engaged in what I'm doing, as I try desperately to control every aspect of any given moment. The idea of "*Mushin no shin (the mind without mind)*," is certainly not a new concept to me, and you may have heard this as well. But, like me, you will probably hear it many more times before you *truly* understand it and have the ability to apply it to your life. Still, today felt like at least a tiny movement in the right direction!

### Day 7

My meditation this morning was deep and calm; both body and mind felt more still than they have for some time. Simultaneously, I felt a strong sense of *metta*, loving-kindness. My heart felt light and open and this sense of peace seamlessly echoed throughout my tea time. I noticed that I was more present today. My movements felt slow and controlled, easy almost. I also noticed that when my mind did wander it was only for a fleeting moment before it returned to the tea. Usually this sort of returning requires a great deal of determination and an internal battle ensues over where my mind should be focused! Overall, my final session of meditation before tea was one of peaceful rapture.

### Day 8

Today marked the first day of the next stage of my experiment, tea *before* meditation. My tea session was peaceful. There was a real sense of quiet as I gazed out of my patio doors, occasionally noticing the wisps of incense smoke drifting around my living room. As I drank my last bowl and settled my hands into the *dhyana mudra*, the first thing I noticed was the clarity of mind and my level of focus. I dropped right into meditation with a real sense of purpose. I gently watched my breath with an unusually low amount of distraction until my alarm sounded to signify the end of meditation and the start of my day. I was feeling good!

## Day 9

This morning's session was a difficult one for me. A lack of sleep left me feeling agitated and my mind was alight with distraction throughout. My tea brewing felt clumsy, too. On one occasion, I very nearly knocked my teapot over with my sleeve and at times I seemed to pour water anywhere but where I needed it to go! My meditation was equally full of distractions, least of all due to my cats fighting an epic duel over territory with another local feline halfway through my sit! My ego was tempted to write today off and simply make tomorrow "Day Number 9" instead. (After all, only I would know!) But I realized the importance of recording the experiences just as I had them, especially the more difficult ones. These "bad" experiences, as we tend to label them, often hold deeper teachings than those we deem to be "good." One other thing that today's session did highlight for me, though, was how my awareness increased the more I brought my attention back to the present moment. I was very distracted, but at least I was aware of it. Today's session may not have been blissful, but it was productive!

## Day 10

Today started with a deep feeling of joy. Last night, I welcomed home a dear friend who had just spent three months in the mountains of Spain on an ordination retreat. She returned home adorned in a glow as beautiful as her new Buddhist name. The Nottingham Sangha was out in force, and its warmth and energy was palpable! As I settled onto my cushion this morning, I took a moment to express my gratitude for all that I have, and to recognize how fortunate I am in all aspects of my life, before carefully pouring the water to heat my teaware. I spent the following thirty minutes paying close attention to each movement,

making sure that the left and right sides were working interdependently and flowing in circles towards the center as we've learnt in this magazine. As I moved into meditation, I felt profoundly energized. Despite a feeling of determination, however, this energy did prove to be distracting throughout, as I was often consumed with many thoughts and feelings. During my tea session, I was able to rein in this energy by focusing it on my movements with positive effect. But during meditation, it was a hindrance!

## Day 11

I was awoken by the rain today. As I prepared my tea space, I opened the French doors and breathed in the petrichor, immediately feeling a wave of joy and calmness envelop me. I settled down on my cushion as the kettle warmed and looked out into my garden. I watched the birds foraging for moss and listened to them sing, as a string of incense smoke gave in to the breeze. I closed my eyes and took a deep breath, opened my eyes and poured my first bowl of tea. Then another. Again and again, becoming more still with each sip until the tea was done. I then closed my eyes again and folded my hands, dropping into meditation. I suppose one could argue that this morning was a bit of a cheat, as far as my experiment goes, since I was definitely in a form of meditation before and throughout the tea session today. My mind conjured images of friends I would have loved to have shared this experience with, pouring *metta* as well as tea into each of their bowls. I remained still and peaceful until the time came to begin my day.

## Day 12

As my kettle started to murmur, I began to feel grounded. The world once again felt quiet outside and I sensed that this feeling was reflected inside me as well. As I lifted the first bowl to my mouth, my senses were ignited by the fragrance of the tea. I felt my eyes widen in ecstasy as my mind began to imagine the taste even before the liquor passed my lips. I was not disappointed! Fully absorbed in the tea, I remained focused on each bowl. I tried to capture every nuance of each steeping: Was the temperature quite right? What was the mouthfeel like? How easy was it to swallow? Was there much of an aftertaste? I found myself surprised at how some days these aspects of tea are so invigorating when my mind is concentrated, and conversely how I fail to even consider them on days when I'm more distracted. I kept my mind returning to my *hara* during my sit, occasionally noticing a returning of the tea on my breath and a sense of joy that came with it.

## Day 13

I stayed up too late last night drinking puerh and reading, and this was very evident this morning! Although I felt calm and happy, there was an awkwardness to my movements—a sort of time delay between thought and action, which led to a few minor collisions between kettles, pots and cups. (Gladly nothing serious!) I was also very aware that my inner monologue was almost constant throughout my sessions and although my thoughts were pleasant, they were seldom about the tea in front of me! My meditation was much the same, although admittedly it was a little more concentrated than the tea session that preceded it. By constantly returning to the body, and my present moment experience, I at least found a few minutes of stillness!

## Day 14

I've been studying a book on conditionality lately as part of a dharma course at the Nottingham Buddhist Centre. One thing in particular stood out to me this morning, and it was something that a friend said last night. It was a quote by Heraclitus: "No man ever steps in the same river twice," for it's not the same river and he's not the same man. As I sat drinking a bowl of Old Man Camphor brewed with the last of the leaves I received with the magazine, I knew that this would be the last time I would probably ever get to drink this particular tea. As I took another sip, it occurred to me that this very bowl would be the last bowl of tea to ever taste just like this, and so I attempted to savor every moment of it! I then tried to apply this concept to the rest of my time on my cushion. Each breath was the first and last to be just like that, as the next breath was different; and so too was I. What I noticed was how much more focused I was on every aspect of my experience—each element of it felt special and worthy of being cherished.

## What I learned

Whilst at times my descriptions in this diary may appear to be a little lacking in what one might call progression (at times one could even argue there is some visible regression) I felt the need to write honestly about my experience so that anyone reading this could get a sense of the extent to which my, and presumably anyone else's, experience varies from moment to moment, day to day. Whilst I am an extremely novice practitioner by comparison, I'm sure that even the most seasoned of sages have days like these, or at least I would like to think so!

After two weeks of studying my own practice, I have one firm conclusion: tea and meditation are powerful allies, and of this I have no doubt. Regardless of which order you choose, really they are one and the same thing if practiced correctly. On days where I was grounded and focused during my tea session, I found that my meditation was deeper and more profound. Likewise, on days when my mind was calm and peaceful during meditation, I found deeper levels of exper-

iential joy and improved awareness during my tea session. Although not ostensibly a part of this experiment, I also think it's worth considering the activities I participated in on the night before certain tea sessions. Those nights in which I participated in acts of spiritual cultivation such as ritual, meditation or study often laid the foundations for a productive experience the following morning. If I consider Wu De's teaching, "How we do one thing is how we do everything," then I can see a direct relationship between the activities I choose to devote my time to and the consequences I experience in my life. This short experiment has encouraged me to devote more time to analyzing my life both at and away from the tea table, as they too are ultimately the same. Tea and Zen have the same taste; they are not one and not two. I believe this to be the right understanding.



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# Teawayfarer

Each month, we introduce one of the Global Tea Hut members to you in these magazines in order to help you get to know more people in this growing international community. 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 share glimpses of such beautiful people and their Tea. This month we would like to introduce Kent Steedman:

After being asked to be this month's Teawayfarer, I had to contemplate my time with Tea. Three stages come to mind, three key moments that changed everything. Like most Australians, I drank tea with my grandparents from the pot with a tea cozy to keep it warm—strong and loose leaf with milk and sugar. Then, in my late teens, a friend suggested I try tea without milk. I tried it and I could taste something other than milk and sugar, the tea.

Many years later, I had my first tea moment. After drinking herbal beverages for some time, I was taken to a tea room in Sydney and experienced drinking a second generation *Da Hong Pao*. It was amazing, to say the least.

My second tea moment came after I became a regular at that tea room, and got to try many fine teas. Circumstances changed for the owners, and I ended up taking over care of the shop. Then the third amazing thing happened: Six years later, I got an email from some joker named Sam, asking if another bloke named Wu De could come prepare tea for a group here. I thought, "Sure, why not?" I had tried some wild-harvested teas before, but not the old growth he'd brought with him. I didn't mind puerh, but preferred oolong. A great puerh is special and can change your relationship to tea.

So here I am at the Hut, learning more than I knew was possible and contemplating Tea and me. In hindsight, it is no surprise I have aligned with Tea.

I have played music for decades, so sound, vibration and tone have been the primary to my journey and focus. There is a place in us that music touches that can only be known when you are in that space; and there is a knowing that Tea touches that only comes when you are in the space as well.

All things are frequency, and Tea is a bridging tone for me. The first time I stopped and resonated to the tone of Tea, I knew there was more than I could fathom in Her song—the sound that goes to all places and continues to grow, like a tree does.

The healing potential of tea is not used to its full extent yet by most in the East or West, I feel. We can help this grow more as a global community, which supports those that maintain the integrity of tea produc-



tion, tradition, brewing and love. Find your truth in Tea and stand in that truth, remaining open to learn and help. Adapt as Nature does.

I tip my hat and offer my gratitude to the aboriginal peoples for sharing this herb long ago, to those supporting them today, and to other traditional growers everywhere; I bow to the Tea Hut crew for this lineage and for helping those of us who heard the call of Tea, and to all of you reading this for participating.

If any of you find yourselves in Sydney and feel like listening to records and sharing some fine tea, please come by.

[tianhe09@gmail.com](mailto:tianhe09@gmail.com)

# Inside the Hut

Because of the large number of tea sessions happening around the world, we are going to post about them on our site from now on and use this section to discuss news happening around the world. If you have any news, like a wedding, birth or tea happening, let us know and we'll write about it here. Also, our new site, coming in the next few months, will connect you to tea sessions around the world in a much better way than this page ever could!



If you haven't yet, check out the "discussion" section of our webpage. There is now a place for you to leave reviews of every month's tea, as well as your experiences with the gongfu tea tips!



Our 2015 Light Meets Life teas are all going fast, and one is already sold out, so if you want one you should order soon!



Rich Allum, a contributor to this month's issue, and his beautiful wife Becky just gave birth to a healthy teawayfarer named Tobias Stanely Allum. Raise a bowl in congratulations to them!



Stay tuned for an announcement about this year's Global Tea Hut Trip. You have to have been a member all throughout 2015 to be eligible. This year, we will be reserving half the spots for new guests!



Please make some comments under the new videos and let us know what you think of the multi-media Global Tea Hut.



We are creating a survey for you all, which we will email you about. It will help us to understand how you use this magazine, which parts you enjoy and want to see more of, and what we need to improve.

## Center News



Before you visit, check out the center's website ([www.teasagehut.org](http://www.teasagehut.org)) to read about the schedule, food, what you should bring, etc. We've had a big increase in our number of guests lately, so if possible please contact us well in advance to arrange a visit.



Our brother Denis Mikhaylov is taking precepts in our tradition this month. He will soon receive his tea name.



It is Shen Su's birthday this month, on February 9th, to be specific. Send him some light, email him or raise a bowl. He is a bright soul, without whom the center would not be able to run!



The center will be closed from April 24th to the end of May, like every year, to facilitate the third annual Global Tea Hut Trip. Wu De plans to do less traveling this year, so he will be here teaching except for that time. Check our website for more details.

## February Affirmation

**How you do anything is how you do everything.**

Much more of our life will be spent doing small things like walking up stairs than the things we think define us. Do I put my heart, my respect and soul in all that I do? Do I miss my own life?



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

*The best tea magazine in the world! Sharing rare organic teas, a magazine full of tea history, lore, translations, processing techniques and heritage, as well as the spiritual aspects of Cha Dao. And through it all we make friends with fellow tea lovers from around the world...*

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