

GLOBAL TEA HUT

國際茶亭

TEA & TAO MAGAZINE

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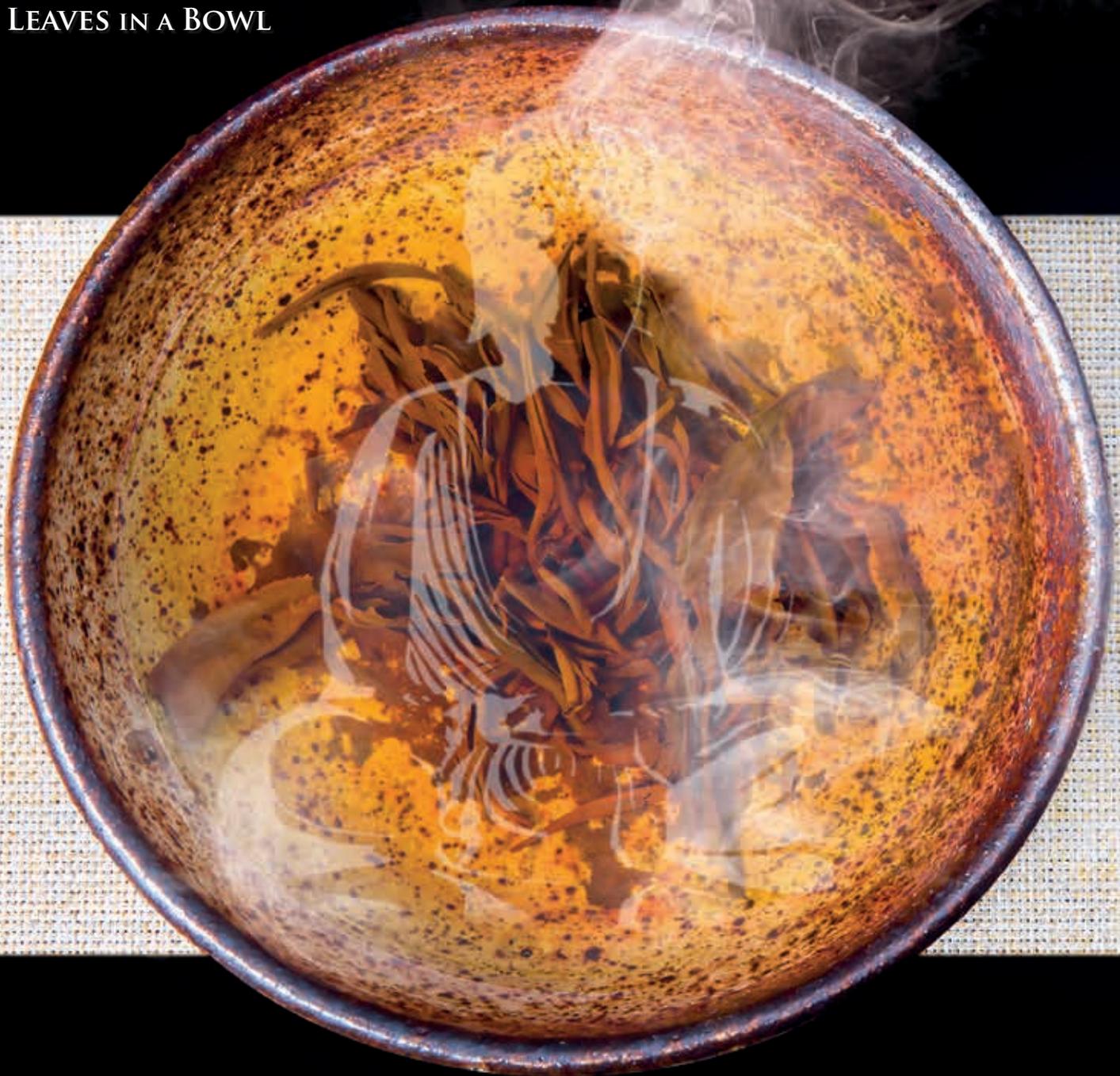
DIAN HONG GUIDE

HISTORY & PROCESSING

TEA & MEDITATION

TEA CEREMONY

LEAVES IN A BOWL





VITALITY

In this bright red issue, we explore red tea from Yunnan, called “dian hong,” in great depth, while raising bowls of one of our favorite Yunnanese reds ever made. Then, we will explore tea and meditation, and, for the first time ever, offer an in-depth guide to tea ceremony that will help you start or improve your tea practice.

*Love is
changing the world
bowl by bowl*

FEATURES

17 INTRODUCTION TO TEA & MEDITATION

By Wu De

25 TEA & MEDITATION SELF-COURSE

By Shen Su

35 LEAVES IN A BOWL TEA CEREMONY GUIDE

49 THE FIRST ANNUAL GLOBAL TEA HUT ZEN & TEA RETREAT

The accounts of many retreatants



TRADITIONS

03 TEA OF THE MONTH

“Vitality,” 2016 Dian Hong Red Tea,
Big Snow Mt., Yunnan, China

31 GONGFU TEAPOT

Yixing Purple-Sand Clay

61 TEA WAYFARER

Maxim Ulasevich, Russia



From the Editor

In February we enter the Lunar New Year, lighting lanterns for a healthy, happy and prosperous year for us all. But let's not forget the abundance we're already surrounded by—I sure won't. I'll be traveling throughout most of this year, from Bali to “Down Under,” then on to America, Europe and Russia—all on the steam of a teapot. And that means a lot of bowls and cups received and shared, heaps of smiles and hugs as well as all the reminders of how grateful I am to you and to Tea. I hope to see you out on the tea road in the year of the little red rooster!

Gratitude is what Global Tea Hut is all about. When it's boiled down to its essential liquor, this project is a momentum to share tea, driven by a deep love for tea in all its forms. In the deepest sense, we drink tea together in silence, around the world, and nothing can really be said about that. A great Zen master once supposed that all the sutras are just footnotes to meditation (Zazen). In the same way, all five years of this magazine could be seen as footnotes to the ceremonies, casual or formal, that we've shared together or alone around the world throughout these years. But there is something to talk about as well. That's what people do, after all. It is deeply rewarding to share and grow together, learning about tea history, processing, brewing methods and other linear aspects of the rich and vast tea world. From ceremony to magazine, from magazine to Center and then from Tea Sage Hut to the tea gatherings so many of us are hosting or attending around the world, this experience is worth raising a bowl to! I've never felt like an owner, or even a founder of this experience, but I am very proud—proud to be a part of this community.

We have a great, tea-filled road ahead of us this year, with three or four issues devoted to some rare kinds of tea you have probably never tried—and even if you have, you'll be excited to dive deeper into their history, production and lore. We also have another issue in our Classics of Tea series and another introduction to a great Chajin here in Taiwan. First and foremost, we must remember that the brewer is the most important aspect of any tea session. More than any pot or tea, water or fire; more than any skill or talent, the best tea is served from the heart. As the old saying goes, “The path from the mind to the hand travels through the heart.” It has always been our intention to cover tea holistically in these pages, devoting issues to community, food, meditation and ceremony, as well as tea history, production, brewing and teaware art. And we are also committed to improving your lives, which is why we've started this year with an issue on diet and now one on the heart.

In this issue, we are going to discuss tea and meditation, delving more deeply into the relationship between the two. In some ways they support one another as separate practices, and, in another very real and important way, they are one and the same. Tea prepared with a meditative mind

is a powerful practice in and of itself and it is the aim of all meditative practices to encourage the peace and balance we achieve on the cushion in all our affairs. Meditating more doesn't just mean more retreats or more meditation periods in any given day, but also a continuation of the insights we cultivate in our tea-making, cooking, walking and through all the vicissitudes we face in our lives. Like the bowls coming into and going out from the center of a tea ceremony, tea and meditation are one and they are apart in turn: tea is very conducive to a seated meditation practice, helping us focus and stay awake and also helping us to translate more of our meditative mind into our quotidian affairs. Apart, we drink our bowls separately; but then the bowls come in to the center and we become one gathering again, and tea *is* once more meditation itself.

We are also going to start a new series in this issue. Many of you have asked us for more detailed brewing instructions. You may have noticed the new symbols on the Brewing Tips page, offering suggestions for ideal methods for preparing any given month's tea. We've decided to take the time this year to capture some of the ceremonies we practice photographically, allowing you to see some of the steps we use to prepare tea, along with some tips so that you can cultivate these practices at home, creating ceremonial space for you and your loved ones. Every few months, we'll explore a different method of tea preparation with a kind of visual guide and tips that will help us to achieve one of our long-term goals of creating some textbooks to guide those who need help navigating the immense tea world, with all its teaware and brewing methods, to find the way of making tea that best serves your heart. Eventually, we will put these works together, add to them and edit a series of hardbound *Guides of the Hut*.



Further Readings

This month, we're going to publish some extras on red tea from the March 2016 issue. We are also going to publish the series on the Five Basics of Tea Brewing, which are always helpful and, in combination with the ceremony guide of this issue, will help you serve tea better.

*Further Readings are posted on our blog each month.

TEA OF THE MONTH

Over the course of this issue we'll be exploring tea and meditation pretty thoroughly, so we thought it would be a great idea to delve more deeply into red tea and dian hong in particular, so you can also have a healthy dose of tea information this month to go along with all the meditative peace. We've devoted whole issues to red tea in the past, but never dian hong specifically. Before we brew a thick, malty bowl of this month's Vitality, however, let's cover all the red tea basics.

I know that many of you have heard all this before, but we have to start by correcting the black tea/red tea mistake. (*Beginner's mind!*) Yes, what is called "black tea" in the West is actually red tea. The reasons for this mistake are manifold, having to do with the long distances the tea traveled in chests to Europe, and even more importantly with the general lack of information there for the first few hundred years that tea was traded. Another layer of the confusion comes from the fact that the Chinese have always categorized tea based on the liquor, while Westerners named tea for the color of the leaf itself. The difference between black and red tea is much more obvious in the liquor than in the leaf, though the leaf is also slightly red to our eyes. Europeans weren't allowed inland in those days, and never saw the tea trees or the processing either (except some roasting). Buying tea through middlemen in broken Pidgin English, you could see how easy it would be to spread mis-

information. We repeat this every time we send a red tea, because it is an important mistake that we tea lovers have to correct in the world, so that the real black tea can have its name back!

Nowadays the term "dark tea" is used by some tea vendors and authors to describe black tea, rather than correcting the mistake. However, we still feel that when a culture misappropriates or mistranslates a concept, category or idea from another culture then it is the foreign culture's responsibility to correct the mistake, demonstrating a respect and honor for the "host." Honoring the proper Chinese terminology is honoring the farmers and tea masters who have handed the genetic lineage of trees, the brewing methodologies and the spiritual practices down to us. We are not trying to correct the mainstream habit of saying "black tea." What we are doing is correcting this mistake amongst those who care—amongst our community of more conscious, heart-centered Chajin, allowing all of you to better communicate with those who produce and sell tea at its source.

The issue is, ultimately, a minor one, but here's an example of the effect that honoring tradition and correcting this mistake can have: last year, we met with two farmers from Liu Bao in Guangxi, and they were so happy with our efforts to honor and respect true black tea, returning it to its proper place in the West, that they broke out a celebratory fifty-year-old Liu Bao tea and congratulated us again and again,

cup after cup! And their gratitude was definitely sincere, as is our respect for black tea producers.

Understanding the Genre

Red tea is unique in another way. One of the other common mistakes that is published in English is that "all tea is *Camellia sinensis* and the differences in genre are all in the processing." Correcting this misinformation is actually paramount to an understanding of red tea. Actually, both points of this widely published idea are technically not correct. Firstly, all tea is not *Camellia sinensis*; there are actually a couple dozen species of *Camellia* used to produce tea. (We have shared some other species throughout the years.) Traditionally, the cluster of species with caffeine that has been used to make tea was called "*Theaceae*," which comes from the Greek "*Thea*," after the Titan goddess of clear vision. (There are even more species in the *Camellia* genus that have been used to make tea throughout the millennia that humankind has partaken of the Leaf, if you include those without caffeine.) Tea was, in fact, often called "Thea" before it was called "Camellia." There are also more kinds of trees to be discovered and/or speciated. For example, the tea that we used to produce Mountain Gate last year, from Ai Lao, is a very unique kind of tree that has a different appearance, leaf and flavor from all tea we have ever tried.



Vitality



Big Snow Mt., Yunnan, China



2016 Dian Hong Red Tea



Wa Aborigines



~1800 Meters



The trees are taller and do not branch until much higher. The tea is sweet, sour and pungent, light and fragrant in a way unlike all other kinds of tea. We suspect that once biologists get around to studying the tea in Ai Lao, it too will be classified as a unique species of “Thea.”

The second half of the misstatement that “all tea is *Camellia sinensis* and the differences in genre are all in the processing” is actually the part that is more relevant to a discussion of red tea, which will lead us to dian hong. It is important to remember that processing methods developed over time in response to certain varieties of tea, which in turn evolved in response to a particular terroir. Farmers were learning, honing their skills through some trial and error, as well as through a deep connection to a life of tea and intuition/insight. In other words, they innovated over time to bring out the best in the tea trees that were local to them. It would not be correct to say that oolong, for example, is just a method of processing tea, because that processing was developed to suit certain varieties of tea. And as oolong varieties have changed, moving from place to place (whether naturally or carried by people), so too have processing skills evolved, creating a whole array of different oolongs. So you could say that oolong is both a processing method and a varietal (or more correctly varieties, as there are now many).

Nowadays, there is a lot of experimentation, processing teas from one region in the way that they are made elsewhere. Like many things in the modern world, this fusion is due to faster communication, more access to information, easier travel and the greater connection to the rest of the tea world that modern farmers enjoy. And a lot of that is great. People traditionally only ever bought tea from tea shops, but nowadays many people can purchase directly from farms, often resulting in fairer prices for the farmers themselves. And some of the new experiments do result in amazing teas, like the purple red tea from De Hong many of us know and love (Evening Sky). But the majority of such teas don't turn out well, as with the modern attempts to cultivate Taiwan's Three Daughters, as well as *Ching shin*

oolong in Vietnam and Mainland China. No matter how nice the trees or how great the skill of the farmer, you can't find the same quality elsewhere. In other words, a Taiwanese tea processed like a Wuyi Cliff Tea might be a nice tea in its own right, but it will never compare to a real Cliff Tea, at least not by Cliff Tea standards. And anyone (we do mean anyone) with some experience drinking Cliff Tea will know that this tea is *not* from Wuyi. Also, anyone who has ever been to Wuyi will stand up and testify to what an immense role the unique terroir there plays in the creation of Cliff Tea (it's called “Cliff Tea,” after all). There really is no place on Earth like Wuyi, and so no tea could ever mimic that environment, which then informed the varietal, which influenced the evolution of processing, and so on...

As another example, the tea buds in Fuding have white hairs on them as a natural deterrent to insects. Local farmers found the thick buds hard to process, and also beautiful when dried, so they developed a unique kind of tea processing to suit this varietal of tree, which came to be known as “white tea.” White tea processing has changed, evolving significantly since the early days of the Tang and Song dynasties when tea was processed into powdered cakes (as we covered in April 2016 when we talked about Emperor Song Huizong), but the varietal and those changes have grown together. The evolution of processing was motivated by this unique tree. And while you could dry other tea like white tea, and this may create new and interesting results, if it is not made from a varietal that has white buds it is technically not a “white tea.” Therefore, white tea is also both a kind of tree and a processing method.

How many of the albums in your collection are cover bands? Probably not many, and for good reason. There may be some cool cover bands that produce interesting music, and we can even think of a few good reasons for having a cover band, but at the end of the day if that cover band can produce music that is good enough that a fan of the original band will like it, then they are also good enough musicians to produce *their own music!* This is analogous to tea. There is no way a Taiwanese farmer can make a Cliff Tea that



could convince an experienced Cliff Tea drinker that it is from Wuyi, but he could make a replica that was interesting and delicious. But, a tea lover is then left wondering the same thing as with music: “If you can take this tea from a completely different terroir and impress me, a lover of Wuyi Cliff Tea, then you obviously have the skill to stop copying and produce this tea in a way that is in harmony with its terroir and essence!” Why not process the tea in the way that brings out its best qualities instead of making cheap copies of another region's heritage and skill as a gimmick?

The conclusion is that the genres of tea are not “all in the processing.” The reality is far more complicated than that: each genre of tea is as much a terroir and the local varieties of tea as it is the processing methods used there.



最優良的茶花品種

Species of *Camellia*

These are some of the known species and varieties of *Camellia* used to make tea. These are all natural varieties, and do not include “cultivars,” which are manmade varieties.

茶 *Camellia crassicaule*:

*var. *crassicaule*: S.E. Yunnan; evergreen broadleaf forest

*var. *multiplex*: S.E. Yunnan; evergreen broadleaf forest

*var. *shangbaensis*: S. Yunnan; evergreen broadleaf forest

茶 *Camellia grandibracteata*:

W. Yunnan; evergreen broadleaf forest

茶 *Camellia gymnogyna*

*var. *gymnogyna*: S.E. Yunnan, S.W. Guangxi, S. Guizhou; broadleaf forest or scrub

*var. *remotiserrata*: N.E. Yunnan, N. Guizhou, S. Sichuan; fir forest or broadleaf forest

茶 *Camellia kwangsiensis*:

*var. *kwangnanensis*: S.E. Yunnan; broadleaf forest

*var. *kwangsiensis*: S.E. Yunnan, W. Guangxi; broadleaf forest

茶 *Camellia purpurea*: S.E. Yunnan; evergreen broadleaf forest

茶 *Camellia sinensis*:

*var. *assamica*: Yunnan, Guizhou, Guangxi, Hainan, Vietnam, Taiwan; evergreen broadleaf forest

*var. *dehungensis*: S. Yunnan, S.W. Yunnan; under forest or scrub

*var. *pubilimba*: S.E. Yunnan, Guangxi, W. Guangdong, Hainan; broadleaf forest

*var. *sinensis*: S. China, S.E. Tibet, S. Japan, N. Myanmar, Korea, many other countries around the world, often where tea was propagated by Western traders, including Indonesia, Africa and even the U. S.; sparse forest or scrub

*var. *sinensis*: S. China, S.E. Tibet, S. Japan, N. Myanmar, Korea, many other countries around the world, often where tea was propagated by Western traders, including Indonesia, Africa and even the U. S.; sparse forest or scrub

茶 *Camellia tachangensis*: E. Yunnan, S.W. Guizhou, W. Guangxi; evergreen broadleaf forest

*var. *sinensis*: S. China, S.E. Tibet, S. Japan, N. Myanmar, Korea, many other countries around the world, often where tea was propagated by Western traders, including Indonesia, Africa and even the U. S.; sparse forest or scrub

*var. *sinensis*: S. China, S.E. Tibet, S. Japan, N. Myanmar, Korea, many other countries around the world, often where tea was propagated by Western traders, including Indonesia, Africa and even the U. S.; sparse forest or scrub

茶 *Camellia taliensis*: W. Yunnan; sparse forest or scrub

茶 Various kinds and ages of dian hong

In fact, some authors include culture and processing methods in the very term “terroir,” which is an insight that we appreciate, since it acknowledges and celebrates the very natural part that humans play in Nature and in tea. If the tradition of tea processing is indeed evolving and improving based on the idea that “better” processing brings out the natural highlights of the trees and leaves, then you could say that farmers who process in this way are as natural a part of the life of that tea as the sun or rain. There are also deeper and subtler implications in including processing methods in the word “terroir,” beyond just climate, weather and all, since doing so testifies to the fact that humanity *is* Nature. These days we feel disconnected and separate from the world, even though we are as ingrained as any species of Thea,

and our influence can be just as natural and harmonious or as destructive as any other force of Nature. So, it is worth repeating that the differences are *not* all in the processing. The next time someone tells you white tea, oolong or puerh is a processing method, you should raise a finger in protest.

And this brings us to red tea, which is actually the exception to this rule. Of the seven genres of tea (white, green, yellow, red, black, oolong and puerh), red tea is the only one that is truly “all in the processing.” In other words, you can take tea from any varietal and terroir and process it like a red tea. And it is often nice. We’ve had great Taiwanese high-mountain oolong (*Ching shin* varietal) processed like red tea; the “gongfu reds” are essentially all-bud green teas processed like red; and, of course, where this discussion is head-

ing this month—puerh raw material processed like red tea, called “dian hong.”

Understanding that any varietal can be red tea is also illuminating when it comes to understanding just how the misconception that differences in tea are “all in the processing” became so widespread in the Western world. Red tea (mistakenly called “black tea”) is the most consumed and produced tea in the West. Almost everyone in the Western world who drinks tea, drinks red tea. And since it is true that “the difference are all in the processing” for red tea, you could see how this would be mistakenly applied to other kinds of tea, on the assumption that this principle is as true for green or oolong tea as it is for red (which it clearly is not). Consequently, red tea is really the only genre of tea we can say this about.

One of the characteristics used to evaluate red tea is its clarity—finer red tea does not have any cloudiness in the liquor, so it is important that we have taken a few bowls’ worth of time to clear up this misunderstanding. As we travel further into our session, we’ll have to do so with the understanding that red tea is unique amongst all kinds of tea since it has no terroir or varietals to call home. This means that a discussion of any given red tea will have to include the varietal which is used to make it. In our case, we will have to discuss dian hong as coming from puerh, since it is essentially puerh tea exposed to red tea processing. But before we turn to dian hong specifically, let’s review some history, as well as the general steps of red tea production, which are even more essential since they literally define this genre of tea.

Red Tea History

The Ming Dynasty saw many developments in tea processing, including oolong tea, flower-scented tea and red tea. Later, in the Qing Dynasty, many of the teas developed during this age of innovation evolved further.

As with any timeline detailing groundbreaking developments, there is some controversy over when the first red tea appears. Accordingly, there are several origin stories about red tea. Some claim that the appearance of Wuyi Cliff Tea (which was also mistakenly called “black tea,” even though it is actually an oolong) in the 15th or 16th century heralded the age of red tea, while others credit it to the appearance of *xiao zhong* (“souchong black tea” in the West) in Fujian around 1730, or to various red teas that were developed in Qimen in the 1700s. Later, around 1875, the technique for making “gongfu red tea” was introduced to the Anhui region, a major producer of Qimen (Keemun) red tea to this day.

Ultimately, which tea was the “first” red tea didn’t matter much to the local tea drinkers of the time—in general, red tea wasn’t very popular with them. However, from the early 1800s, the export markets in Europe, the American colonies and the Middle East couldn’t get enough red tea. Some attribute the international popularity of red tea in particular to red tea’s shelf

stability (a necessity during long ocean journeys), while others say that it has more to do with the compatibility of the bold flavor profiles of red teas with the cuisines of Germany, England, France and other nations where red tea has become the default tea type.

It was this popularity that led to large-scale production of red tea in China, and to the eventual theft of tea seeds, tea plants and tea production techniques, which were taken by Scottish and English adventurer-entrepreneurs and transplanted to India and other colonial territories (such as modern day Sri Lanka and Kenya). These entrepreneurs took their limited knowledge of tea production and used it to fashion machines to replace the handmade aspects of tea processing. The availability of cheap red tea fueled its popularity as a tea type further, making it the most popular category of tea in the West to this day.

Today, red tea is produced using this machine-driven approach in many countries, including Brazil, India, Indonesia, Rwanda, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam. More recently, machine-made red teas have appeared in Japan (where they are called “*Wakocha*” or “Japanese red tea”), and machine-made red tea has even made its way back to China.

Meanwhile, green tea and oolong remain the most popular types of tea amongst tea drinkers in China. However, in recent years the interest in handmade and more traditionally made red tea has seen a resurgence in China, Taiwan and elsewhere, resulting in a wider availability of handmade red teas from China and Taiwan (including our tea of the month). For this and other reasons, the characteristics that red tea drinkers in China and Taiwan prefer tend to be different from those preferred by the typical tea



drinker in the West. Instead of looking for a dark color in the infusion or boiled liquor and a bold flavor that can handle milk and sugar, these tea lovers seek out beautifully shaped leaves and infusions that are best savored without any additives. Also, while most red tea drinkers steep their leaves only once, those opting for more traditionally made red teas prefer to let the leaves open up gradually with many short infusions, savoring their tea's patience and their inner spirit rather than gulping tea from a to-go cup while eating a pastry on the way to the office.

Red Tea Production

When it comes down to it, red tea is the last stop on the oolong line. This is another reason that the confusion of calling red tea "black tea" began in the first place, since it hadn't yet distin-

guished itself as a kind of tea in its own right when European traders started exporting red tea to the West. Oolong is semi-oxidized tea, and red tea is very heavily oxidized (sometimes people say "fully oxidized," but that isn't really possible). In other words, red tea was considered a kind of very dark oolong in the beginning. In fact, all semi-oxidized teas were called "red" by some dynastic tea authors.

The main feature that distinguishes red tea is a very heavy withering, often with as much oxidation as possible. This heavy oxidation is achieved during the processing/drying stages of the leaf. Oxidation is an enzymatic process: basically, cellular breakdown due, of course, to exposure to oxygen, like when a banana or an apple turns brown on the counter. Oxidation can be spontaneous or controlled and can have a positive or negative influence on the quality of a tea. The change in

the leaves after harvest is spontaneous oxidation. In green tea production, the goal is most often to arrest this as soon as possible. Controlled oxidation happens during the withering, rolling and piling phases (not all red tea is piled). Proper oxidation in tea production requires an abundance of moist, oxygen-rich air. For red tea production, oxidation rooms (or long vats with fans and/or heaters) must provide ample humidified air to promote heavy oxidation. The polyphenols in the leaf (tea catechins) bond to oxygen molecules during the early stages of oxidation.

The intentional, controlled stage of oxidation begins after the harvest, which could be by machine or by hand, when the raw leaf is sent to the processing facilities for withering. When tea leaves are picked, they are too brittle to process, and would crumble as a result. It is essential, therefore,



茶 After being rolled, dian hong is either withered again, often overnight, or sun-dried. The dried tea is then swept up into piles for sorting and packaging. Throughout this heavy oxidation, dian hong will turn from bright to darker shades of green, red to maroon and then ultimately chocolaty brown with golden buds. The liquor becomes sweeter and malty. Throughout the process, the tea smells of wintergreen.

THE PROCESSING OF DIAN HONG

採摘
Plucking

萎凋
Withering

揉捻
Rolling

萎凋
Withering

晒干
Sun-drying

分級
Sorting

包裝
Packaging

to evaporate some of the moisture before processing. (The exception to this rule is all-bud green or yellow teas, which are always firm and never withered.) These days, the withering of red tea most often takes place in long troughs that have fans which blow warm humid air over the leaves. However, in Yunnan, farms are often still very simple and lack machinery, so the tea is often just left on the ground in a pile to wither. If a farmer is going to wither without machinery, it is ideal to pile the tea on round bamboo mats held up on racks, as this will allow more air flow from underneath.

There are many chemical reactions that comprise oxidation. The oxygenation of polyphenols starts a series of chemical reactions that change the flavor of the leaf more towards that of red tea. Tea expert and Global Tea Hut member, Robert Heiss describes these changes better than we can: “The enzymes polyphenol oxidase and peroxidase act on other polyphenols to produce theaflavins. These red-orange compounds then react with more polyphenols to produce thearubigins, the chemicals responsible for changing the leaf’s color from green to golden, coppery or chocolate brown. The thearubigins, meanwhile, are also busy reacting with some of the amino acids and sugars in the leaf, creating the highly polymerized substances that develop into the various and distinctive flavor components that we expect in red tea. In general, theaflavins contribute to the brisk and bright taste of red tea, while the thearubigins are what provide strength (depth or body) and color. If the temperature of the leaf is allowed to rise too high, the controlled oxidation will rage out of control; and if it falls too low, oxidation will cease.” Usually, the pile of withering tea is stirred to control the temperature and degree of oxidation.

The oxidation of the tea then continues into the next stage of rolling. Rolling can be done by machine or, more rarely, by hand. This breaks the cell walls down and releases the essential oils that make red tea darker, allowing oxygen to interact with these otherwise trapped chemical components. Rolling also shapes the tea, so the method of rolling will determine the final shape of the tea. For most red teas, this is done for up to nine-

ty minutes, but experts will of course judge when the tea is ready by looking at and smelling the leaves. One year in Ai Lao, Auntie Ai had us roll for more than ninety minutes, but then last year we only rolled for around thirty to forty minutes, so it really depends on the leaves and their moisture content.

In the case of CTC (Cut, Tear, Curl) tea, rolling is combined with additional steps, which involve chopping the tea leaves into tiny pieces, causing them to quickly oxidize, and then rolling them into pellets as the tea is further oxidized and dried. CTC processing is an efficient and cheap means of tea production, so CTC tea is commonly used in teabags and in less wealthy tea-drinking countries, such as India and Sri Lanka. CTC tea is intended to release all its flavor very quickly; it usually lasts only one infusion or two to three boils.

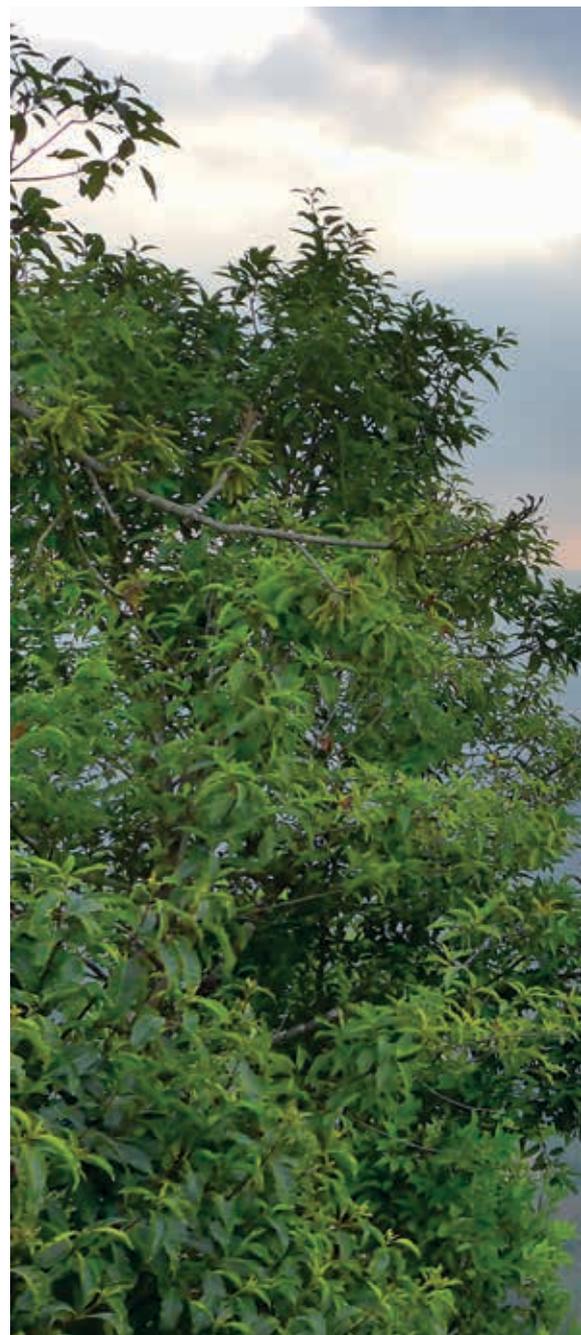
Optionally, red tea is then piled again after rolling to increase oxidation, usually on round bamboo mats, to a thickness of twenty centimeters or so. This additional oxidation results in further changes in the tea’s flavor, aroma, color and impact on Qi when drunk.

Finally, red tea is dried. Most red teas are baked dry in ovens, as we showed in October’s issue about Elevation, Sun Moon Lake red tea. However, dian hong is more often sun-dried like puerh. The baking arrests the oxygen and finishes the tea. Some areas will also include sorting at various stages of the processing, but usually after the tea is dried to remove mis-processed or broken leaves before final packaging.

Dian Hong

“Dian” (滇) is an aboriginal word for “Yunnan” and “hong (紅)” is “red,” so this term applies to any red tea produced in Yunnan. It may surprise you that Yunnan produces red tea, since it is famous for puerh tea. Actually, throughout the twentieth century, Yunnan produced much more red tea than puerh, until the boom in the early 2000s. In the late nineties, there were hardly any puerh shops in Kunming and the locals drank much more red and green tea. Now, of course, there are puerh shops everywhere, including the airport.

As we discussed earlier, any tea can be processed like a red tea, and while the process may seem complicated when you include all the chemistry we have discussed this month, it is actually one of the simplest kinds of tea to make: *pluck and oxidize heavily*. Since dian hong starts out as puerh raw material, its quality is determined in much the same way, which means that terroir and the age of the trees play a huge role in evaluating dian hong. Some of you will remember our discussions of trees and gardens in Yunnan, in which we said that, like most things in the tea





茶 *Big Snow Mountain in the morning, as the trees awaken.*

world, there are no standard ways of discussing tree ages or garden types (and like most things tea, the trends that do exist are often misleading and/or incorrect).

Understanding the age of the tree, the mountain the tea came from and the kind of garden it grew in are essential in puerh tea. Most teas have a ratio between the terroir/trees/raw material and the processing skills that create the final quality. This ratio is different for each genre. With oolong, for example, half of its quality comes from the raw material, half from its processing. But

with puerh and dian hong, as much as ninety percent of the quality of any tea is in the raw material—the terroir. We call trees above one hundred years “old growth” and trees around one thousand years old “ancient.” We then divide gardens into three main categories: “plantation,” which are industrially grown, rarely sustainable rows of cuttings; “eco-arboreal,” which are semi-wild, seed-propagated gardens that are on the edges of villages, between the forest and homestead; and “forest gardens,” which can be wild or manmade, but are in the jungle proper

with all its biodiversity and life. While there has been a lot of plantation red tea produced in Yunnan for centuries, the old-growth dian hong are the best examples of living dian hong.

Dian hong is distinct from other kinds of red tea in the same ways puerh is distinct from other kinds of tea. Puerh maocha is unique because the firing (*sha qing*, 殺菁) is done at a lower temperature for a shorter duration so that the heat-resistant spore colonies essential to the post-production fermentation will survive the firing to form new colonies afterwards.

The tea is then sun-dried so that the light and heat will reactivate the microbes and fermentation will begin. Dian hong has no firing stage, no de-enzyming, so the microbe-dense leaves, which are covered in hundreds of species of molds and bacteria before harvest, are even more active. Like puerh, dian hong is sun-dried, which gives the tea a unique flavor and leaves the microbes active.

Dian hong is most often malty and rich, brisk and energetic. The color of the leaves ranges from dark, bluish black to bright gold, and it can be made of buds or sets of leaves and buds. The liquor often brews a dark or bright red and can be cloudy due to a lack of skill and quality control in Yunnanese tea production, especially if the tea is made simply in the village. But no one drinks a dian hong looking for refinement; if you are seeking that in a red tea, drink a “gongfu red tea (功夫宏茶)” from Anhui or Fujian. Dian hong is strong and vibrant. It moves the Qi as briskly as any genre of tea. And our Tea of the Month, Vitality, is amongst the strongest of all dian hong! The flavors and aromas feature the same complexity as puerh, with added sweetness and maltiness from the extra oxidation. And though dian hong teas can be hard to palate when they are produced from plantation tea, covered in chemicals and misprocessed; when they are produced from quality raw material from old trees, they are most often loved by everyone and are therefore go-to choices for those starting their tea journeys.

Ageability of Dian Hong

The best qualities dian hong has to offer are in many respects similar to puerh: old trees and deep Qi with a strength due to the heavy oxidation, which releases the deep energy of a dian hong in the same way aging puerh tea does—only aged puerh is yin and red tea processing results in yang tea. You could think of dian hong as the counterpart to aged puerh. Both release more of the deeper, dark essence of the tough, large leaves of Yunnanese species, but dian hong does so through oxidation during processing, making it vibrant and young, while the slow and graceful aging of sheng puerh releases

the same depths more softly and gently. And energetically this is also true: dian hong is vital and strong and aged sheng puerh is deep, soft and soothing in a feminine way.

People often ask about the ageability of red tea in general, and then follow that question with many more about whether you can age dian hong and how. All tea gets better with age—*all tea!* You should be clear on that to start with. Though that is a very true statement, there are some caveats and conditions regarding green, yellow, white and lightly oxidized oolong teas. We wouldn't call these light teas exceptions to the rule that all tea gets better with age, but there are some things you need to understand about aging them. First, there is a magic in the freshness of light teas that will, of course, be lost; and second, these teas will pass through an awkward stage that can last as long as fifteen to twenty years. This happens because the moisture content is too high, so the teas need to dry out. Storing them in a drier environment for a while is therefore paramount. And since space is limited for all of us, one could make a convincing argument that light teas aren't worth storing long-term. Indeed, most well-aged light teas were accidentally left around rather than intentionally stored (though they are wonderful). Consequently, traditionally processed oolongs, sheng/shou puerh and black teas are the best candidates for aging. Red teas like dian hong fall somewhere in the middle.

Like light teas, red teas were rarely intentionally stored. But they don't have as much of an awkward stage throughout the beginning phases of aging. If the red tea in question is a dian hong, however, and it was made from good trees, it will age spectacularly. And, what's more, you can age them in drier conditions than puerh tea, which means that many of you can age dian hong where you live. This will result in a different kind of tea than those aged in humid places, but the quality won't deteriorate as heavily as with sheng puerh. Still, it is ideal to have some humidity around your dian hong. As with most kinds of tea, we recommend storing your dian hong away from other kinds of tea, as it will definitely influence them negatively, especially sheng puerh and oolong.

Most of the same principles we use to age puerh apply to dian hong as well: it ages better in a cake than as loose leaf and it requires some air and humidity (though much less than sheng puerh). However, it doesn't take as long to age, and can be wonderful even after ten or fifteen years. It kind of dries and mellows out the way a heavily fermented shou puerh does, as we discussed in last month's issue. Dian hong can also have a bite to it, and can be strongly tannic, bitter, astringent and rough on the mouth. These qualities all soften with age and the tea will grow sweeter and more billowy in the mouth, all of which is great! Even a year or two can make a difference with dian hong.

We have found that if one is intentionally producing dian hong for aging, one should consider oxidizing the tea less, creating a more sheng puerhy kind of dian hong, which will damage the Qi of the raw material less, and provide more opportunity for the tea to change over time. Such greener red teas are not as sweet, but make up for it in Qi and ageability. We often prefer these teas more when young as well, willing to give up sweet flavors for a stronger presence of Nature in the body.

 *Tian Wu with a huge pile of dian hong that we met on our annual trip last year. More than a hundred kilograms of Daughter of the Forest dian hong from old trees had just been dried that morning and everyone in the group immediately rushed over to enjoy a deep smell of the glory.*



Vitality

Vitality comes from one of the Five Mountains where all tea was born, Big Snow Mountain (大雪山), an area of Mengku in Lincang. (The other four are Min Feng (鳴風), Mang Fei (忙肺), Mei Zi Qing (梅子菁) and Wu Jia Zhai (武家寨), which are all also in Lincang.) Big Snow Mountain is a high-altitude area that's home to many tea gardens, including lots of clean eco-arboreal gardens and some ancient gardens in the forests as well.

Vitality was processed with care from first flush of Spring 2016 Assamica tea leaves harvested from younger eco-arboreal gardens near the village. This affordable red tea is amongst the best we have ever created. It comes from the same organic, eco-arboreal farm as August's Tea of the Month, Forest Song came from. When we found out that we could get extra of this amazing tea, beyond what we pressed into Light Meets Life cakes, we jumped at the opportunity to share this amazing tea with the community. (Also, this will give those of you who have a cake of Vitality the opportunity to compare the loose-leaf versus cake versions!)

Vitality has a bright and crisp maroon liquor that invigorates you. It is sweet, malty and delicious. It is truly amongst the best dian hong teas we have ever tried! It has a sweet, rich and bright liquor that is one of the reddest red teas we have ever seen—red like rubies thrust towards the sky. It is thick and complex, very interesting and patient as well. The Qi is vigorous and strong, yang and rising. It is great in the morning, especially if you want some calm force to start the day right. It is also one of the best teas to help you have a clear meditation session, which is why we chose it for this particular month. May you all find clarity and serenity in this month's session!

*With every sip, I feel myself straightening up,
and my roots tapping into the Earth even deeper.
This tea whispers to me, asking me to open
up my pores and let the Earth's forces be soaked
up by my body. Vital vibrations coarse through
my veins, filling up my chest and widening my
eyes. As I look into the deep, amber-to-red tea,
bowl resting in my two hands, I see a stronger me
reflected in the liquor. The longing for sleep has
disappeared altogether. I feel awake!*

—Jing Ren

Vital to the forest
And the blood
Vital to the rain
And the flow
Vital to the air
And the movement
Vital to the charge
And the energy to let go
Of vitality

—Wu De



Leaves in a bowl



Sidehandle brewing

Water: spring water, gathered or bottled

Fire: coals, infrared or gas

Heat: hot, fish-eye, just before a full boil

Brewing Methods: leaves in a bowl
or sidehandle

Steeping: duration to taste

Patience: 7–10 with leaves, more in
a sidehandle

茶 Dian hong is of-
ten nice when it is
brewed strong. Be
sure to make this
month's tea into a
bright, ruby-red
liquor.

A traditional Chinese side-handle teapot, likely made of unglazed ceramic or stoneware, is shown pouring a stream of clear tea into a wide, shallow, light-colored ceramic bowl. The bowl contains tea leaves and some liquid. Another similar bowl is visible to the right. The scene is set on a dark wooden surface, with a wooden handle or tool lying in the foreground. The background is dark, making the teapot and bowls stand out.

Brewing Tips

This month's tea is much better as bowl tea. You can brew these leaves in a bowl or with a sidehandle pot. If you are starting your tea journey, or want to make your foundation stronger, you can follow along with the first of our tradition's brewing methods, leaves in a bowl, which we are going to share in detail for the first time in this issue of Global Tea Hut!

Since this month is all about the meditative mind, we suggest focusing the powerful and awakening energy of this month's tea on having a focused tea ceremony, without any distraction. This starts with the right intention, sitting down with the time and space for tea, removing clutter and making a chaxi. You should wear loose, comfortable clothing and definitely turn off your cell phone or any other distractions. You may want to play some soft, unobtrusive music to help calm you down. Try to have a few bowls in quiet, if not the whole session, allowing the meditative energy of this tea to inform the space. You will find that any tea is much more rewarding in quiet, as you can then sense the subtler aromas, flavors and energy of the tea more clearly. In fact, some aspects of any tea are too subtle to notice when we're talking. This doesn't mean every session needs to be held in silence—conversation is better with tea, and the two have gone

together for millennia. But sometimes a bit of quiet can enhance a tea. If you do have the opportunity to enjoy Vitality in the morning quietly, you'll meet a very different day as a result!

We have one more suggestion for creating a very mindful and meditative session that we have also never shared in these pages: keep your hands in the center at all times with the strong hand on top. This is a deeper, more advanced extension of the first of the Five Basics of tea brewing: to divide the space in half and do all actions with the corresponding hand. (If you need to review those, you can watch our video on them or review past issues. We will put some up on our blog in the Further Readings section this month.) In tea brewing, we often only use one hand at a time to perform actions, though there are times for using both hands together. In such cases, it is very helpful to keep whichever hand you aren't using on the ground in front of you or on the table, front and center. This helps to center the whole space, keeps our mind focused on our actions and the teaware, and helps to root you during the times when you do have to lean in one direction or cross the line, like when pouring with a sidehandle pot, for example.

Meditation & Tea





Meditation is the expression of our real selves, dignified and pure. Without periods of silent reflection, a life becomes a shallow pursuit of what can quickly become meaningless materialism. Nature itself alternates periods of activity with stillness. Learning to take the time out of each day and relax into a peaceful state where nothing is wanted or needed, where there's nowhere to rush off to and no baggage from where we've been can make all the moments of our lives more serene. Beyond that, it infuses us with the wisdom inherent in our quiet centers. This wisdom and inner goodness bring dignity and poignancy to the rest of our lives.

Once one realizes that tea can be an aid to this meditative stillness, all kinds of doors open. Many people initially find that just sitting and doing “nothing” is difficult, and finding the time is almost impossible. However, most people can quickly make a habit of enjoying some delicious tea each day. The connection with the senses and the enticing flavors and aromas, as well as the comfort tea brings to our bodies, can make the transition from our hectic daily lives to a quiet time much smoother. But how do we turn this act of tea drinking into something meditative?

Since ancient times the Chinese have focused their tea practice on extracting the highest quality nectar from the Leaf—the purest cup possible. In effect, they seek a dialogue between Man and Nature through tea, and emphasis is placed on the skill and mastery of creation, not the form or ceremony. In fact, constant adaptation and flowing with the changes that each tea brings are what gongfu, and this expression of the Dao, are about. The Japanese, on the other hand, used the repetition of the ceremonial traditions and the creation of the tea room and garden to achieve higher states of consciousness.

There comes a time, however, in the learning curve of those committed to finding the best cup of tea, where one reaches the farther edges of technique. Eventually, one discovers the ideal cups, pots, Leaf and water as well as the skill necessary to combine them into delicious and rewarding cups of tea. Of course, you will spend your life improving these skills, and could



spend many more lifetimes, in fact, but you will still wonder, “Where do I go from here? What new area can I improve in my tea practice?” At that point, we can look at any art as analogous to tea—whether it be music, painting or even athletics. One can master all the techniques involved in mixing colors, stretching canvas, drawing and painting to the point where one can create photographic representations of any scene on Earth, but that doesn't make one a Michelangelo. Similarly, one could master the guitar and all the technical skills necessary to play it, and then go buy the most expensive, clear-sounding guitar itself, but that wouldn't make one a Hendrix; or even in sports, learning all the skills needed to play a sport won't make you a master athlete. What is it, then, that takes these people beyond just the mastery of skill? It's simple: soul.

We all know and recognize soul when we see it: when we walk through a museum and certain paintings stand out to us as better than others; in our

mother's cooking and the way it tastes better than the food prepared by master chefs at expensive restaurants; in our music, for, as Van the Man says: “Turn up your radio—turn it up, so you know it's got soul!” And this applies to tea as well.

When you reach that point where you're comfortable with your leaves, water and teaware, but you're still seeking higher and greater cups of tea, you will understand that the only thing left to change is yourself. In the same way that you experimented with different pots, waters, cups and kettles, you'll begin to experiment with yourself. My tea is much clearer and more delicious because I'm vegetarian, for example. Many tea lovers, past and present, have found this to be so. My body is lighter and cleaner and my senses sharper because of my diet. After all, we are consuming tea, so obviously diet is a factor. For now, this claim might be the same as someone saying that “silver kettles are much better”; in other words, it's just a claim. The point is that just as



you experimented with kettles to verify such ideas, you will begin to experiment with yourself to see the ways in which your lifestyle affects your cup of tea, and the depth of the dialogue between yourself and Nature—the Leaf’s essence.

Gradually, we come to realize the importance of the mind of the one pouring, steeping and brewing as well as the mind of the one drinking the tea. We notice tremendous differences when separate people use the same teaware, water and leaves—and true understanding dawns. We now know that it isn’t the “Cha” part of “Cha Dao” that is difficult, it’s the “Dao.” And that is where true cultivation begins.

The wonderful thing about tea is that it really is affected by the mind of the one brewing, and for that reason it has been the most important teacher in my life. If my mind is upset, if my body has toxins from eating poorly, if anything is ruffled, the tea will be different. In fact, as soon as one

has achieved enough technical skill to gauge temperature and leaf amount, choose quality tea and teaware, etc., one quickly learns that the only aspect of the tea ceremony left to refine is oneself. The tea begins to talk to you, and the conversation always results in wisdom.

As mentioned above, one begins to notice the effect diet has on tea, for example. And the more one meditates with tea, the more sensitive one becomes and the more the tea itself rewards with deeper, more subtle flavors and sensations—in essence enticing one forward on the Path from the gross to the subtle. I practice a meditation technique that focuses on intense retreats to cultivate inner wisdom. We often meditate long hours. This slows down the metabolism and, combined with fasting, causes the body to store fat. This was fine when I was younger, but at the age of thirty—like many meditators in my tradition—I began to gain weight. I thought that being slightly overweight wasn’t an issue,

since the inner world was of much greater importance. I followed what I had been taught and put my focus on inner development, ignoring the issue. As years passed, though, my tea started to change. It took a while for me to notice, but I did eventually. It was showing me the importance of keeping physically fit as well—transcending what I learned from my teachers, even, and teaching me about myself, through my own being.

Tea Between Teacher & Student

For centuries tea has been used in ceremonies. From weddings to funerals, and from initiation ceremonies to transmission of wisdom, people have used tea to convey non-verbal truths that words and ideas never can. 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, same 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 con-

sume 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 world views, 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 have for Tea: 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 or disagree with a bowl of tea; *you drink it!* And that somehow makes it more real.

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 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.

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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, Taoist 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:

Non-verbal transmission between teacher and student.

No non-provisional, lasting view; no dogma, no doctrine, no scripture or philosophy.

Must lead to the heart of a person.

Must reveal the truth of Nature as it is.

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!

Focus, Meditation & Tea

Recently, I was chatting with my dear tea brother Matthew London, whose gorgeous photography has occasionally blessed our pages, about focus and devotion to one’s art and practice.

He had some brilliant insights, and I was left reflecting on them for most of the following week. Our conversation began because we both felt sad that focus and devotion to the mastery of any art seems to be growing rarer and rarer, so much so that the artists left committed to their practice are more eccentric than ever. The reason “Mr.” precedes men’s names is that it comes from the German “*meister*,” which means “master,” and back in the day *everyone* was a master of something (or striving to be)—master carpenter, master cobbler, etc. (And women were masters, too!)

“Almost all the progress in our world,” Matthew said, with a sharp eye that intimated the embodiment of what he was saying, “has come because our ancestors were *focused!* They were focused on the stars for centuries, naming them all, and that led to astronomy. But nowadays we have sadly lost this focus, distracted throughout the day by so much media; distracted by too many thoughts about too many topics.” I couldn’t agree more. Concentration is a huge aspect of development in any field. It was one third of the Buddha’s path to freedom. He used the ancient word “*samadhi*,” which literally means a “one-pointed mind.” The fact is that there is no skill without focus and concentration. And since we are positively oriented people, my conversation with Matthew very quickly oriented itself towards solutions to this challenge, and, of course, how tea could play a role in helping people to reduce clutter and focus their lives and minds.

As I reflected on the role that concentration and focus have had on the evolution of humankind and our civilizations, I discovered three areas of focus worth discussing: the mind, the life and the physical approach. I know that tea can help with all three because She has changed my life and the lives of so many others in these ways.

The first type of focus that tea affords is a focus of the mind: the ability to concentrate on one task at a time for longer periods. This is close to what the Buddha meant by “*samadhi*.” Deep capacity for concentration and focus is the hallmark of a master. Look through pictures of any artist deep in their practice—making music, teapots, painting or any other work—and you will see the sharp fire of an intense fo-

cus. When we are young, we are taught that the best kind of concentration is strained and rigid, with clinched and furrowed brows. Students are rewarded for struggling to read. But the best concentration is actually relaxed while focused. If the body is soft and free, while being focused in laser-like intensity, then true mastery will follow. When you combine this ability with cultivated skills and knowledge, there is no limit to what humankind can do.

This ability to focus the mind is not just a tool for mastery of an art or skill, though it is necessary for that; it also has many deep, subtle implications. When complete focus of mind is achieved, there is a merging of the subject and object. Complete focus, in other words, is when we *become* the object of our focus. This is a state of “no mind” in Buddhist terms, or “effortless effort” according to the Daoists—a heart that is free to act without deliberation or hesitation. This is what athletes call “being in the zone.” In such a state, you aren’t there at all. There is no self, no thoughts or memories, drama or dilemma—only the action itself. The trailblazer and pioneer for Chajin like me, John Blofeld, says this more poetically than I can: “The use of a term meaning ‘way’ to describe the vast, unfathomable reality of which every form is but a transient manifestation has very subtle implications, pointing to the non-dual nature of reality; for, if reality is in fact non-dual, then the source, the way to the goal, the wayfarer, and the goal are all indivisible from one another.”

The second kind of focus is a concentration of life. One of the reasons Matthew and I discussed as to why focus has been lost in the modern era is clutter. And with increased communication and transport, as well as constant innovation, there is a plethora of good options in any choice. More often, though, this clutters our life and prevents us from focusing on reaching the rich depths of any one practice. People today have access to dozens of beautiful and enriching practices, great products from around the world, etc., but this variety isn’t always a good thing. It makes us tourists of everything and masters of none. We don’t ever reach soul—the true core—of any art or practice, where a real transformation in our person can occur.

Alan Watts often said that rich people don't want to take the years necessary to learn enough about sailing to actually enjoy a yacht, so they anchor them in the bay and have cocktail parties on deck. When you try to learn every kind of music, you may frustrate your ability to master any one of them. Or if you go to yoga on Monday, Sufi class on Tuesday, etc., you may not really delve into the true essence and benefit of any practice because your energies are too scattered.

Tea teaches us to simplify, to revere emptiness and ordinary space. Sometimes cutting things from our lives is not a qualitative decision. We aren't judging that which we are taking out. Rather, we are creating space to focus more and more deeply on one practice, relationship or area of our life. Focusing our lives on the things most important to us brings great joy. It is not the sacrifice you may be fearing; it is what you've always wanted.

The second kind of focus, reducing our life to what is essential, steeped into the third, which I call our "physical approach." You could say that focusing our life on our passions has to do with time and scheduling, while the third aspect of concentration on physical approach has to do with our space. Tea helps in this too, as it is a practice which is much more enjoyable in a conducive environment, which is ultimately a tea space that is clean and clear. The clutter of our schedule, filled with too many activities and not enough time to focus deeply on any one, also applies to our space. A cluttered mind will clutter the space, and then that space will inspire a more cluttered mind in a loop of increasing clutter. Living minimally in terms of one's physical approach to life will help you to focus your time and mind. It will also make your home much more conducive to tea. A tea space is best when it is empty and simple. This is very difficult to achieve, actually. But if you do, you'll find it a wonderful boon to your happiness and health. One of the main goals in building our future Center, Light Meets Life, is to keep the tea and teaware out of the tea-rooms, which will be empty canvases for students to practice chaxi and tea ceremony.

Before we move on to some practical tips for cultivating meditative

tea, I'd like to conclude our discussion on focus by commenting that we also need to start reorienting our so-called civilization towards not just focus for its own sake, but focus on the right things. The Zen master Kodo Sawaki said, "People always talk about 'civilization,' but civilization and culture are nothing but the collective elaboration of illusory desires. No matter how many wrinkles of illusory desire we have in our brains, from the Buddhist point of view, they will never amount to meaningful advancement for human beings. 'Advancement' is the talk of the world, but in what direction are we advancing?" Can Tea help us re-orient our direction?

We have to start applying our focus towards closing separation, towards education and towards a love of the Earth, our home. Is technological advancement in weaponry really an advancement? Does the world really need yet another tea company profiting from inorganic tea that harms the Earth, the forest and mountain, the farmers and the consumers?

We do need to learn to focus our minds, lives and space to achieve any kind of skill (gongfu), but without the soul, skill is meaningless. The heart is what makes a skill valuable. There is an old Chinese story that demonstrates this quite well: a master archer was one day showing off in the town square, drilling arrows into the bull's-eye one after the other to the applause of a growing crowd. With deft skill he quickly knocked each arrow, hardly aiming at all. Each arrow he loosed whooshed and then loudly thumped right in the bull's-eye. The proud warrior's enjoyment of all the applause was, however, impaired by a simple oil vendor off to the side of the square who was, for all intents and purposes, completely ignoring the archer's display. After some time, the warrior couldn't stand this intentional snubbing and stomped over to the oil vendor's cart. "Hey, you! Can't you see what I am doing? Bull's-eye after bull's-eye—this is amazing archery. You haven't clapped even once!" The oil vendor looked up and responded with a quiet, "I'm not impressed," averting his gaze. "You're not impressed!" repeated the warrior with venom. "Nope, not impressed." The oil vendor saw the confusion on the warrior's face along

with the threat and decided to explain a bit more: "Look, you just practiced archery for many years. This skill is the result of years of practice. Nothing more. Using your skill for show is not impressive." Deciding that the oil vendor wasn't worth the trouble, the warrior dismissed him with his hand, exclaiming, "Ahh, what would you know? You're just an oil vendor!" With a deft skill, the oil vendor reached down and placed on his counter one of the gourds which were used to hold liquid in those days. Then he placed a coin on the gourd's already small opening. (Chinese coins in those days were round with a very small square hole in the center.) With the grace of years of training, the oil vendor ladled oil and poured quickly and from on high through the small square and into the gourd—without spilling a single drop! He quickly capped the gourd and handed it to the now-agape warrior, declaring "On the house!"

Practicing Meditative Tea

What, then, do we mean by meditative tea? Meditation, in the West, is sometimes confused with contemplation. We don't mean that here. Meditation, in the Eastern sense, is when the distinction between the object and subject becomes fuzzy, the ground lost. You might say that only the object remains, but the words here force us into a paradox since there can't be an object without a subject. There aren't any good English words to describe the state, so perhaps it's best if we just use an Eastern one: *Dhyana*. "*Dhyana*" means "being-onto," so that when we are being-onto a flower, for example, the division between ourselves and the flower evaporates and there is only flower, though not the word. Understanding all this isn't really terribly important. Experiencing it *is*. But where to start?

First, we must begin with our posture. So much of modern life slouches us: the sofa, food, the TV and games. We slowly hunch over like animals and lose the dignity of our upright posture. Beneath us the Earth is firm and holds us, no matter how heavy we are; above us, the Sky remains constant as well. Between it we rule. Try drinking your tea on the floor or a low table.



Cross your legs and sit up nice and straight. When your spine is straight, you'll find meditation easier as well as your normal thought processes, and even perhaps your confidence in yourself. Dignified people don't slouch. Slouching is the sign of our mental impurities, like fear, nervousness or a lack of esteem. Try sitting at the tea table with a straight back.

One of the oldest methods of making tea into a meditation is listening to the kettle. This is another reason why using hardwood charcoal can add so much to the process of tea brewing. While your kettle is heating up, close your eyes and take some deep breaths. Try focusing on the area below your nostrils and above your upper lip. When your mind wanders, don't feel frustrated or rebuke yourself; just return to the breath. Slowly, your mind will begin to quiet down. Then, just as you find yourself settling into a stillness, you'll begin to hear the kettle like the "soughing of the wind through the pines." Try to learn to gauge the temperature of the water by this sound. Feel it; hear it in your soul. Don't make it an intellectual exercise. With some

practice, closed eyes and a still, sensitive mind you will find that you can intuit the temperature very accurately in no time.

Nothing affects tea as much as the first time it meets the water. When the kettle finishes boiling, therefore, make sure your mind is at ease. If it isn't, rest the kettle aside and take a few deep breaths. Sometimes it helps to play soothing music in the background. I have found the flow of the water from the kettle, as it mixes with the leaves, significantly affects the flavor and power of the tea. Consequently, it's important to be calm, to breathe and let the water flow smoothly, like one's clear mind. Focus on the flow of the water and the steam; "be-onto" it—*Dhyana*.

Just as you learned to gauge the temperature of the kettle by the sound, eyes closed, you can learn to know when the tea is finished steeping just by quieting your mind and listening to your heart. Feel comfortable with your mistakes; as long as your posture is upright it is okay to misbrew tea. It can be a bit weak or strong. There is only one tea that is right for this moment,

and that is the one before you—however it tastes. Let the parameters go, and achieve oneness with the tea and the process. Then, just as you were clear and focused when you poured the water from the kettle, you should be completely present for the tea as it is poured out. It will respond to your mind, pouring as smoothly or jerkily as you are clear or not.

When you smell and drink the tea, do so fully and completely. This requires silence, as does most every aspect of the tea ceremony. Allow your tea to reconnect you to yourself and Nature. Quietly sip it fully and wholly, remembering your posture and breath. When your posture is straight and your mind calm, you will notice so much more in your tea that you didn't before, subtler and subtler flavors, aromas and sensations in your body.

After you set your cup down, don't be so anxious to steep again. Don't bring the rushed mentality of your daily life to the tea space. Relax. You have more than enough time. There's nothing to do but be here and now with the tea. Close both your eyes and continue to breathe.

When your mind drifts, just bring it back to your breath. You may notice the Cha Qi beginning to move in your body. Focus on your palms and extremities since the subtle sensations will often first become apparent there, as these areas are more sensitive.

It may feel like a prickly, tingling sensation vibrating or moving in waves. Slowly, you will notice these sensations elsewhere the more tea you drink, especially when it's good quality tea.

Another great aspect of using tea as a meditation is the fact that you can always return to the present when your mind becomes unhinged. If you close your eyes and find your mind running away, and returning to your breath, the flavor of the tea or the sensations in your body all don't work to bring focus, you can always take 2–3 deep breaths and then steep the tea again, paying attention to the flow of the water from the kettle and repeating the whole process. It won't take too many rounds for even a disturbed mind to begin to calm down, especially as the essence of the tea wants you to be calm. Not only does it reward you with exciting new dimensions of flavor, aroma and Qi as you develop calm sensitivity, it begins to speak to you of Nature and the lost ages past.

A student of tea traveled many miles to meet Master Rikyu. He wanted to learn the inner essence of Cha Dao. When he arrived, he bowed before the master and told him of his long and arduous journey in the name of tea. Rikyu agreed to teach him and showed him to his lodgings. A few days later, after a particularly great tea session, the man asked the master, "Master, what is the inner essence of Cha Dao?" Rikyu smiled, "The highest truth of Cha Dao is this: gather water, lay the charcoal, heat the water and steep the tea." The man was shocked and began to question whether traveling all this way was worth it. Perhaps people had been wrong about this master. Giving him the benefit of the doubt, the man decided to ask for clarification, "But, Master, that is too simple. It would seem anyone could do those things." Rikyu scoffed; "The day you can do as I have said, I will travel all the way to your house, rest my head at your feet and become your disciple."

The meaning of this story is important, for it expresses everything we have

been discussing. Rikyu was telling the student that the highest expression of Cha Dao is to gather water, heat it and steep the tea. Like the man, many of us might not understand why the master then said that he himself would become the disciple of anyone who could do that. The idea is that you *just* gather water and *just* heat it, and then finally you *just* steep the tea. In other words, there are no other thoughts, no ideas and no ego—just pure, enlightened action, called "*wu wei*" in Chinese. This is obviously no easy task, and will take a lifetime (or lifetimes) to master. The reason masters brew the best tea is because of their state of mind; and the reason tea was always so coveted by Buddhist and Daoist mystics is this very ability to transmit, along with its liquor, the state of mind of the participants, so that if one is deeply peaceful the tea will also be thus.

And the value of tea as a meditation isn't just for beginners looking to start finding quiet time each day. As we develop on the path, many meditators find that the time they spend meditating is often peaceful enough, but this doesn't always translate to daily life so well. Because you can "practice" peace at home on a nice cushion, with gentle music, etc., doesn't mean you'll be a Buddha when someone abuses you or behaves improperly. We are human. The world is full of negativity and it is often difficult to maintain one's equanimity. I have found that tea can help in this regard quite a bit.

At the Center, we meditate for two hours a day. The practice is ingrained. Most of the time, these two hours are enough. It is easy to find calm in the serene surroundings we have created in the Center. But how to bring this energy out into the world each day? It is easy to find peace with one's eyes closed and legs crossed, but what about when the hands are busy and the mind occupied? I have found that tea bridges this gap in an excellent way. It is in some ways an ordinary, daily activity—just drinking. But in many ways it is also a meditation, as we have been discussing here. You are moving and concentrating, coordinating the body and mind, but at the same time must seek the same kind of meditative stillness as is found on the cushion. Like tai chi or other moving meditations, tea helps to bring the wisdom of the cushion into

more ordinary, daily moments of each day. I have found that this convergence happens much more often with tea in my life, and find myself meditative when brushing my teeth, for example, more often than before. In this way, everything becomes a part of practice.

Tea is an ancient and wise teacher. If we learn to quiet ourselves and listen to the Leaf, it has many things to show us about ourselves: our diet, our mindset, our emotions, even our cravings. It also can teach us about Nature and about the harm we are doing when we pollute it. It can discuss with us our own role in Nature and connection to it, not as external exploiters, but as part of a working ecology. Then, occasionally, there are those tea moments when all the elements come together and we achieve transcendence of ourselves. The ancient sages worked with the five elements (*wu shing*), trying to achieve external and internal alchemy, bringing Man, Heaven and Earth into proper alignment, not only to achieve a greater longevity of life, but also to cultivate wisdom.



茶 *"Tea embraces the embodied paradox that we live moment by moment. There's no struggle, only calm joy arising from the recognition of the simple practice, which frees the mind into the heart—the expanse of being in the interior of our embodied experience. Apparent limitation, density, contraction and matter are seen as a continuum from tea cup to our lips, to our being. We flow from the finite to the infinite and back again, spiraling into presence through the simple act of bridging Nature into humanity—the meeting of all time and space in a simple cup of tea."*

—Gregory Wendt the First

冥美修行





TEA & MEDITATION SELF-COURSE

茶人: Shen Su

Shen had the good fortune to do two self-courses this year: one while we were in Yunnan in May and one recently in October with guests. These retreats are paving the way for what we hope will be many scheduled tea and meditation retreats at Tea Sage Hut and our future Center, Light Meets Life. In fact, we are setting up our first retreat this September. In the meantime, Shen shares some advice for organizing your own self-course with a focus on tea and meditation. Taking time to retreat at least annually can have a very positive impact on our overall health and well-being, and incorporating tea into a retreat always helps soothe the process.

Creating the time and space to form positive habits is actually the most important element in positive change, and having the time and space to drink tea and meditate all day is a rare privilege, indeed. One of the most important and challenging things I have done to deepen my tea practice here at the Tea Sage Hut was a self-guided, silent tea and meditation retreat. I am very fortunate because this is about the best place on Earth to conduct such a retreat; it is a Zen and tea center, after all. It is easy enough to say, “Tea and Zen are one flavor,” but just try to put that into practice. What does it even mean—the taste of Zen or the posture of tea? An intensive retreat like this creates an intimacy between the two so close that one starts to overlap with the other. You do not need some sort of philosophical understanding of this, nor to live in a tea and Zen center, and you certainly do not need ten days for such a retreat. These are all ideals, not constraints on doing a tea and meditation retreat yourself. In this article, I would like to share what went into organizing such a retreat to make it accessible to everyone, even if you only have one or three days. Even a half-day retreat can be great!

What does a tea and meditation retreat look like?

I have done one-, three-, seven-, and ten-day, self-guided, silent tea and meditation retreats. The number of days is really up to you, but the longer the better. As you can imagine, your days will consist of waking up early, drinking tea, meditating, eating and sleeping (also cleaning and cooking, unless you have someone to help you, which is ideal). This might sound amazing, and it is, but like any intensive retreat, it will also come with its fair share of challenges along the way. It is not a holiday or a time to relax, but rather a time to let challenges arise in a controlled environment that is conducive to facing them and working through them. It is the challenging days that offer the greatest potential for growth and transformation. Growth is always outside the comfort zone. That does not mean you purposely make yourself uncomfortable. Celebrate the times when you are comfortable and consciously work through the times when you are not. A meditation retreat is an excellent time to observe how much we fluctuate between comfort and discomfort and then to reflect on what that means with respect to our everyday lives.

How do I organize my own retreat?

You will want to have your entire retreat very organized. The schedule will be the structure that holds your retreat together to keep things running smoothly and on time. Things can change a lot, depending on how many people are attending the retreat or helping out. In fact, some of you might be in a situation where you are doing the retreat around other people who are not involved at all and are just living their daily lives (perhaps a spouse or roommate, for example) who understand what you are doing but are not participating. In any case, the more people involved, the more organized the retreat has to be, and everything must be communicated very clearly before going into silence. Wu De often says that we must learn to love discipline, treating the schedule as an ally, rather than an enemy to some idea of egoic freedom.



茶 Baisao was an eighteenth-century tea sage whose bright spirit illuminates our tradition in more than name alone. A Zen monk for most of his life, at the age of forty-nine he traded in his robes for what was paradoxically the more Zen-infused life of a roadside peddler of tea. His bowls were steeped in the ancient and priceless spirit of tea, unclouded by money, theory, ritual or even mind itself—a spirit from before the first fingers plucked the first leaves. And those who came by his wayside hut just might have passed by the old man so strangely donning the crane robes of an ancient Daoist hermit, but for the way the spirit twinkled invitingly in his eyes or the softness of his hands as he poured his tea into worn and cracked bowls. And after such a bowl, the passerby left changed somehow, though perhaps not able to grasp the importance of what exactly had shifted their perspective. He called his stall “The Hut Which Conveys One to Sagehood (通聖亭),” which is where the name “Tea Sage Hut” comes from. Out of place and out of time, he was a revitalization of the ancient forest tea sages who haunted the mountains of a long-forgotten China, offering healing draughts and bits of insight to those who crossed their paths. This gorgeous sculpture was made by our very own Global Tea Hut brother Xander Rijkee, the Tea Wayfarer of March 2014.

ELEMENTS OF A TEA & MEDITATION RETREAT

Time & Space

You will need to set aside time for your retreat. This might sound obvious, but it is one of the most common excuses people have not to do one. Check your calendar, take time off work, utilize a long weekend, do whatever you need to create some time for this important period of self-cultivation. Make a note of it and let others around you know so as to solidify it and make it more real. You need to create a sense of commitment towards it so you will not just blow it off for that new blockbuster. Set a reasonable time frame and then commit to it.

You will need space for both for tea and meditation. They could be the same space, but for all practical purposes, it would be easier to have a different space designated for each activity. If you already have such spaces, great, and if not, then here is a great opportunity to create them. Consciously choose where you will drink tea and sit in meditation during your retreat. In addition, carefully consider the other spaces that will be used, like the dining area, sleeping quarters and bathrooms. They should be clean and stocked with all necessary supplies. Do whatever is required to prepare and organize your spaces for the retreat. You will be very happy you did, trust me! There is nothing worse than starting your retreat and then having to invest energy in things other than tea and meditation that could have been taken care of with a little careful forethought.

The spaces do not need to be special. Small and simple spaces and short periods of time should never prevent you from doing a retreat. Like brewing tea, you need to work with what you have. You do not need fancy tea or teaware or brewing methods—just a bowl, water, kettle and organic tea are all that is necessary to make tea. So too, make use of the time and space you have and with the right intention you can have a very successful retreat.

Meditation

Here, I mean either seated or walking meditation. The specific type of meditation is up to you. In many retreat settings, the entire day will revolve around meditation, literally. Aside from meals, rest periods and sleep, you sit all day! For this type of retreat, however, there will be more of a balance between tea and meditation. The meditation periods will be broken up throughout the day and you can expect to schedule in five to seven hours of meditation, or more, each day. I included one-hour and one-and-a-half-hour meditation periods in my retreat. Most of them were one-hour sits. I used a simple timing app on my phone that I could trust so that I was not constantly disrupting my meditation by looking at a clock to see how much time was left. (This is a small tip that can make a big difference!) But if having your phone near you is going to distract you, you can use a simple clock or watch.

Discourses

I've found it useful to listen to recorded discourses each evening after the final meditation. If you have a recording from a particular teacher you like, and if it can be divided up throughout the retreat from start to finish, then you might also benefit by including these evening discourses. It is by no means necessary, but discourses help encourage you to practice with continued enthusiasm. This would have to be discussed and agreed upon if there were more than one person.

Tea

Many of you will be able to incorporate two types of bowl tea (sidehandle and leaves in a bowl) and possibly gongfu tea, as well, into your retreat. As I mentioned above, just work with the teaware and brewing methods you have access to. Tea and meditation retreats should be accessible to everyone, regardless of your experience with tea or preferred brewing method. Tea sessions will fall between meals and meditation periods. It is important to remember to leave time for both setting and cleaning up afterwards. Because the retreat is done in silence, I never listen to music during any of the tea sessions.

I always started each day with leaves in a bowl. For this, I gave myself half an hour, which was more than enough time because I was drinking tea on an empty stomach quite early in the morning; a few leaves steeped in three bowls of water was all I needed to start the day. When I was drinking sidehandle bowl tea, whisked tea or gongfu tea, I found one and a half hours more than enough to comfortably set up, drink tea, and clean up afterwards.

Meals & Cleaning

Two vegetarian or vegan meals a day should be sufficient, possibly supplemented with a light late afternoon snack of fruits and/or nuts. If there is someone willing to assist the retreat by volunteering to prepare the meals and manage the cleaning, then your retreat will be deeper. If there is more than one person doing the retreat you could also take turns making meals each day. Again, meals and groceries should all be organized in advance so you can devote as much energy as possible to the retreat. Recipes and menus go a long way here. You should really have all your meals planned out in detail for each day. You will need to sit down, search some recipes, write down the ingredients and buy them. Of course, you can cycle through certain meals, but do not eat the same thing day after day. Choosing recipes that can be made in advance is also helpful. Soup stocks and homemade meals that can be frozen or refrigerated can be useful for longer retreats. As much as possible, use ingredients that are fresh, local and seasonal.

Cleaning is a process, not a finished state. If you have to do the cleaning yourself, make a practice out of it. In fact, it would probably be better for most people to do the cleaning

靜修的元素

and “sweep” their ideas away than to separate cleaning from the retreat itself. While it is a tea and meditation retreat, the opportunities for growth come in doing *any* activity with presence. It does not matter what you do, but how you do it.

Work Periods & Free Time

At large, well-staffed retreats, *everything* is taken care of for you. Basically, you are temporarily ordained, and just eat, sleep and meditate. And that is always the ideal if you can manage it. However, at home, guiding your own retreat, often you still have chores that simply cannot be put off just because you need some time for self-cultivation. The plants need watering, the pets need feeding, and someone has to answer the door and communicate with the postman when he arrives. Not to worry—*this is your practice*. But you will need to schedule in time for such activities and manage work periods or free time very responsibly, alone or in groups. I tried one short work period in the morning and a larger work period in the afternoon. This was sufficient to complete my chores while still maintaining a retreat mindset. These types of retreats are not easy, and often taking more rest is the best use of free time. Living in the world is generally an experience of stimulation overdose. I would recommend limiting your free time to sleeping, walking or

more meditation, and cutting yourself off from books, computers, phones, notepads and anything that distracts you.

Due to my position here at the Center, I had to be on the computer and at the post office every day during my retreat. However, I found that it was not a problem, and, in fact, useful to do some work every day. It was essential, and therefore part of my practice. What I mean by this is that I was able to observe how I took what I cultivated at the tea table or in the meditation hall into my everyday life. And that is always the question, is it not? How do I take that which I cultivate or experience in practice and apply it to my everyday life in a useful way? After all, what *good* is any practice or insight if it does not apply directly to your everyday experience of life, to driving the car, brushing your teeth or walking up the stairs? Remember, to retreat is to move backwards. Though it is time for self-cultivation and introspection, a retreat is a movement back or inside, and the only way forward is to apply what you cultivate back into the world you temporarily left.

Observing myself out in the real world during my retreat was an excellent measure of how the tea and meditation were affecting my behavior. I found that I was able to carry more peace and presence into my activities, and more importantly, that when I did not carry such qualities, I was at least more aware of *that*. I was able to observe my negative habit patterns, take a step back and let them run their course.

Rules of Conduct for a Retreat

Here is a simple template for the codes of conduct that I found useful to give to other people when we did a retreat together. It can obviously be expanded on and modified to suit your particular retreat.

茶 Noble silence means silence of body, speech, and mind. Please observe noble silence from the beginning of the retreat until after the morning meditation on the last day. You may begin to communicate during breakfast on the last day.

茶 You may speak to management (resident students) if there are any problems during the retreat. But even these contacts should be kept to a minimum.

茶 Please use your free time wisely. There are no strict rules enforced, however, it would be a skillful use of time to take rest, meditate more, stretch, go for a walk, etc. Should you decide to study, write, or read, please keep it related to tea and meditation. It is strongly recommended not to use computers or smart phones or do anything overstimulating. This is a retreat.

茶 Do not let any use of free time become a distraction to others. Please be mindful.

茶 Please accept the food provided at each meal. The course volunteers endeavor to prepare a balanced, wholesome menu suitable for meditation. It is purchased with donated money and cooked by volunteers. Therefore, please do not get up and add condiments or other food to any of the meals. Practice gratitude for what is placed before you.

茶 Please do not lean against the wall during any meditation or discourse in the meditation hall.

茶 Be mindful not to point your feet towards the altar or teacher when stretching or relaxing your legs.

茶 Feel free to use more or fewer cushions for any sit, so long as there are enough for everyone.

茶 Adhere to the schedule with discipline. Try your best to view the schedule as support, rather than a hindrance.

And that is exactly what any spiritual path is about! It is not just about increasing the peace, happiness and joy in your life, but also learning how to skillfully navigate the vicissitudes of life that inevitably come your way. You probably do not need me to remind you, but life has got some serious curve balls coming your way. And let's face it, that means sickness, pain, failure, death and loss of everything. That is why I love tea and meditation: they awaken us to presence, which is always accessible here and now, and in a state of presence we can act skillfully, mindfully and respectfully, even in the face of the challenges life throws our way. The world can often be a chaotic place and it requires a great deal of presence to respond calmly, especially in chaotic situations. Tea and meditation are excellent teachers of presence and therefore wonderful allies to have when navigating our lives.

The Unexpected

Expect the unexpected. There is no telling what is going to happen during your retreat. Be flexible and understanding if things do not go according to plan. Your plans are ultimately meaningless in the eyes of reality. You might be wondering why, then, I have stressed planning out your entire retreat! Though your plans may mean nothing, *planning* is everything! Remember that.

Let friends and family know about your retreat so they do not bother you unless in an emergency. Set your email to auto-reply, letting others know when you will be able to respond next. If you are doing a longer retreat with others, you will need to consider things like laundry and other chores that were possibly overlooked. Also, it is a good idea to brainstorm a list of supplies you do not usually use, like meditation cushions, extra water and certain tea or teaware, just to make sure you do not forget those essentials before beginning.

Ending the Retreat

It is important to end your retreat well because re-entering the world can come as quite a shock when you have just spent so much time in stillness and silence. Planning to end your retreat becomes more important the longer your retreat is. But it is also quite easy. Essentially, you need to avoid jumping right back into your regular routine, or running around sharing all your insights with anyone willing to listen. You should relax back into the world in a calm fashion. While it might be slightly over-stimulating at first because your sensitiv-

ity was heightened as a result of the retreat, a little equanimity should have also been cultivated as well, helping you stay balanced, grounded and composed.

I usually end a retreat by ending noble silence on the morning *after* the last day. I like to sit in meditation for one last morning session, and then break noble silence during breakfast. But breaking silence depends on how you define your retreat. For example, I think of a three-day retreat as three full days of meditation plus one day to end. So if you are doing a three-day retreat, you actually need four days to finish properly. You should really use one day as a buffer before re-entering your regular life. If you have a short time frame due to work or school, you might be tempted to use your very last day to squeeze in more tea and meditation, but this is not a good idea! How you finish anything is how you start the next thing. I also would not immediately jump back on my phone or computer, or do anything over-stimulating. I might go for a walk outside, enjoy some conversations with other retreatants, perhaps read a simple book, weed in the garden or cook a nice meal. There are lots of simple things you can do that will help with your transition, and you might even find that the simplest things are a little more special after cultivating even the slightest amount of presence in your life as a result of the retreat.

It is funny and frustrating because a state of presence is always accessible to us, and yet we fail to maintain contact with it so much of the time, or at least I do! That is why doing these retreats routinely can be so helpful in maintaining a practice. You might only have time once a year to do a long retreat, but if you use this template, you might be surprised at just how easy and influential it is to do a few smaller retreats throughout the year on long weekends or short holidays. I wish you all the best in organizing your own tea and meditation retreat! Let us know if you have any other questions about organizing a self-course!





Schedule for a Retreat

Here is what a typical day looked like for the retreat I did. It can be modified to suit your needs, but it is a good structure to start with. I found the brewing methods worked great in this order, but you can organize it in any way you like. If you do not need such a long afternoon work period as I have scheduled here, simply shorten it and add another meditation period. As for the last day, I would end the retreat after the first morning meditation and during breakfast.

4:00am: wake up

4:30am–5:00am: bowl tea
(leaves in a bowl)

5:00am–6:30am: meditation
(listening to recorded chanting is also nice during this time)

6:30am–7:00am: breakfast

7:00am–8:00am: free time/work

8:00am–9:00am: meditation

9:00am–10:30am: whisked tea

10:30am–11:30am: meditation

11:30am–1:00pm: lunch/free time

1:00pm–2:30pm: bowl tea
(sidehandle)

2:30pm–3:30pm: meditation

3:30pm–6:00pm: work period

6:00pm–7:30pm: gongfu tea

7:30pm–8:30pm: meditation

8:30pm–9:00pm: evening discourse

9:30pm: lights out





When you drive into Yixing there is a very old sign that boldly proclaims: “There is only one ceramic teapot in the world and her name is Yixing.” And while there are many gorgeous clays and teaware artisans around the world, even in faraway Czech Republic, there is no clay with as deep or as long a connection to tea as Yixing. The relationship that Yixing teapots have with tea is one most tea lovers will explore at some point in their journey. Consequently, articles on Yixing history, lore, science and experience are going to play a huge role in this new “Gongfu Tea Table” section of the magazine, in which we explore all things gongfu tea.

A big part of what makes Yixing teaware so special is the clay itself. There are other aspects of *Zisha* tea-

pots we will discuss in future issues, but none as important as the clay. The Chinese had master potters long before many Western countries, having developed stoneware and porcelain many centuries earlier. The clay used in Yixing teapots is mined from the local Yellow Dragon (黃龍山), Blue-Green Dragon (青龍山) and Hu Fu (湖父鎮) mountains and their surroundings. There are many ways to use the word “stoneware” in the ceramic world, but when we say that Yixing clay is “stoneware” we mean that it is made from ore mined from the Earth and crushed/fermented into clay, rather than from natural clay from a river, stream or lake. In fact, most teaware in the world is stoneware by this definition of the term. This brings the Earth element into tea brewing.

Because Yixing clay is naturally lead-free, it can be used for food and drink even after the initial firing, without the need for a glaze. Without glaze, the clay remains porous and sand-like, which means that it has a capillary action that preserves the heat of the tea liquor, especially when showered on the outside. This also means that it famously absorbs the oils of the tea and imparts them back to future brews, adding depth and wisdom as one “seasons” one’s pot through use over time. Examination under a microscope allows one to see the deep chambers of pores that actually run from inside to outside in an Yixing teapot. Yixing clay is composed of quartz remains, isinglass, kaolinite, mica, hematite, iron and several other trace elements. It is fired at a temperature of around

Gongfu Teapot

功夫茶壺

Introducing a whole new approach to our gongfu tea series: we will still be offering gongfu experiments, but we wanted to expand this section of the magazine to cover more than just the experience of those practicing gongfu tea. From now on, we will sit down at the gongfu table almost every month and learn about Yixing pots, porcelain cups, techniques, history and many other aspects of gongfu tea, improving our knowledge and practice of gongfu. This month, we begin the new series with a discussion of purple-sand clay.

1100–1800 degrees Celsius, and the quartz and isinglass remains create what potters call a “double pore structure,” which ultimately was the ring that sealed its marriage to tea. The composite structure of Yixing clay makes it resilient to radical temperature changes, so that teapots can be covered with boiling water even in the cold of winter. And what could be a more elegant image than winter-plums covered in a light snow, perhaps pine-covered mountains in the distance beyond a frozen pond, as seen over the rim of a steaming Yixing pot?

After the clay is mined it looks like a block of stone, with a flaky consistency. It is then allowed to rest in the air for weeks or even years, called “corrosion,” as it breaks down into small, soybean-sized pebbles. These small

chunks are then ground into sand and allowed to “ferment” in water for a period. The duration depends on the ore and the master overseeing the process, though most of the old masters I’ve met seemed to have a “the longer the better” philosophy when it comes to airing/storing the ore. More water and sifting produce smoother clay, whereas leaving more sand creates textured clay that is often more porous when fired. Sifters of various sizes are used to create these different textures. Then, after the clay is slabbed, it is pounded with a large wooden mallet, sometimes blending colors in this way, until the putty is of the desired color and consistency. The clay itself is then fermented, and like the ore, the older the better. If a clay is very well-aged, it becomes smoother, softer and better for tea.

Many of the old recipes, blends and methods of making clay have been lost. This is one of the main reasons why antique Yixing pots make better tea, though craftsmanship and pot-making skills also haven’t survived.

Purple, Red or Yellow

The variety of colors in Yixing relate to the kind of ore, where in the strata the ore was mined, how long it was allowed to “ferment” in air over time, as well as the firing temperature and, in modern times, the mixture of powders like iron, cobalt oxide, copper oxide, etc., to change the color of the clay. These additions definitely make the pot less ideal for tea brewing, even if they do enhance the appearance.

Traditionally, Yixing clay is categorized into three main families: purple (*Zisha*, 紫砂), red (*hongni*, 紅泥) and gray/green/yellow (*duanni*, 段泥). Some scholars and Yixing collectors, however, suggest that the clays should be classified by what mountain they were mined from, rather than by the color. Each of these categories is a family of clay, with many kinds of ore. And each ore can then be refined to different consistencies and also fired to different temperatures. In firing, hotter temperatures will produce darker purple colors.

Yixing is famous as the “Purple-sand City” because it is the purple-sand (*Zisha*) which is the oldest and most common clay/ore; and that’s why we capitalize its name. It was the purple-sand clay pots that became the “Father of Tea,” marrying Yixing forever to tea brewing. Real purple-sand pots have a magical effect on tea liquor that can only be tasted and felt in the mouth. We suggest doing some experiments with *Zisha* clay versus other kinds of teaware, like porcelain, and then later continuing these experiments into a comparison of *Zisha* with other ores from Yixing.

The first barrier you will have to cross to do experiments with purple-sand clay and its magical effect on tea liquor is finding a pot made of real *Zisha*. Some tea lovers buy an “Yixing” pot on the Internet and then find that it is equal to their celadon, porcelain or other ceramic pots. It may even be worse. The issue is that the mines in Yixing were closed in the late 1990s and no more real ore is being quarried. However, when the government factories closed they had tons of ore, as well as fermenting clay, which was all distributed to employees based on seniority. This old clay is still around, but the cost of purchasing real ore or clay increases every year. As a result, potters have begun importing clay from other areas of Jiangsu or Anhui (a lot of purplish clay is brought in from a place in neighboring Anhui called Gongde). This clay from other regions is not composed of the same material as real Yixing ore, is often colored chemically and, in the end, may or may not be as nice as any other kind of clay, lacking in the magic that has married *Zisha* to tea for five hundred years.

Your first priority, then, is to get a genuine Yixing pot. Second, look for *Zisha*, as opposed to a red, *hongni* pot or yellowish, *duanni* pot. Use a trusted source if possible, learn to recognize the difference between genuine Yixing clay and other clays, and then do your comparisons. One other tip is that real *Zisha* clay should not be too shiny or glossy, but more matte, and you should see grains of sand in the clay, especially when magnified. The more purple these grains are, the better. As time goes on, and you see more genuine *Zisha* clay, you will get better at evaluating pots.

The Father of Tea

Yixing clay has almost perfect plasticity, and can be molded, thrown or cast without being sticky or difficult to work. Furthermore, it has one of the lowest shrinkage rates of any clay, on average ten to twenty-five percent from production to firing, depending on the type of clay, the processing and the temperature of the kiln. This allows for the perfect fit of the lid and pot, as well as the porous texture that makes them so perfect for brewing tea. Moreover, the quartz and other metallic elements in the clay lend it a natural, simple color. The great potter Gao Zhuang once said that what he loved most about Yixing art was that the appearance couldn’t show its value, but rather its nature.

The Earth couldn’t have dreamed of a clay more suitable for tea, for Yixing clay comes from deep mines, bringing that spirit and joy with it to the tea ceremony. One of the brightest masters in the Pottery City today, Ke Tao Chung, says, “The art of purple-sand teaware is used to express the feelings the craftsman has for the Earth, and then to transcend them, so that people can feel the softness and freedom revealed in the Earth.” We too have found such artistic, spiritual and even elemental grandeur in holding Yixing pots—they are wise and kind, and the way they improve our tea, by absorbing its essence and power and bringing it to all our future sessions, is nothing shy of miraculous.



茶 *Yellow Dragon Mountain is the most famous location for collecting ore. In the late 1990s, all the mines were shut down. Looking at the mountain walls, you can see veins of Yixing ore all throughout. Due to exposure to air, the iron in the clay has started to rust, turning orange. The best ore came from deep mines. They had to be drained constantly due to the high water table of the area. There are a tremendous variety of ores.*

茶 *These are various kinds of raw Zisha ore. Each can then be fired into an array of colors, from purple to reddish brown, depending on the temperature. The spots of other minerals are called “chicken eyes” by locals. The ore ferments outdoors for up to several years until it breaks down into pellets. Then, the small balls are soaked in water and purified until the desired clarity of clay is produced. This clay is then slabbed.*



Leaves in a Bowl Ceremony

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To prepare tea leaves in a bowl, you don't need much. Tea basically comes in three shapes: striped, ball-shaped and compressed. For this kind of ceremony, large striped teas are best since they don't get stuck in the mouth, are less likely to float and are beautiful to watch open. (Sometimes a few balls can also work, especially if they are hand-picked and open up into bud-leaf sets.) You can actually find tea in this shape in all the seven genres. As for teaware, you will need a large dish for the tea, bowls for each of your guests (rice bowls will do if you don't have tea bowls yet, but make sure they have a foot on the bottom so that they aren't too hot to handle), some chaxi supplies like a runner, flowers or other decorations and a waste-water container (jien shui, 建水).

I. Preparation

For a Chajin, there really is no beginning to a tea session. Master Lin often says, "I have devoted fifty years of my life for the sake of this cup of tea." We put all of ourselves into the service of tea, and as a result this practice transforms us. For a formal session, you may want to spend as much time as possible planning the occasion, time and place to host your tea. You may want to send out themed invitations and create small gifts for your guests to take home based on that theme (maybe a small packet of the tea you're sharing). The more time you spend planning and creating the event, the more special it will be for your guests. There is no need to acknowledge this effort, as it will be in the heart of the event itself and your guests will feel that honor and love whether they recognize the particulars or not.

On the day of a ceremony, even a more casual one, you should spend time cleaning. We honor our guests by cleaning and decorating. In this way, we also honor the occasion itself; taking the time to make a session special is actually what does set it apart! Clean everywhere, even the places your guests will never see, as the purity of the space is a real energy and not just a show. After you have cleaned sufficiently, you can start on the chaxi.

As we have discussed in so many issues (we'll add some to the Further Readings this month on our blog), a chaxi is a mandala: a work of art that connects this occasion with the cosmos. The main function of this art is to honor your guests and the tea served. For that reason, it is important to choose your tea and brewing method *before* starting on your chaxi. After you've chosen a tea and brewing method, remember that the subject of any chaxi should be the tea itself. Arranging flowers for tea (*chabana*), for example, follows a very different aesthetic from ordinary flower arranging (*ikebana*), because the flowers cannot draw attention away from the tea and therefore need to be much simpler and more understated. In fact, simplicity is one of the main principles that should guide a well-designed chaxi. There are rarely neutral elements in art, and this is even truer of chaxi. If you aren't sure about how any element is enhancing the space, take it out. Less is truly more.

One Encounter, One Chance

One of the great tea sayings in the legacy of wisdom that has been handed down over generations is "ichigo ichie," which is Japanese for "one encounter, one chance." (The Chinese is to the right.) Any discussion of chaxi would be remiss without an exploration of this poignant expression, as it speaks to the underlying spirit of a great chaxi and the session that will take place upon it.

Before the session begins, this expression asks us to remember that this tea session we are preparing for is unique, pregnant with possibilities. It reminds us to treat it with the same respect and attention we would give to a once-in-a-lifetime meeting with someone very important, which it surely is.

Once the session has begun, *ichigo ichie* reminds us to cherish this moment, taking nothing for granted. Even if (especially if!) you and I drink tea together every day, even if it's the "same" room, the "same" time,

the "same" tea, this saying reminds us that, in fact, nothing and nobody are ever the same. We are always sitting down to tea for the first and last time together. The whole Universe is changing every second, and so are we.

Anything at all that instills in us a sense of the uniqueness of this moment in time is worth contemplating. Nothing is guaranteed in this life. It's all a gift. We have no rights to it, we didn't earn it and we don't get to keep it as long as we want to. We don't even get to know when our lease is up. It has been granted us through some extraordinary fate, and everything can change in a flash. We just never know. We may not live out this very day. Such contemplations may sound dreary at first, but it is actually quite glorious, as it reminds us to celebrate and savor the experience we have left. And nothing helps you learn to appreciate each occasion like a tea practice, especially with a bit of one encounter, one chance heating up the water!





Technique: Work towards a theme (perhaps pre-planned). The more obvious themes are related to the event itself, like honoring a birthday or other life event; or you can always resort to basing your chaxi on Nature, connecting this occasion to what's happening around, like using autumn leaves on the table. More subtle themes can also be implied, like a sutra under the tea boat suggesting that the tea is soaking up lineage wisdom. There is no need to explain themes to your guests, though you can do so if you wish, especially if you are sending invitations beforehand. Most times, however, it is better to let them read into the session in whatever way resonates with them. As with any art, there are infinite insights and reflections available.

The art of making chaxi and preparing for a ceremony is a huge part of the respect that makes tea drinking into a ceremony, and you can continue this process into whatever depths you have a capacity for or your schedule allows. You can include the shirt of the brewer, which will also be a big part of what the guests see when they sit down. (Does it match the tea runner, for example?) You can decide whether or not to play music, whether to offer gifts, whether the decorations are just at the tea space or throughout the house, etc. The more we put into the session, the more special the occasion will be and the more honored our guests will feel.

This shouldn't make us feel like all tea sessions have to be formal—a formal session when the occasion calls for casual tea would be forced and ugly. But neither does that mean that casual sessions must necessarily be sloppy. You can celebrate the chance to have a casual gathering with friends as much as any formal occasion. It is, after all, a wonderful opportunity to have some time to chat with friends over tea! Why not celebrate that and make a chaxi that acknowledges, accentuates and encourages that type of tea? A skilled master of chaxi creates the perfect environment to support whatever tea and energy the session is trying to evoke—from formal ceremony to nice, down-home conversation.



II. Washing the Teaware

We could wash the teaware before our guests arrive, but doing so in front of them is meant as a gesture of respect. It shows hospitality and cleanliness, offering them intimacy into as much of our tea preparation as possible. The respect the host has for the guests, as well as a desire to invite the guests into our practice and space, are the overt reason for cleaning the teaware in front of them, but there are also deeper internal reasons as well. There is not a need to express these internal reasons to your guests, though it is important for you to understand them, hold them in your heart and then let the gestures of cleaning the teaware express them without words.

Firstly, the washing of the teaware is a “temporary ordination,” an idea that most modern cultures have lost. In the East, it was common for young people to spend time in the monastery finding themselves before making big life decisions, like who to marry and what to study. (I’m sure we could all have used more of that!) Beyond that, temporary ordination also meant that even wealthy businessmen could build a tea hut and garden in their back yard, and for a few hours a week live just as the hermit-monks in the mountains do. Many arts were born of this aesthetic, like bonsai, for example. Scholars would retreat to mountain temples when they had vacation time, writing poetry and living simply the way monks do. The tea ceremony is also one such space. In tea, we are all monks or nuns: social class, gender and our ego stories are all left outside with our shoes. We are all equal here—one heart sharing tea and wisdom together.

Most every tea tradition has some version of this temporary ordination. In Japan, tea huts often have very small doors called “*nijiri-guchi*,” or “crawling-through doors,” that people have to kneel to pass through, leaving behind status and ultimately all ego. Other Chajin have used ordination scepters in their chaxi to symbolize a setting down of all our stories for tea. In China, cities had unpaved roads and were dusty, whereas in the mountains, where holy men roamed and temple roofs made winged gestures at Heaven, the air was clear and clean. Consequently, it quickly became custom to discuss worldly matters in terms of “dust,” especially “red dust,” since the capital cities in the North often had red soil. We therefore wash the teaware in service of washing away all our ego-stuff, so that we can set down our background and show up equally pure and clean, resting in our highest beings for tea.

Washing the teaware and rinsing the tea is also a purification ritual like any done throughout ceremonies since the dawn of time—creating a purified space to host the guest of honor: *Tea Herself*. We wash the teaware and rinse the tea to clean off all Her travels, as well. We awaken tea from Her sleep and invite Her into our lives. As such, purification is an important preparatory step in any ceremony.

Finally, we wash the teaware and rinse the tea to wash off all our past sessions. Oftentimes, we forget to be present and miss out on the life that is passing us by all too quickly. By learning to honor *this* occasion, we learn to honor our very own lives. Sometimes people take a sip of a nice puerh, for example, and exclaim: “This puerh is wonderful... You know, I had another wonderful puerh two weeks ago at John’s house...” And then three bowls of the puerh they themselves just said was “wonderful” go by unappreciated because they are talking about a puerh that no longer exists—lost in the past and missing the present. We are all prone to this. None of us celebrates the treasure of this life as much as we should. By washing the teaware and rinsing the tea, we are staying present to this very occasion and moment, which will never happen again—this “one encounter, one chance.” Even if you buy several cakes of this puerh and take it home to brew over and over again it will never, ever taste like *this* again!





Technique: We wash the bowls by holding the bowl in the offhand. Make the offhand into a bicycle fork, with the thumb forming one side and the four fingers held together forming the other side of the fork. This hand *does not move*. (This will be very important if you are to rinse the bowls properly.) The bowl spins through this hand much like the wheel of the bicycle spins through the fork. The strong hand then grips the ring of the bowl and spins it *towards you* (you don't want to pass unclean water towards your guests). Hold the bowl at a forty-five degree angle. The ideal is to have the water clean the inside of the bowl as well as the outside of the rim where your guests' mouths will be touching. In order to achieve this effect, you will have to master the correct angle and speed. The speed will be more difficult than it sounds, so you may want to practice at first with cooler water. If you go too slow, the water will run over the edge and down to your hand, burning you; and if you go too fast, it will shoot out and won't clean the outside rim. Like most things, you have to do it just right. You will know when you have cleaned the entire way around the bowl because you will feel the wetness return to the thumb part of your forked offhand. At that point, put the palm of your offhand into the curve of the bowl, much like a martial arts palm-attack, while holding on with the strong hand, and shake the bowl up and down to flush out the last drips of the excess water. Then, repeat this for every bowl, making sure to clean your own last.

III. Adding Leaves & Water

Once you have washed all the bowls, you can add the leaves. When we prepare leaves in a bowl, we often include the leaves themselves in the chaxi—often in a large bowl at the center of the table. Use a large open bowl that makes it easy to grab the leaves. Teas with long, striped leaves are ideal for leaves in a bowl tea, as they won't get caught in your guests' mouths and are more beautiful opening in the bowl. As your guests are sitting down, you can invite them to appreciate the leaves if you like, which they often enjoy. They may have questions, which you can then get out of the way at that time or politely postpone until after the ceremony.

Since the brewing starts here, this is a good place to review the Five Basics of Tea Brewing, which will help you throughout your entire tea journey. We will post some articles that go into each of the basics in greater depth in the "Further Readings" section of our blog this month (there is also a nice video on our YouTube channel). In summary, they are: to divide the space in half and do everything on the right side with the right hand and vice versa, all circular motions move towards the center, always keep the kettle in your offhand, never (ever, *times ten*) pick up the kettle until you've stilled your heart-mind and, finally, stay focused and concentrated on tea preparation until handing the tea to your guests.

Once we are ready to start the tea brewing, we like to bow to our guests. More than the obvious show of respect, this bow is also a kind of apology, as you will be excusing yourself from the role of host to focus completely on the tea. You are asking them to allow you to ignore them, so that you can honor them by making the best tea you can, which will, of course, demand all your heart and attention. If you are serving guests who are new to tea ceremony, you may want to mention out loud that you will be sharing some tea together in silence, with time to talk and ask questions afterwards. For especially agitated guests, it is also helpful to tell them *how many* bowls, as indeterminate silence can be uncomfortable for some people. By saying out loud that you'll share three bowls in quiet, for example, can make the space much more comfortable.

We need hot water to help open the leaves in this style of brewing. However, since the water is going directly into the bowls, you may want to experiment with taking the kettle off the stove for several seconds, or even a couple minutes depending on the kettle, to make sure the water is cool enough that the bowls can be held comfortably. After the first steeping, you can use cooler water. You may also want to let the tea steep for a minute or two each round before handing the bowls out.



How to Hold the Kettle



It is very helpful to hold the kettle properly. Holding it in the off hand will become increasingly important as you develop your tea brewing skills. In doing so, you increase the fluency of brewing, especially when you move on to gongfu tea. Some people hold the kettle at the back of the handle with their fist, forcing their arm sideways. This may seem more comfortable, especially if you are using a heavy kettle, but it really only has an "on" and "off," meaning that there are much less gradations of pour and flow this way, severely limiting your control over the degree of water flow and the circular precision. As we progress in tea brewing, we learn not to pour the tea into the pot or bowl, but to place it where we want.

In other words, precision becomes more and more important over time.

The best way to hold the kettle is with your index finger running down the handle. Your hand should be as close to the center of balance of the handle as possible, which will differ from kettle to kettle. Experiment with water and various methods of holding the kettle. You will see that having your index finger run down the handle offers a lot more control over the power of the stream and much more precision when seeking a point anywhere in the circular range you have with the kettle. This is especially important in gongfu tea when showering the pot in the wrong place, for example, makes the lid too hot and therefore difficult to grab.



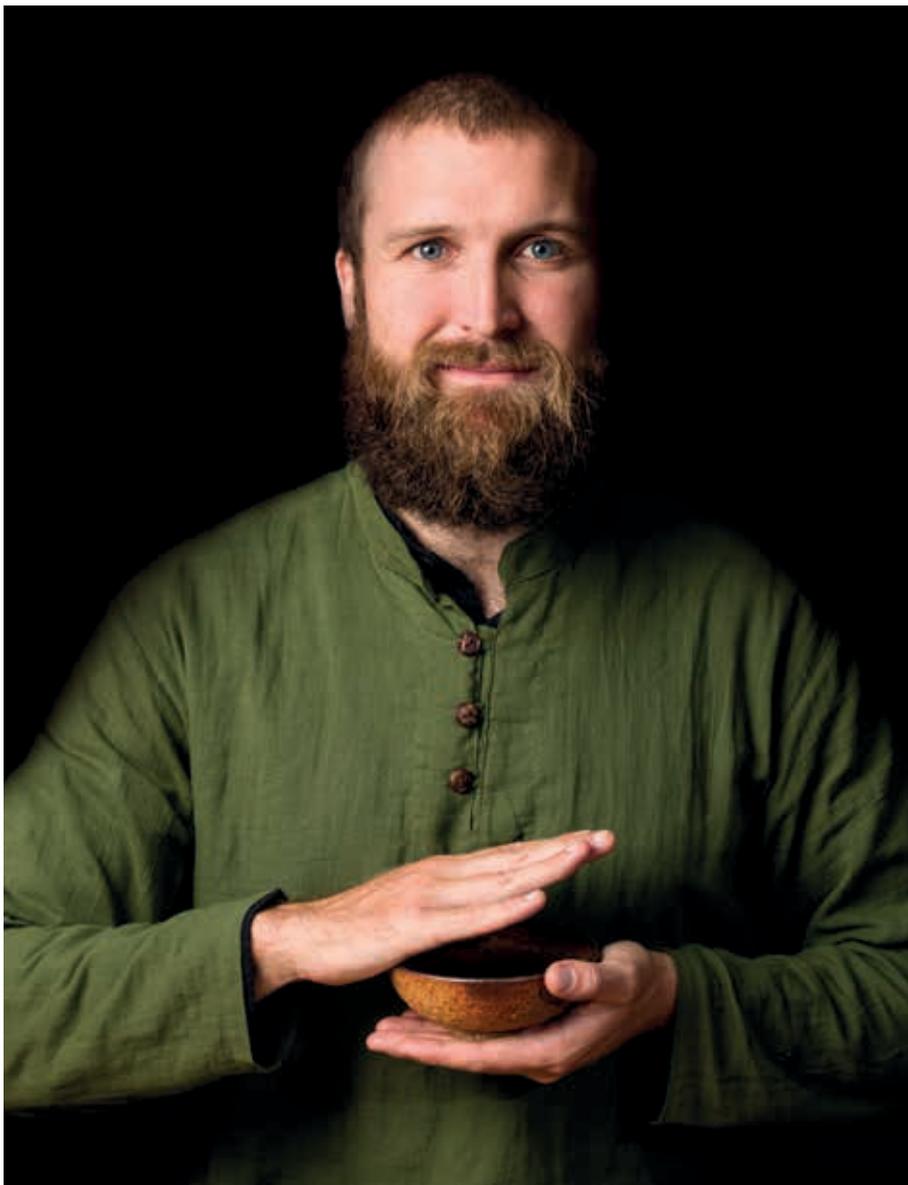
Technique: There are two useful skills in adding the leaves to the bowl and steeping them. The first is to use your thumb and fingers and pinch the leaves upward from the bowl and release them. This separates the small bits, which fall to the bottom of the dish. This will make it easier to choose large, beautiful leaves for each bowl. How much you add depends on the kind of tea: for sheng, we like to add one large leaf and one budset, if possible. Red tea, on the other hand, is nice when it is a bit stronger, so you may want to add five to seven leaves if you're making this month's tea. The second skill that is useful is to make the leaves spin when you pour the water. In the first steeping, this helps pull the leaves under the water so that they start steeping right away, instead of floating for a long time. In later steepings, the leaves will be stuck to the bottom of the bowl, so this technique is helpful for lifting them off so that every leaf steeps evenly. To do this you will have to get to know your kettle and bowls. We want the spin to move around at a slightly downward angle as opposed to just going in flat, horizontal circles, which wouldn't pull the leaves under in the first steeping. Try starting with a thinner pour from the kettle and move along the side of the bowl furthest from you until you find the place where the leaves start to spin, at which point you can increase the flow of water—"turn on the gas," as Wu De often says. After some time, you will get to know your kettle and bowls and will be able to do this rapidly without hunting for the right spot.

IV. Acknowledge the Guests on the First Round

Sometimes when people come into ceremonial space, they may find it heavy. They may not know that when you bowed before serving that you were excusing yourself, and wonder why you are ignoring them. The intent look on your face, as you focus all your heart and soul on tea brewing, may feel intimidating. And, let's face it, not everyone is comfortable with silence, as it shifts the whole world inward and we all fear looking inwards to some extent. Whether your guests are beginners or seasoned tea drinkers, it helps to show that a session is not heavy and that all our energy is bent on perfect hospitality. There will be plenty of time to move inward and rest in peace or take a journey, but it helps to connect to all your guests in the beginning of each and every tea ceremony.

Before serving the first bowl, we like to make eye contact with each of our guests one by one. Bring their bowl to your heart and look at each of your guests in turn. You can smile at them or bow. Whatever you do, make sure that you communicate welcome and warmth, hospitality and love. This one gesture goes a long way towards making the silence of a tea ceremony into a *joyful silence*, rather than something heavy and/or intimidating. Feelings that this space is unapproachable or uncomfortable will be deflated and everyone can then spend the rest of the session focusing on the tea. We only do this for the first bowl.

Technique: When bringing the bowl to your heart each time, be sure to switch hands halfway round the table, so that the guide hand holding the bowl from the top will switch from the right hand for the right side to the left hand on the left side. This allows you to place the bowl before each guest with the proper hand. Once the bowl is by the heart, you can place your open palm over it and fill it with all your heart and hospitality as you make deep and meaningful eye contact with each guest—an exercise that can be challenging for some, forcing us to confront others openly and honestly.



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V. Serve the Tea & Change the World, Bowl by Bowl

The coming and going of the bowls or cups is the breath of the tea ceremony. We are separate individuals and we are also one—one gathering resting in one heart space. The tides of together and apart mark the pace of a tea ceremony, and if you have defined a limit to the silence, it will also determine when you can start conversation again. Always try to bow and initiate the conversation yourself. As the host, it will be your job to steer any conversation towards meaningful, heart-centered topics.

Each round, wait for your guests to finish their tea, being sure not to rush them in any way. If you are a guest and want to pass on a round of tea, you are always free to do so. We must listen to our bodies when it comes to taking plant medicine. Simply place your hand palm down over your bowl on the table as the host is gathering the bowls and he or she will know that you want to skip this round.

When serving, make sure you keep the same order every time. This is usually achieved by putting your own bowl to the far side of your strong hand. Also, always be sure to fill your own bowl last. Hand them out in reverse order each time, from right to left and left to right. That way, each guest will get a nice hot bowl at least every other turn. This also helps keep you mindful and focused as the rounds pass.

Technique: When we hand each bowl out with one hand (depending on the side of the table), we open the wrist outward, which is the one exception to the second basic principle that all circular movements are towards the center. This turning of the bowl outward offers the guest to drink from the part of the bowl that your hand was not on. It is also a gesture that harkens back to a simpler time when everyone in the community shared from a single bowl and turned it to offer the next person the part of the bowl where their lips had not been. The revolution of a single bowl in circles, and in orbit around the gathering, connected the tea ceremony to the celestial movements of the Earth. It is nice to share a single bowl between you and your guests if you want, but even with many bowls, this turn of the bowl is to represent that though we all drink from separate bowls, we share in the same Tea spirit. Tea connects, bringing people together. This gesture symbolizes drinking from one bowl, and not just those who are present, but all the bowls that have ever been drunk through time, starting with old Shen Nong himself!



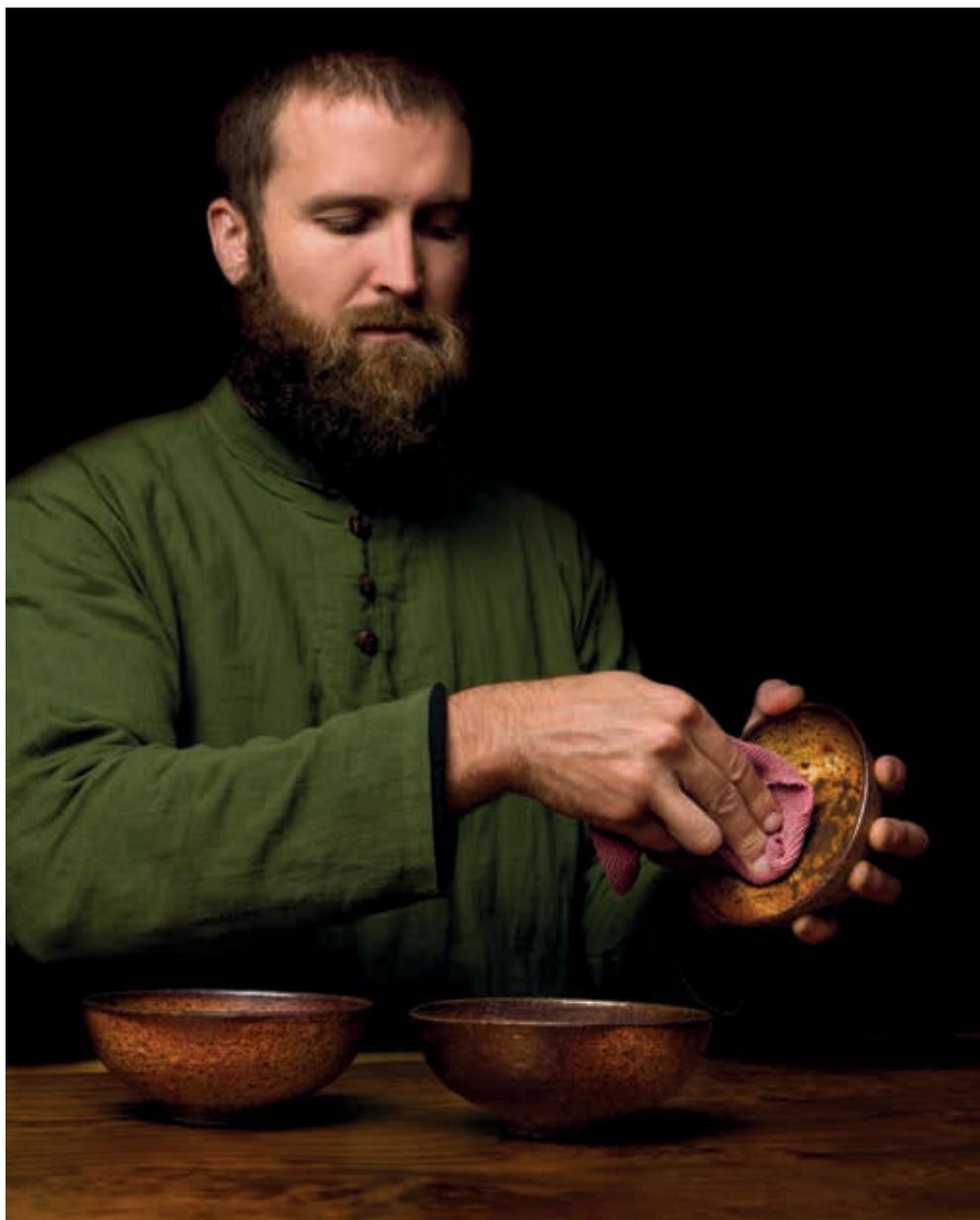
VI. Ending the Ceremony & Cleaning Up

When a ceremony doesn't end, guests are left with an incomplete feeling. It is always worth ending what you've started. One of the best ways to end a leaves in a bowl ceremony is with a bowl of water. There is an old Chinese saying that "friendship between the noble is like clear spring water—it leaves no trace."

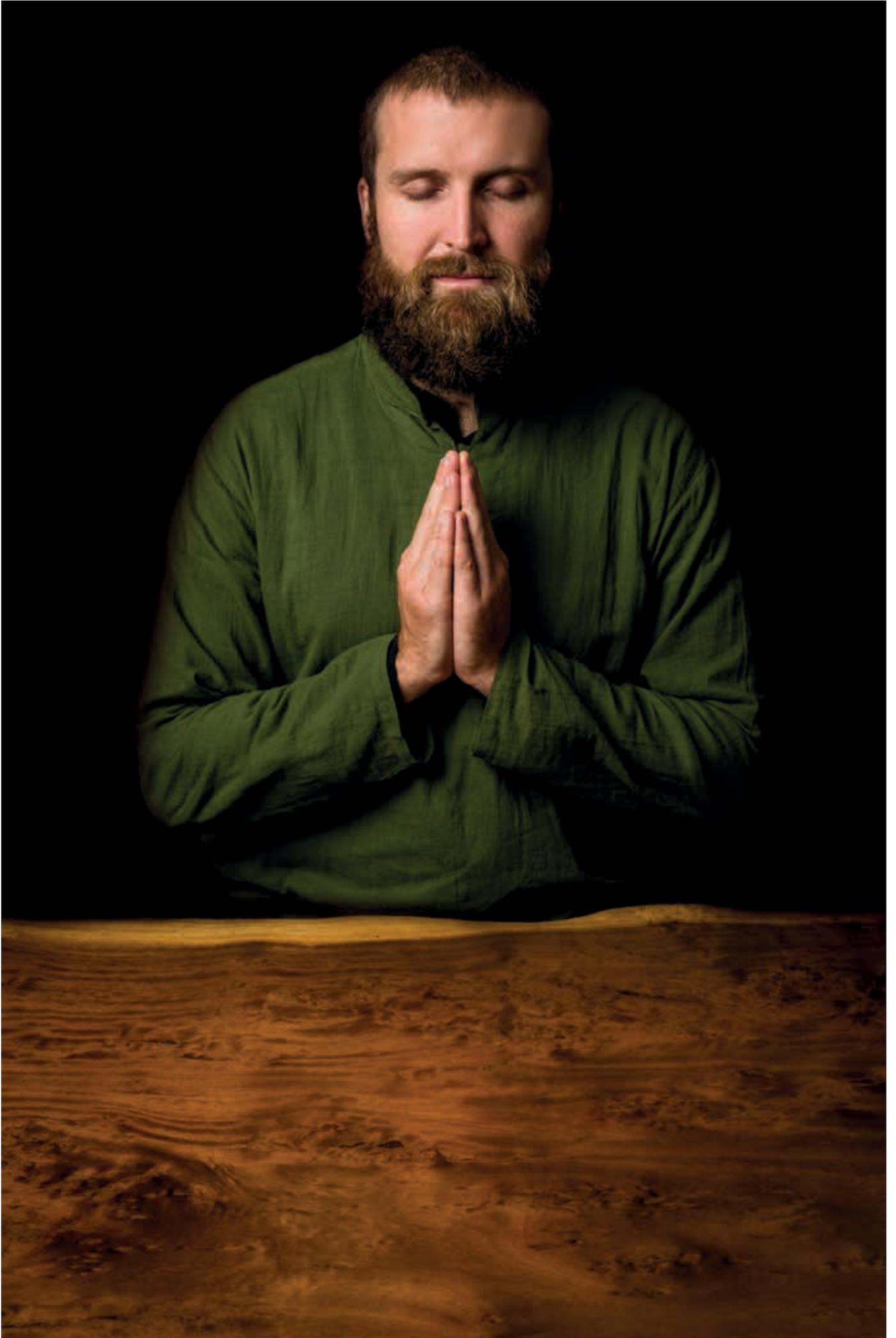
Simply, quickly and deftly scoop the leaves from each bowl and place them in the wastewater dish. Then, rinse the bowls one by one again in the same way you did at the start of the ceremony. Finally, add some water to each bowl. You may want to leave the kettle off the stove in anticipation of this, since you don't want the water to be too hot. After serving water, bow to your guests one more time to complete the ceremony, show respect to them and to excuse yourself for breaking the noble silence.

Always leave ample time to clean up a tea ceremony, as it too should "leave no trace." Honoring the session, tea and teaware means cleaning up completely. By taking the time to always clean up, we honor this practice. If this is my means of cultivation, it should be tight, clean and clear. After all, a cluttered altar means a sloppy relationship to the Divine, and, in this case, to Nature and the spirit of Tea as well.

It is also a wonderful practice to sit in the tea space after your guests have left and spend ten or fifteen minutes cleaning and drying the bowls, while at the same time celebrating the wonderful occasion you just had the fortune to be a part of, acknowledging with gratitude the time and heart to honor such a space. Then, you may want to wish each of your guests a fare-thee-well in turn, hoping that the ceremony which has just occurred carries them to fortune and happiness. Contemplate each of their faces in turn, filling your heart with loving-kindness. Be grateful for the occasion and for their company as you clean up your teaware and put it away, clean off the chaxi and wipe the table or floor down, leaving no trace of the "one encounter, one chance" that has just occurred.



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Global Tea Hut Expansion Packs

EXPANSION II: DIAN HONG

We've developed a new and exciting way to expand your tea education. If this trial run works and you find these expansions fulfilling, we plan to offer three or four of them a year. Each will come with two or more teas that expand upon the topics we are covering in that issue, allowing you to taste more, rarer and sometimes higher-quality examples in order to learn more about various genres of tea.

Over the years, we have shared simple, clean teas that remind us to celebrate all the simple moments of our lives, as well as bright and transcendent examples of rare and unique teas that epitomize their genres. But there will always be a much greater variety of tea than we could ever send you, both in kind and quality. Some teas are too rare to get in the amounts we would need to send with our magazine and others are just too expensive for our friends to donate, no matter how strongly they support our message. And yet, a large part of the motivation for including tea with this magazine is so that the education in tea we are providing isn't just intellectual, but experiential. Drinking twelve unique teas together every year is more than half of what Global Tea Hut is all about! And now, it will be about more.

Many of you have been emailing us over the years asking for a way to go deeper into the rarer genres we cover, how to get more of a particular Global Tea Hut tea and other questions con-

cerning furthering your tea education by drinking more and different examples of the many kinds of tea we talk about in these magazines. The issue is that we aren't tea merchants; we are a tea school. And we don't have a lot of experience buying tea online, so we don't know where to send you. Also, in our commitment to stay ad-free and not endorse any one tea brand, merchant or shop, we prefer to abstain from recommending any given tea merchant, even if they are a friend or supporter of our Center.

This year, we are offering a limited number of expansions to the topic we are covering in certain months. The idea is that when we can, we release a limited edition expansion to the topic covered in that month's magazine, affording you the chance to drink at least a couple more examples of the type of tea we are discussing. Often, these extras will be rarer and/or important to your journey exploring that kind of tea. Each expansion pack will be exclusively for Global Tea Hut members.

We will keep the expansions transparent, letting you know our cost for the tea, shipping and how much we think is a fair minimum donation. Like with all our work, you will be able to choose the amount you donate based on the cost of the tea and the minimum suggested donation. Our goal is to keep each and every expansion pack around fifty dollars. The expansion packs will be limited, and distributed on a first-come-first-serve basis. If we find that demand for them is high, then we will try to make more next time.

Dian hong is a kind of tea everyone loves. It is affordable, delicious and when it is made from good raw material, can be stunning to drink in ceremony. Since dian hong is more expensive, we wanted to include a greater variety of Yunnanese red teas that we enjoy, each very unique in its own way, including cakes and loose-leaf tea. We have included different mountains, seasons, ages and kinds of trees and vintages so you will taste a broad spectrum of the genre and learn more.

茶 *Wild Old-Growth Mengku*

茶 *2013 Fen Qing cake*

茶 *Evening Sky*



茶 *Autumn Camellia taliensis*

茶 *Autumn Bu Lang*

茶 *Joy*

This expansion pack includes:

茶 A 100-gram cake of Spring 2013 dian hong from Feng Qing in Lincang, similar to the Golden Vajra cake we made years ago.

茶 50 grams of Autumn 2016 Bu Lang Mountain dian hong.

茶 50 grams of a very unique dian hong made from a different species of Camellia called *Camellia taliensis*, like the Moonlight White tea we sent in April of 2016, which was also a Light Meets Life cake. This delicate red tea is one of the most gorgeous teas we've ever seen, and glorious to drink as well!

茶 50 grams of Spring 2016 Evening Sky wild purple red tea from De Hong.

茶 50 grams of Spring 2016 wild old-growth dian hong from Mengku.

茶 20 grams of our all-time favorite dian hong, which we call "Joy." Joy is an early-2000s dian hong from ancient trees in Lincang.

Our cost for these six teas, including shipping to Taiwan and packaging, is just around \$37. Like the first expansion, we only produced 50 sets and we are going to ask for a suggested minimum donation of \$50 plus shipping, which Shen thinks will be \$20 or less to most places in the world. You can donate anything you want above that. All proceeds will support our free Center. Each expansion will also come with a descriptive booklet that will explain each tea and why we chose it.

We have a webpage with info on the expansion packs and discussion boards for anyone to comment on any of the teas in the expansion packs. We plan to engage in these discussions as well, so feel free to ask questions about the teas, a topic, brewing, etc.

www.globalteahut.org/expansions

THE FIRST ANNUAL GLOBAL TEA HUT



🍵🏡: *Signe Sillasoo, Estonia*

It has been months since I saw stars so bright. There were thousands of them if you but stood still and watched. In the center of Tallinn, where I live, like every city, there is no such luxury—streetlights, computers and TV screens glow out from windows instead. I drift from here back to our retreat in Spain...

Now I'm standing and watching thousands of stars cross the sky. The more I watch, the more deeply I see them. I'm enjoying the moment and reminiscing about childhood. While at camp in a small village out in Nature, I snuck out one clear August night to watch stars like these. It was magical...

It's October, and almost ten in the evening. All the others are preparing to go to sleep in the house. I should go and do the same, but I'm cherishing the view of the Pyrenees around me: the calmness of the village and the infinite sky, which has obviously affected me deeply. Soon there will be another, new day—full of tea, meditation and hiking in the mountains...

Tea class is starting soon... After meditation, breakfast and a silent walk outside, I'm sitting on the floor, enjoying silence and the view from the windows. Before I arrived at Casa Cuadrau, I had very little expectations. I still have few. I'm going with the

flow, letting myself experience all the feelings, thoughts and emotions that arise. Wu De is sitting in the middle of the room and is starting to prepare tea. We drink three bowls in silence. Soon, Wu De starts to speak about Nature, Tea, mindfulness, serving tea. I'm listening...

Over the course of the week, my notebook has filled with quotes, insights and random thoughts. One of them is "*osoji*." It means a deep "spring cleaning"—the kind where you not only wipe the dust away but take everything you have out of the house, even the furniture. Later, you can then bring back in the things that

ZEN & TEA RETREAT

This year began our first annual Zen & Tea Retreat at the amazing center Casa Caudrau, tucked into the stunning Spanish Pyrenees. More than two dozen Chajin from all over the world traveled to share tea and meditation, wonderful food and breathtaking hikes. The experience was glorious. And, as usual, all of you, our beloved Global Tea Hut community, were there with us in spirit. We spoke of you, sent loving-kindness to you, and now, through the writings of several participants, we hope to share the wisdom and insights of those unforgettable days with you. And if that isn't enough, and you're still feeling left out, take heart, for there is another Zen & Tea Retreat coming this October! Most of the gorgeous photography in this article was made by Rich Allum & Andrus Kiisküla.

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really support and are important to you, getting rid of the rest. Although I dust regularly at home (and in my mind through meditation), I like the idea of a metaphorically and literally deeper cleaning. Our dogmas, beliefs and ideas are not fixed. Like furniture, they are changeable, and throwing some out creates new space, whether it be in our homes or in our minds. It has been our task to practice *osoji* during the week, in our lives and minds.

Another idea that I have written down is “space.” This has touched me deeply, because I have always been a busy person, loading myself with tons of tasks. And work has sometimes

been my way of escaping, postponing the most important things in my life. I have broken under the burden of busyness; I have burned out. Once I recovered from that, I experienced that doing less is a way to do things *more* meaningfully, to create peace and balance in our physical world and minds. We have definitely done that this week.

The third important insight in my notebook is “respect.” Wu De says that our problem is not that we lack mindfulness, but rather respect. At first, this surprises me. I think about it a lot. Respecting ourselves, others, Nature, events and even the smallest things like our tea bowls makes us mindful...

Ming Hui is now pouring out the last tea Wu De will make. Afterwards, Wu tells us about our homework: to drink three bowls of tea every morning and to take one day a week where you plan to do nothing, *absolutely nothing!*

Like the stars in the sky, the roots of all this wisdom—making space, respecting myself and everything around me, not stagnating, loving change, creating new habits and being the higher self inside me, etc.—all these insights have been inside me a very long time. I think about that after the last sip of the retreat's last bowl. I have felt the urge for these changes pulling at me from within my heart.

This trip has been like washing the dust away from this innate knowledge; it has been like standing still and watching the sky and stars. The more you make space, take time and look inside yourself, the more you see, feel and understand. I'm thankful for this week and everything that I've experienced.

I grab my notebook and pack it in my suitcase. Everything is swirling inside me, but I recall standing still to see the stars. *I must remember to be like tea and watch the stars!* —茶道—

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茶人: Morten Menge, Germany

When it came to my holiday planning for the end of 2016, I was unsure what to do. All I knew was that I wanted to do something “quiet.” Then I remembered a retreat Wu De had told me about a while ago: he was coming to Spain to teach tea. He said the teachings would be accompanied by many opportunities to hike and meditate. But what really made the retreat sound exciting was that the whole thing would take place in the mountains, in a small town in the Spanish Pyrenees. He also said that we would actually make our tea with local water from the mountains, which we would gather ourselves. What could be more exciting for a tea person than that? So I made my decision to go, checked if there was still availability and was lucky. I got one of the last spots. I wanted to combine my stay in the mountains with a weekend in Barcelona, so I checked with my tea friend, Nuria, to see if she would be around to hang out with and, amazingly, she was actually also scheduled to participate in the retreat. My excitement for the whole trip could not have been any greater!

The length of the retreat was six days, from Saturday to Friday. On Saturday, all the participants arrived either individually or in a big van. It was a good bunch of people, who had come from around the world to Casa Cuadrau, our retreat center. Most of us met close to the Barcelona train station and got picked up there by a bus driver. As it was a trip of around four hours

from Barcelona to Casa Cuadrau, it was a good opportunity to get to know some of the people that would be attending the retreat.

People had come from many different countries, including Estonia, Spain, England, Canada, the U.S. and Germany. Most of them were rather new to the practice of tea and didn't really know what to expect from the days to come. I enjoyed the bus ride through Spain, talking with the other people, so time passed quite quickly. We were all surprised in the beginning, as we never seemed to enter mountain terrain, but the last forty-five minutes were a steady, steep and rocky climb up into the mountains at last.

When we arrived, it was just how I'd envisioned it: a tiny town, consisting of maybe not more than five houses. All were made of old stones and had a rustic, medieval appeal to them. It all seemed so wonderfully isolated, and so quiet indeed. The town was surrounded by gorgeous mountains—colors from the dark, faded green of the many bushes to the gray and sand-yellow of the rocks, to the light brown of the earth. We were quite high up, so there were not many trees around, and you could therefore see very far into the distance. The whole scenery left an impression of seclusion, scarcity, endlessness—the perfect place for reflection, meditation and tea!

One of the major contributors to making this trip so great was our host, Daniel. He lent a human voice to the Nature that surrounded us. He lives

in, and therefore resembles, the spirit of those mountains, bushes and stones. You could see that he dearly loves that place. It was also clear how much he enjoys sharing his love for it with other people. Daniel was a modest and honest person, just like everything around us. Each time I looked into Daniel's deep blue eyes when he was talking, I had the feeling I was diving into a lake high up in the mountains and was overcome with melancholy, love and compassion. Zen was deep in him too. I will not forget how he described the behavior of a local bush, using its nature to reflect on selflessness. The nature of that inconspicuous bush was to pave the way and create the right growing conditions for new trees to come. But as soon as the new have grown, it is the bush's fate to die, as the new trees will then claim all the sunlight for themselves. “This is a bush that has been giving for its entire existence, sacrificing life for new life. What an astonishing selfless act, and worth reflecting on,” he said.

It is probably no surprise to hear that one of my personal highlights on this trip were the silent morning walks through the area with Daniel as our guide. Right after breakfast, all of us would dress up in warm, rain-safe clothing and follow Daniel through his “living room.” His favorite spot, which he took us to several times, was a mountain cliff. Another spot was a little hill that gave you the opportunity to have a 360° view of the whole region. Daniel would smile, and without

茶 After breakfast, all of us would dress up in warm, rain-safe clothing and follow Daniel through his “living room.” He took us on magical, oh-so-silent hikes throughout the area. The views were breathtaking and the exercise was the perfect balance to the many hours we were spending in seated meditation. And it didn’t feel as if the hikes were distracting, but rather peaceful extensions of Zen & Tea...

pause, as you were looking at him, his whole expression would say: “Isn’t this just pure beauty?” As you can see, we were in good hands.

As the story goes, Daniel was living in a trailer up in these mountains for seven years and pretty much built up the whole center with his bare hands. He now lives there with his wife and young baby and has friends and volunteers living with him that keep the whole place going. At Casa Cuadrau, there are events and retreats happening throughout the whole year. The food you are served is organic and either grown by them or at least from the local area.

For the retreat, we followed a clear structure every day: we would get up early, before sunrise, and have a meditation session in the hall on the top floor of the house. That room was also the most special place in the house. Just like the rest of the house, it had wonderful wood floors, but what made it really special was the big windows afforded grand views of the mountains. While you were practicing, you could watch the sun rising or setting. It was beautiful.

After an hour of meditation and some morning chanting, we would all have breakfast together in silence. After that, everyone had the chance to shower and get ready for our morning walk in Nature. Each day, we took a different route and discovered new parts of our surroundings. After that, we would return to the house and have our first tea session of the day.



Wu De prepared tea and we all sat around in a half circle on the ground. Usually, we enjoyed three bowls of tea and silence, and then Wu De would start teaching about a specific aspect of tea, officially ending the noble silence for the day.

There were many people that were all new to the Way of Tea, so Wu De used the first sessions to provide a general understanding of what tea and tea practice are about. In the next sessions, he then built upon the lessons he had given and got more into the practical side of tea preparation.

For me, a rather experienced tea drinker, starting from scratch with the others was very helpful. I was already familiar with many of his teachings, but I was never taught them in such a linear and detailed way as at this retreat. I learned many new things and had some amazing insights as a result of the retreat, simply because we went so deep into each individual matter.

After his teaching, then there was always the opportunity for others to ask some questions. Then there was lunch. We were invited to choose from the great buffet that was prepared for us, and then decide to eat at the table in the dining room or take our tray of delicious food with us and eat outside.

Regarding weather during the retreat, we experienced two sides of the mountains. While the first three days were bright days with lots of sun, the others that followed were rather rainy. Both were beautiful. On two days, the weather even forced us to change our planned outdoor activities and stay closer to the center in rain gear, as it was too slippery due to the rain.

After lunch, more meditation followed, and another lesson of tea. At five we could have a snack, as there was no dinner in the evening. The evenings were devoted to meditation, followed by a Zen discourse from Wu De. After the discourse, which ended usually around 9pm, we would all go to bed.

The clear structure of the day, and the alignment of activities, reminded me of other meditation retreats I had been on before. Also, the one-hour meditation sessions were not new to me. I had the impression, however, that other participants were struggling with this part of the retreat. I am sure that many had practiced meditation before, but only a few had experienced

sitting for such a long time and the challenges that arise with that.

The one day that really stood out in terms of experience and scheduling, was the day when we went on a full-day hike rather than just a morning meditation walk. On that day, after breakfast, we packed our things and met in front of the house. We then went on a hike through the mountains, returning to Casa Cuadrau for dinner. The highlight of the day was when we came to a place right next to a river to rest and have a tea session. We gathered water from the nearby river and used that for a very special tea Wu De had brought along. We were perfectly equipped. Everybody had carried his or her own bowl and we had gas stoves and kettles, too. So we had all the necessary equipment to have tea in Nature.

Drinking tea in Nature is always something special. In this setting, we were using the natural water of the stream next to us and could hear its roaring sound while we were drinking the tea. We were also surrounded by a wall of mountains and felt perfectly sheltered. Then there was the sun warming our faces. And while we were sitting calm and silent, the tea began working in our minds and bodies. I remember feeling very grateful for this moment.

Towards the end of the retreat, we got to practice what we had learned. Everybody was given the opportunity to practice hosting a tea ceremony. We split into small groups of five to seven people and within the group people took turns in preparing tea. Everything was at the ready for the tea host—water, bowls, tea and the guests. When I was serving tea, for me, and maybe also for the others, the hardest part was to be the center of attention. While you prepare the tea, all eyes are on you and you tend to pressure yourself to do things perfectly. The more you do that, the more you learn to let go of that pressure, turning away from thinking too much and focusing more on what your hands are actually doing. The practice sessions certainly were not easy, but because they were not, in consequence the progress everyone made with each session was tremendous.

The retreat ended with a lot of love. After six days, we had gotten to know each other very well, so it really

felt like saying goodbye to long-time friends when we all split up. I got a lot out of those six days! I felt very centered afterwards. I arrived with quite a troubled mind at the retreat, but after three days, I began to settle down. I enjoyed the rigid schedule of the retreat, with many meditation sessions and, of course, the wonderful Nature hike.

I took countless lessons and insights home with me—on tea and also on many spiritual and life matters as well. There is still a lot to reflect on for me. In the end, I think that it was the good people who made this retreat so successful. It just felt so good to share time with all those warm-hearted people. I enjoyed getting to know them and learning from them. I loved being able to witness how their love for tea was growing and to see the progress they all made. It was lovely to see that not only I, but also all the others, went through such a positive transformation in those six days! I feel very grateful and enriched, as if a gallon of fuel has been added to my desire to share my love for tea with the rest of the world!

—茶道—



茶人: Paolo Maffei, Italy

This is a story concerning Tea, a retreat in the silent Spanish mountains, a Zen monk, the best Tea community I know and a dude that, after long searching for it, has finally found some Light. Over and over during my years of Buddhist and Tea practice I kept hearing the universe saying this message: “You don’t do it for yourself. You can’t possibly do it for yourself. You need a larger motivation than your own personal happiness.” And over and over I’d say, “Yeah, sure,” but I didn’t really mean it. It wasn’t a surprise, then, to hear Wu De say the same thing multiple times during our Tea sessions: “Tea is not for yourself, Tea wants to be for everybody. In this tradition we don’t make tea, we serve tea.”

The mountains are stunning, the rural house we’re staying in is made of pure love, and yet I’m feeling quite grumpy: I want to do my own thing, not follow the strict retreat schedule. But with the passing of time and the long tea and meditation sessions starting to take effect, I start to see it: by always trying to say “me, me, me,” I have only damaged the possibility of happiness. Always trying to get things my own way, always busy trying to get more of what I want and pushing away what I don’t want—such a huge loss of

energy! It’s the default mode humans are often in, trying to change the world into what we want and not appreciating our current situation.

But during these beautiful quiet days in the mountains, something is changing in me. I feel more connected to Nature than ever before, and I also feel ever so grateful for everything I have, from the smallest detail to just being alive in itself. I feel unbelievably blessed for having met Tea, this community, and my Buddhist tradition, for being healthy, for the food I receive (and for countless other things). It takes a lot of sacrifice, effort and even suffering (even if you’re vegan, insects and plants will die on your behalf) to keep me alive. I feel more conscious of this than ever, not taking it for granted, but respecting the huge opportunity I have in having a human life and therefore knowing that I must make my life matter.

During the retreat, I complain: “I’m not sure if I like these sessions with all these people. I only go very deep when I drink Tea in the morning quietly on my own!” And Wu De answers: “Very well, but you will hit a ceiling really soon if you just keep Tea to yourself.” Buddhist teachings are “*Ehipassiko*,” literally “come-and-see-how-the-world-looks-from-here,”

so I decide to give it a try. I serve tea to small groups four times in the week following the retreat.

The first session is very well liked by the guests. The second session brings me and a member of my family closer than we’ve ever been before. In the third session, a lovely couple shows up and for a few hours we’re all three in the jungle. They express such strong love to each other and I’m deeply in love with them for having the opportunity to witness it. Lo and behold, this ends up being the “deepest” tea session (at least in terms of meditation) I’ve had to date! And finally, in the fourth session, only one friend shows up. I’m very eager to practice, but I sense that he may very well like leading the ceremony for the first time in his life, so I ask him to do so and step aside. All in all, I start to sense that this is what I am meant to be doing, creating the space for quiet to enter busy people’s lives and for Tea to be their Medicine too, not just mine.

A couple weeks later, I travel to Spain again for a series of workshops by Wu De. At my Airbnb, I serve tea to my host. As sometimes happens with beginner’s mind, she gets into a very deep meditative state and seeing this I cry and cry. The beauty I experience is so full, it’s almost violent,



feeling like my heart will explode. *This really is what I'm meant to do!* In this moment, sometimes clicks very strongly for me. It's as if I had been carrying a huge weight and I've finally set it down. I feel extremely blissful for the rest of the day, and since that day, I've started needing two hours less of sleep per night, like a huge reservoir of energy has been unlocked. It's as if something has permanently changed. I finally understand in my heart (and not just in my head) that it's not about me, it can't possibly be about me, that this "me" I so desperately try to defend against "the outside world" just isn't there, and that it's much more satisfying acting in accordance with how reality really is. Allow me to correct myself: it's not only that it's more satisfying, it's the only thing one can

possibly do to be in harmony with the universe! It's just like the silliness of putting chemicals on plants to "take care of them," as if Nature doesn't already know how to take care of itself! Nature has its Dao and so do humans, and to try to go against this flow will only lead to suffering. "If there's no 'I,' there is no one to suffer," "act in harmony with reality and happiness is guaranteed," "act from egoistic desire and soon it will not work and you will be hurt": saying things like these are simple, but really knowing it in your heart is amongst the deepest truths known to humanity.

When I think that I need to protect "my practice" above serving others, that I need to keep the best tea for myself, or that cleaning the retreat center is beneath me; when I don't treat

things and people with respect, when I judge others for what I consider "bad" brewing—all these are just poor ways of disguising the same old boring story that "I am the most important being in the universe." And that story has caused me so much pain. And so now I understand: *The more I serve, the less "I" there will be.*

—茶道—



茶人: Rich Allum, U.K.

As anyone who's been on any form of meditation retreat will tell you, talking about your experience afterwards seldom comes easy, especially in the beginning. The effects of even a short amount of time spent in deep contemplation can take weeks or months to unfold and rise to the surface of your consciousness, if they ever do at all. Whilst each person attending a retreat may be in the same place, attending the same events and hearing the same teachings on an external level, the internal experience is obviously infinitely wide and varied from person to person. I would like to attempt to give you a few glimpses into my own experience of Wu De's Tea and Zen retreat at the Casa Cuadrau retreat center in Spain back in October.

Firstly, it is also important for me to mention one other reason as to why my own experience in particular was slightly more unique on this retreat: Becky and I were accompanied by our nine month old son, Tobias. Shortly after becoming parents, Becky and I quickly discovered that our initial idea that life was going to be "more or less the same as before, just with an extra person" was as unrealistic as it now sounds. One thing in particular that we also realized, rather selfishly, was that our dreams of returning to Taiwan again to visit the Tea Sage Hut would not come to fruition for much longer than we'd initially hoped. Also, the total time we spent in the air on our last visit was around sixteen hours each way and that would not be fair to a young child, nor the hundreds of other people on board! Needless to say, when we discovered Wu De would be hosting a tea and Zen retreat in the much closer (and at the time of paying our deposit, much more affordable) location of Spain we jumped at the chance.

We contacted Casa Cuadrau, the place that the event was to take place, and received a reply from Katya explaining that she and her husband Dani (more on him later) had a daughter, Uma, who was only two months older than Tobias and that they would be happy to help in any way that they could so that we could bring our son with us. We expressed our concerns—from travel to sleeping, to feeding and entertaining Tobias whilst at the same time ensuring that our presence impacted the other retreatants as little

as possible. Katya's help was nothing short of incredible; she arranged everything, including alternative accommodation for us away from the main building. And that's where my story will start...

5:15am: The bells chime to signify the start of our first day on retreat—Wu De had previously explained that this would be sleeping in for most Zen practitioners on retreat! I slide out of my warm bed and place my feet on the cold tiled floor. The change in temperature serves as a powerful catalyst, helping me to make the transition from half asleep to wide awake in a fraction of a second. I dress and head downstairs, remembering to duck—this time at least—so as not to smash my forehead on one of the large wooden beams or doorframes that traditional houses such as this are renowned for. As I step outside, it hits me: *the silence*. There's barely a sound aside from a gentle breeze in the trees; no traffic, no voices, no birdsong, no music, no nothing. *Nada*. If it weren't for the fact that someone had rung the bell that woke me, I could have felt, just for a second, that I was the only person in the world. The other thing that stands out is the sky—*it's black*.

Light pollution is extremely minimal, consisting of half a dozen or so streetlights, which means the stars appear brighter to me than I've ever seen them before. I take a few deep breaths of the sharp, cold air and crane my neck skywards for a few seconds before making the ten minute walk through the village towards the main building of Casa Cuadrau. The village itself consists of no more than a dozen buildings, some of which are still only partially restored after many of them fell to ruin when the village became almost uninhabited decades before. Upon arriving, I make my way up to the second floor, which houses the meditation hall. We hold noble silence until after breakfast and so the silence that immersed me outside continues to do so inside. I settle into the cross-legged position and it becomes increasingly apparent that the loudest things I have experienced since waking are the sounds of my own thoughts! We sit for around half an hour or so before chanting Wu De's translation of the Heart Sutra together and then heading downstairs for breakfast. Be-

fore we eat we all join hands whilst Wu De recites a prayer of gratitude (the Five Reflections covered in January's issue). We all then circumambulate the main dining table in a clockwise direction, collecting our food and cutlery, etc., so as not to crash into each other and disrupt the flow of things. At this point Becky and Tobias arrive. (Becky purposely arrives late to meal times so that everyone else has had their food and many of the others have already left the dining hall to wash up and prepare for the day ahead.) It's here that we have our first of many anxious parental experiences.

We knew that everyone else understood that babies make noise, and do so whenever they feel like it regardless of what social convention or meditation retreat in-house rules might dictate. What we didn't know was if everyone else knew that Tobias would be coming and if they were cool with that. Wu De had encouraged us to be aware of feelings such as this in an email the week prior, and even though I knew to look out for them, it still took me by surprise when they arose. I'd also like to take a few lines at this point to pay homage to the food that is served at Casa Cuadrau and the wonderful people who prepare it. Every single meal was amazing! If you've ever heard Wu De talk about the difference between food that is shop-bought and food that is homegrown and prepared with love, know that the truth of this lesson was evident for all present on this retreat.

After breakfast and a rest, we went on a short walking meditation, hiking into the hills above Casa Cuadrau. The views are stunning—*breathhtaking!* I've never felt more at one with Nature than I did during my time here. This feeling of stillness was then returned to the meditation hall as we all sat together again before our first tea session of the day. Watching Wu De gracefully prepare bowl tea for the group was blissful. Each of these tea sessions was similar in format but completely different in content. With each new day, Wu De would brew us a different tea—sometimes leaves in a bowl and sometimes using a sidehandle pot. Ming Hui and Antonio would then come around to fill our bowls for the second and third rounds, both in the morning and afternoon sessions, while Wu De gave us all kinds of teachings.

They related to various aspects of tea preparation and ceremony. The three of them worked tirelessly throughout the week: preparing, serving, cleaning, teaching. I know I speak for everyone who attended when I say that I am eternally grateful to them for their hours of selfless service.

Becky and I alternated days; whilst one of us attended the day's activities the other spent the day with Tobias. On my first day with him, the group were going to be hiking into the mountains to collect water for a special outdoor tea session. Fortunately for me, Katya was taking Uma along for part of the hike and Toby and I were invited to join them. Around an hour after the group had left, the four of us drove to meet them mid-way through the hike. We made perfect time, climbing down a path from where the car was parked to a bridge that crossed the river below. Dani, the architect and visionary behind Casa Cuadrau and our guide for the entire week, stopped many times throughout the hike to show us points of interest and impart his wisdom. His knowledge of the local area, its history, plant and animal life, never ceased to amaze me. We made our way around the cliffs, descending towards the river below, and it was here that I experienced the hardest part of the whole retreat, which subsequently has also been the hardest part to write about. Tobias was in a baby wrap and had spent much of the walk so far falling in and out of sleep against my chest, however at this point he had woken up and wasn't particularly happy about it. After we had walked a little further, he had become increasingly agitated and I had moved further and further back through the group, until I was eventually out of sight. Toby was obviously very upset and crying loudly which left me feeling embarrassed and frustrated at the thought of people judging him as a bad child or me as a bad father. The rational side of my brain knew that this was extremely unlikely as everyone seemed to be friendly, kind and compassionate; and, furthermore, nobody had made any negative comments towards us so far to give me such an impression, yet these feelings quickly intensified until I found myself walking the other way entirely, back the way I came and away from my group of friends.

After what felt like minutes, I realized I had become completely detached from the present moment and completely unaware of my son. I looked down and saw his face, bright red with sadness and tears in full flow. In an instant all of my rigidity melted away, I completely softened and effortlessly redirected all of my energy towards him—the way it should have been from the beginning. He soon fell asleep again and I was awash with shame. Just then, one of our guides, Lean, approached me, and his kind smile arrived at just the right time. He proceeded to explain how far the group was away from our current location and how I could go about getting to the destination that had been chosen for the tea ceremony before going on ahead to catch up with the others. Having been pulled out of my own inner turmoil and back into the Here-and-Now, I was again able to enjoy the bountiful beauty that surrounded me.

As I walked through the trees, I periodically caught glimpses of lush blue water glistening in the midday sun below, before eventually arriving at a clearing where the group had stopped for lunch. As Ming Hui, Antonio and Wu De prepared for the afternoon's session, Dani (who was now carrying Uma, allowing Katya to enjoy the tea) and I headed further up stream so that our children didn't disturb the others. As I removed my teaware from my bag and brewed us some Evening Sky dian hong (last year's is one of my favorite red teas), Dani talked about how he had discovered the village of Vió and about the construction of his home there. He then began talking about being a parent and gave me a very important lesson: I asked him how he balanced being a father with his daily practice. Looking at his daughter, he replied, "She is my meditation now." Such a simple and yet profound teaching struck me deeply and I realized that since Tobias was born I have used the title of "parent" as a barrier, an excuse for not continuing my practice, even though I know in my heart that this practice helps me to be the man I want to be, and the man that my partner and child deserve. Several days later at the end of the retreat, as I explained this to the group, Wu De gave me the affirmation: "My life is my practice," and I hope I'll always remember that!

Dani had compiled a list of tasks to be undertaken daily by each of the retreatants as part of a service period. I held out for a while as the jobs were called out, waiting for something that "felt" right, for want of a better expression. As luck would have it, Dani called for a few people to collect water for tea; my hand went up immediately before I'd even had time to think. When I visited Taiwan last year one of my favorite experiences was the hike into the mountains to collect water for tea and doing the same here was also a true joy—knowing many of the bowls drunk each day contained water I had collected was deeply nourishing and gave me a feeling of purpose.

Several times throughout the retreat we all had the opportunity to serve tea to one another under the expert guidance of Wu De and his *cha tongs*, putting into practice the lessons that we had learned. Some members of the group had served tea before and others were doing so for the first time. On one of these days, I was fortunate to drink tea served by five different people one after the other, and the contrast between the taste, texture and energy of each brewer's tea was staggering. We were using the same water, same bowls and same tea but the experience was vastly different. It was almost like the character of the brewer came across in their tea; I've read about this sensation before, but I can't explain just what it felt like to experience it in real time. I would, however, encourage you to try it out for yourselves with your friends and see what subtle nuances you can detect between each session. When it came to be my turn to serve, I was even surprised at how different my own bowls tasted in comparison to those served by the others. It gave me a little more insight into why I think that it is so vital to ensure that your heart is still before lifting the kettle; if my energy can really be passed into the bowls of my guests then I want to be sure I'm only transmitting positivity, love and kindness.

Ultimately, attending a retreat is much like looking at the landscape surrounding Casa Cuadrau; it's full of hills and valleys, peaks and troughs. There is also the contrasting feeling of being surrounded by love and yet being isolated and alone at the same time. Do I relish the stillness, or does



it make me unsettled? I think it's somewhere in the middle and sometimes it's easy to forget, especially when you visit somewhere as beautiful as the Spanish Pyrenees, that going on retreat *isn't* a holiday. On the contrary, it's hard work and not the kind most of us are accustomed to. Having my family there was wonderful and had they not been there, I would have missed them dearly, especially with Tobias being so young. He is making progress daily and I would hate to have missed even a single moment of that, but at the same time it did create its own challenges. Becky and I both felt, as Wu De predicted, that it was difficult to step in and out of the activities a day at a time, as it meant that we each missed vital parts of the retreat, which we then had to try and recount to each other at a later time. The days off were lonely, every day was long and sleep was in short supply, but ultimately it was all worth it. We met some truly incredible people with whom we hope to keep

in touch for many years to come and learned many lessons about serving tea (both physically and in spirit—another of my affirmations) and ourselves both as individuals and as part of the bigger picture.

It was also nice to finally meet some members of the Global Tea Hut community whom until then I had only spoken to through social media, giving each of them a big hug and getting to know them a little better. After our journey back to Barcelona and then home to Nottingham, England, we arrived thoroughly exhausted but equally energized, ready to continue along our path together as a family, with the Leaf as our guide. My account barely scratches the surface of what took place over those six days in Spain, both externally and internally. Believe me when I say that even a whole issue of Global Tea Hut magazine dedicated to my own single account wouldn't be enough to cover it all! We both learned a tremendous amount about ourselves.

Since the retreat, Becky and I have made time each morning for tea together, drinking three or more bowls in silence before going about our daily life. We had both forgotten how important this simple practice is, and it is once again clear to us how vital it is to return to the basics again and again, never forgetting where it all started. If you're ever in or around Nottingham, please know that there's always a space for you at our tea table and a steaming bowl of tea waiting for you...

-茶道-

茶人: Rivo Sarapik, Estonia

You guys must have really good tea karma, Wu De said in a national park in the Spanish Pyrenees, a few hundred kilometers northwest of Barcelona, during a week-long retreat focused on Tea and Zen. We had just hiked for a few hours from our retreat center at Casa Cuadrau in the small village of Vió, fetched water from a spring for tea and sat down right next to a waterfall. And there were eagles flying about a kilometer above us. He decided to say that statement partly because of the tea he was about to serve us, harvested from ancient trees only once in every few years—something you can't buy for all the money in the world. I guess we really were lucky, and not just because of the tea, but also the surroundings, people and time (which equals room) just for ourselves. What Wu De said returned to Estonia with me. Sure, I had been grateful to be in Spain with all these people, in the wild, learning about Zen and Tea. I had also wanted to go there, but in a way it had all happened rather casually, even accidentally. But when he said that, I did start to feel grateful. Back home, I started wondering, "What would happen if I really paid more attention and chose the path of tea?" So I decided to do just that, and set out on my way.

This required changing some things, though. I've learned from training for ultra-endurance sports (beyond marathons, lasting days and sometimes even weeks) that marginal effort can often result in huge gains. I decided to start with three practical changes to my life:

Make Time & Space

Our days in Spain lasted up to sixteen hours, from 5:30am until 9:30pm. And yet, I've never been so sharp from the beginning to the end of a day—eager to listen and learn and not tired at all (especially emotionally). I was also happy, feeling a sincere and simple joy and gratefulness for just being alive, watching the sun, fetching water from the spring or writing down a few sentences from the discourses which moved me. I think this was primarily due to meditation—several hours

a day, from walking to sitting to tea ceremonies. I had meditated regularly at home before, but usually not more than thirty minutes a day. I decided to extend that, and have since added time and sessions here and there. Now I'm up to an hour and a half every day: first thing in the morning at 5:30, and then last thing at night before shutting my eyes. Waking up before most people and taking the time to adjust my mood and tempo before heading out has had a significant effect on my life. It's amazing that something so simple as focusing on my breathing, followed by three bowls of tea, prepared with my full attention, has made everything better. *Everything.*

Drink Less & More

In a way I drink less tea now. On the other hand, I drink a lot more. I used to have three to four different teas in a day, and now I might have just one that lasts for a few days. First, I steep it all the way until the end, and then I boil it more for the following days. I've found that the desire to taste different stories in various teas was often fueled by my ego. I wanted to taste more and more. Having tea mindfully offers something different. Trying to capture everything a tea has to offer, from the first flavorful steeps to the deeper, clear, mineral boils, makes the experience of any tea a lot deeper and more worthwhile than just collecting flavors. So, as I said, I drink less but also receive more.

Just Do It

"If nothing changes, nothing changes," was one of the sentences I wrote down during our retreat. It's easy to fall into a cycle of discontent and complain about how we're always too busy. This had to stop. A week of concentrated effort towards meditation and tea showed me that change needs its own time and space. To me that means doing less, cleaning up my schedule and leaving room for simple things like breathing (literally). Amazingly, I have found this eventually leads to doing more.



茶人: Antonio Moreno, Spain

Wu De visited Barcelona this past October and with the help of our brothers and sisters in Germany and the Czech Republic we organized a jam-packed (literally, mind you, courtesy of Cye Wood) one-month European tour. Wu often reminds us that the first note sets the tone of the symphony, so we began on the highest note possible, invoking the very highest frequency, making a pilgrimage to a pitch-perfect location for a six-day Zen and Tea retreat in the Spanish Pyrenees.

We chose the Spanish Pyrenees for obvious reasons: tremendous beauty, revered remoteness, proximity to Barcelona, pristine glacial water; and for reasons that were less obvious until you actually arrived there and realized that our dear friends Daniel and Katya have created the most harmonious retreat center you could hope for!

Almost ten years ago this lovely couple came to the small town of Vió, at the gates of Monte Perdido (Lost Mountain National Park) and rebuilt a three-story house in what was an abandoned corner of the world. Today, the small town is alive with the pulse of the people who attend weekly retreats at Casa Cuadrau. Anything I write about our retreat has to be preceded by my gratitude for the team at Casa Cuadrau and my admiration for their cohesion as a unit. The entire staff served the retreat with utmost grace, respect and love, while nourishing our souls with delicious local produce and hearty organic vegetarian meals that were always cooked to perfection. *Kudos! Chapeau!*

It was in this incredible setting that we spent six days meditating, walking in Nature, performing and receiving tea ceremonies and learning about tea, with discourses on Zen and tea and time to practice what we learned and share our Zen with each other.

Daniel and Lean took us on wonderful walking meditations where we contemplated our breath and the breath-taking scenery, before us the gentle unfolding landscape of the perpetual continental collision that first began 25–80 million years ago when the Iberian plate met the Eurasian plate and formed the Pyrenees. Daniel guided us through trails, pointing out flo-

ra and fauna and describing poignant tales of their survival and adaptation. However, most of the time during our hikes was spent in silence, amplified by the mountains around us. We trekked alongside glacial rivers, bathing our feet in the chilly, refreshing waters, and prepared tea beside its flowing waters. We stopped and paid homage to the local Buddha: Saint Urbicius.

Wu De guided us internally. He is such a masterful teacher, flowing with wisdom, stories, analogies and parables. He will make a point and then take it in multiple directions, showing it through a prism of multiple perspectives—driving the point to your core of understanding so it can be processed and integrated. Yet, all the while, he reminded us to approach the retreat as an open vessel, to fill ourselves up and then take home with us whatever stuck, and leave behind whatever didn't.

In these mountains, in the *Shala* (meditation hall), meditation sessions flowed into tea sessions. Practice. Repetition. Water. Fire. Service. Attention. Presence. Return.

I learned and re-learned a lot that week. Some concepts entered at an intuitive level, others surely submerged in the unconscious and settled in, making themselves at home. Other teachings were non-verbal, captured in stillness—impossible for me to conjure up and paraphrase today; they penetrated spirit and disappeared, swallowed by symbiosis. Surely they will surface unannounced, unbeckoned, unsummoned, naturally and non-verbally in the form of presence.

Here are some of the truths that I took home with me and share with you now:

茶 *We always lose when we argue with Reality.*

茶 *Form your vision to suit the world as it is, not the world to your vision.*

茶 *Making space for meditation is the primary meditation.*

茶 *We find growth in the valleys (not the peaks).*

茶 *Right now, right here, I am free.*

茶 *If not now, then when?*

茶 *Kaizen—student for life!*

茶 *Perfect yourself & brew naturally.*

茶 *There is no neutral element in art. If an element of chaxi or any other art is not enhancing, it's taking away.*

茶 *I always have control over my orientation.*

茶 *The journey is the destination.*

茶 *The “no-big-deal-me.”*

茶 *The Ocean is the most powerful force in Nature because it puts itself beneath everything else.*

茶 *We all have chips in our paint.*

茶 *Fix the problem, not the blame.*

茶 *Osoji. Osoji. Osoji. (A Japanese word for spring cleaning; in this case cleaning out the mind.)*

In between each simple line I've listed here lies the actual grit of practice: the sinking-in, the assimilation, the embodiment and the room for growth. In those gaps, there is also the realization that in the end, there is only so much I can say—only so much that truly needs to be said. Actions. *We need actions*, with some grace and gratitude sprinkled on top!

I am so grateful for meeting and sharing this time, this space, with all the wonderful people who came from all around the world, many of whom I know I will meet again, various of whom I already have. And to all of you whom I have not met yet, who share this way of tea, I raise a steaming bowl of tea for thee!

As I reflect on this retreat, the whole team of Casa Cuadrau has just announced that they are coming down to Barcelona to visit us at our teahouse. What a fortuitous surprise! Stay tuned for the details... *We're planning another Zen and Tea retreat with Wu De this October, 2017! See you there!*



TeaWayfarer

Each month, we introduce one of the Global Tea Hut members to you 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 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 Maxim Ulasevich.

I'm 27 and I live in Lipetsk, Russia. Several years ago, my life changed. Strange as it sounds, I saw a movie which inspired me to move in a completely different direction. I changed my lifestyle dramatically, giving up bad habits and turning to healthy living. And a couple of days later, Tea came into my life. It wouldn't be a lie to say that Tea sprang into my life. China, and its traditions and tea, engulfed me. But somehow I realized that my perception of Tea wasn't the one I desired.

By that time I had already started a blog where I described my feelings about different teas. I enjoyed every moment: taking photos of the leaves, describing them, breathing in the aroma and pouring the tea liquor into cups and tasting the incredibly rich flavor. However, I realized that there was something behind the taste, something deeper.

In carrying out research on the Internet, I came across a photo of a girl who had a beautiful floral tea cloth instead of the common tea sink everyone in Russia uses. She also wasn't using a pitcher, nor numerous statuettes—everything was so simple, minimalistic, but deep, beautiful and warming. So I made a decision to write her a message. Her name was Raneta. She started to answer my questions, in a calm and concise way. I learned a lot from her. I was turned upside down (metaphorically, of course). I realized that I'd touched something real, animate, and true. That's how I met the tradition of the Hut.

I was glad to find out that there are many of Wu De's students in Russia, and each of them was eager to share their knowledge with me, helping me make my first steps. It was as if I'd stepped onto a new, beautiful, but demanding path. Some time later, I went to Moscow to meet Ming Hui, and he hospitably served me Sun Moon Lake Elevation in bowls. I will never forget that: the stillness, leaves, water, bowl—magic. That night, I couldn't sleep because of everything Denis had told me about this tradition, the Center, etc. He also gave me a couple pieces of "homework" and I was a diligent student. (I am a teacher of math at a public school, so I know how important it is to do homework!)

Some time passed and the idea of sharing tea with my friends in Lipetsk started steeping in me, so I wrote a note in my blog announcing a tea ceremony and it resonated with others here. I worried, as it was the very first time I'd done something like this. It took me a lot of time to prepare for the ceremony. I thought about what I would say after the ceremony. I even wrote a speech. But when people came and took their places, I meditated a second before starting to brew and I fell into a stream which guided me through the whole ceremony. And so I understood that Tea is always



茶人: Maxim Ulasevich

ready to help each and every one of us. The only thing you needed to do is open your heart to Her. Since then, I have started to serve tea every week. And now we have a small but solid tea community in Lipetsk.

Tea for me is something deeper than just a plant. It is a whole philosophy, a way of life. Each session is precious. And I see Tea working in people's lives. At every session, I try to tell people that sustainable tea is extremely important for us tea lovers. I feel so happy that there are people in my hometown who now share this opinion.

I feel like I'm at the very beginning of a great, interesting and incredibly warm journey. It is truly wonderful that walking this path I've met such outstanding people who are willing to serve with all their heart, and to support and show the way to beginners like me. Right now I am going to put several leaves of white tea into a teapot and serve it to my daughter. May her Way also begin with living tea!

Inside the Hut

COMING SOON TO GLOBAL TEA HUT MAGAZINE

茶主题: Qimen Red Tea

茶道

茶主题: Classics of Tea: Ming Dynasty

茶主题: Chajin Stories/Biographies

茶主题: Liu An Black Tea



As you can see, we have a new printer. We are very excited about this. Through some good fortune, we have found a printer who visits the Center and believes in our mission and in improving the magazine!



Global Tea Hut members Resham and Vishwal were married in Thailand. Wu De and Joyce attended and couldn't stop raving about the food and how gorgeous Resh was. Raise a bowl to them!



Check out Wu De's teaching events around the world. Wu De and Sam will be in New Zealand and Australia this March:

<http://www.globalteahut.org/wudeteachings>



Another reason the magazine looks so amazing is that our tea sister, and October 2016 TeaWayfarer, Raneta Kulakova has moved to the Center. She is a great photographer and designer. Raise a bowl to her!



We have started broadcasting live videos at the beginning of every month on our Facebook page. This is a great way to connect with us, learn together and ask any and all questions. Check it out!



We are now offering free Light Meets Life cakes to authors whose submissions are accepted in Global Tea Hut. Let us know if you are interested! Also let us know if there are any topics you want to see in future issues.



Don't forget that we have a tremendous amount of supplementary material online: articles in Further Readings, blog posts from the community, and past issues of this magazine as well as a ton of videos on many subjects that we have covered over the years of sharing tea wisdom.

Center News



Before you visit, check out the Center's website (www.teasagehut.org) to read about the schedule, food, what you should bring, etc. Wu will be traveling a lot in 2017, so check his schedule on the site if you are interested in seeing him while you are here at the Center.



Jasper Hermans took precepts in our tradition and received the tea name *Jing Ren* (淨仁), which means pure kindness. We are very proud to have such a shining light in our midst. He is a great soul and true Chajin.



It is now winter time, which means Fridays are hot spring days at the Center. Every Friday morning, we steep some shou tea and head to the nearby hot springs for a winter tradition of a few hours of soaking. (If you were looking for an excuse to visit in the winter, you've got it!)



We are going to host a ten-day tea course at the Center in 2017 on tea and Qi Gong, starting on Sept. 12th.

February Affirmation

I am peace.

Am I taking the time and making the space for my own peace? Do I foster serenity? Do I honor peace in my life? Peace is not something I cultivate; it is something I let happen by making space for calmness in my life.



www.globalteahut.org

The most meditative 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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