

GLOBAL TEA HUT

國際茶亭

TEA & TAO MAGAZINE

February 2018



茶 & ZEN

PART II



SAMADHI

This month we return to Tea, Zen & Meditation, offering advice for incorporating tea into your meditation, and meditation into your tea practice. We'll also discuss our retreats we hosted this year. And we'll be drinking a deep and meditative tea together, to warm the soul and calm the spirit.

*Love is
changing the world
bowl by bowl*

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From the Editor

In February, the weather in Taiwan is cool, so we boil teas like black tea bricks, Liu Bao and sometimes shou puerh. We also sit for some nice bowl tea or gongfu sessions with the same teas, throwing the occasional aged or traditionally processed oolong into the mix. Our trips to the hot springs continue, and we always take an Yixing thermos with us to sip from when we are there. Our usual hot springs tea is a dian hong mixed with a shou. You should experiment with blending these teas if you haven't yet. When done properly, it can be amazing in the winter! Usually we do a seventy/thirty split, with shou being the primary tea in the blend.

This is also a special time in Taiwan, as it is Chinese New Year. Firecrackers explode all around us everywhere as families gather to celebrate. We have big dinners to attend, full of cheer and happiness all around. You can see lion dances all around town, with thunderous drums and gorgeous colored costumes. There are even contests held to see which team has the best costume, music and dance routines. Everyone is celebrating throughout the island, which is more carefree than usual. It is a great time to visit Taiwan, though certainly not the quietest, which is why we try to schedule our courses around the New Year celebrations.

This is an exciting year for Global Tea Hut. We have some beautiful issues planned, and as our budget increases along with our membership we have more room to translate articles, including a special in our Classics of Tea series, not to mention more travel to exciting tea regions to cover the processing, history and folklore of teas and tea regions we have never explored together, and, of course, some exciting new teas to drink together over this Year of the Dog. We need your help to continue this trend and reach our goal of 10k subscribers by 2020, which will build Light Meets Life, the biggest and best tea center in the world! As you can see, helping spread the word and growing this global community not only helps us build our center, it also means more improvements in the experience itself, including better and more varied information and tea, as well as more Global Tea Hut trips to tea growing regions!

This is an important issue. We have tried to create more balance throughout these issues, covering tea holistically, which means processing, science, history, folklore and more. We never intended for this magazine to be a mouthpiece for our tradition. The Center can serve as that, protecting and transmitting the teachings of our lineage. These magazines, on the other hand, have always been about a growing community of tea lovers around the world. And, for that reason, we have tried to cover tea from all perspectives, inviting all of you to contribute articles and translating the ideas, opinions and insights of various authors here in Asia, as well. We hope that these magazines, especially over the course of a few months, provide something for everyone interested in tea. We have a reputation for being "spiritually focused,"

which is not necessarily a bad thing, though it is not entirely true either, as we feel we have achieved a balance of linear and spiritual topics, offering as much information about tea as we do discussions about tea as a means of self-cultivation. But we do intend to devote at least one issue a year to tea and meditation, as this is central to our message.

When we host events around the world, we always try to offer a balance of tea ceremonies, workshops on tea as self-cultivation (Cha Dao) and linear workshops, which are more like lectures that offer information on tea, tea regions, processing, etc. We love tea. We love learning about tea. And that means on all levels, intellectually and spiritually. For us, balance has always been the goal. It is great to read about tea processing and lore, but without a deep practice this can become too lofty, heady and disconnected from actual tea preparation. Similarly, too much spiritual discourse and we can become ungrounded, not understanding the simple, quotidian spirit of tea, which has always been unadorned and very grounded. A bit of Heaven and a bit of Earth is the Way of tea, and of Zen. And we hope that you feel like we do, that Global Tea Hut is a perfect balance of both styles of education.

This is our second edition devoted to Tea and Zen. The first was published in February of last year. These issues allow us to explore the relationship between meditation and tea, and also to cover all the various retreats we have hosted in the last year, which were important, life-changing gatherings for many of the people in this community. We hope that the insights offered in these pages help deepen your meditation practice if you have one, or encourage you to begin including meditation into your tea life, as the two are truly "one flavor."



—Further Readings—

This month, we recommend re-reading the November 2017 issue, which is packed with all kinds of articles on shou puerh, many of which will provide a deeper context for this month's tea. Also, since this is part two of our Zen & Tea series, you could check out the February 2017 issue on the same topic.

TEA OF THE MONTH

 ver the course of this month, we will be exploring meditation and its relationship to tea. We needed a powerful tea that calms and centers us, shining light on the connection between Zen and Tea, and why the sages of the past have said they are “one flavor.” A lot of the most powerful teas are rare and aged, and therefore beyond the budget of Global Tea Hut, except in an Expansion Pack. The tea we call “Samadhi” was perfect in every way, aged, beautiful and rich in meditative energy. “Samadhi” means “one-pointed mind” or “concentration,” which is a testament to its meditative energy—perfect for this month’s exploration! And since Samadhi is a 1990s loose-leaf shou puerh, this is the perfect opportunity to review some of what makes shou puerh what it is and discuss loose-leaf aged puerh in general, which is a topic we have been excited to explore with you for some time.

Let’s review the basics of puerh. To begin with, we have to start by dividing puerh into “sheng (生)” and “shou (熟).” “Sheng” means “raw” puerh; it’s the greener, more astringent kind of puerh, which can be enjoyed when it is young and fresh or aged to ferment naturally over time. On the other hand, shou, which means “ripe,” is artificially fermented by humans, so it is darker to begin with. The words “sheng” and “shou” are used in Chinese to discuss food as well, referring to “raw/uncooked” versus “cooked”

meals. The terms also describe the ripening of fruit. Understanding this distinction is important for exploring puerh, and more specifically shou puerh, more deeply.

In order to better understand tea processing, we also have to return to a review of oxidation and fermentation. Oxidation is an enzymatic process: basically, cellular break down due, of course, to exposure to oxygen, like when a banana or apple turns brown on the counter. Fermentation is similar, but is metabolic and involves the presence of bacteria and other microorganisms, like the changes in yogurt, cheese or alcohol. Sugar is converted into acids, gases, and alcohol. This distinction is important in understanding tea, and especially shou puerh, because many kinds of tea are withered (oxidized) to change the chemistry of the tea and remove moisture from the brittle leaves before processing. But puerh is also fermented post-production, which means it has a strong relationship to microorganisms—whether it is naturally fermented (aging) or artificially fermented in the factory, as with shou. Over time, puerh both oxidizes and ferments. These natural changes are more pronounced in sheng than shou. But we’ll get to the aging of shou in a bit.

Like many genres of tea, puerh starts with “*maocha* (毛茶),” which means, “rough” or “unfinished” tea. You’ll hear this term used most often with regard to the genres of oolong and

puerh, as they traditionally have “finishing” steps that occur later and/or at a different location from where the tea was initially processed. With puerh, the tea is processed fully (dried) and then sent to a factory to be blended, compressed or made into shou. And even back in the day when the final steps were done at farm, they were still done at a later date (sometimes months later) so the term “*maocha*” was still relevant. In oolong, it is the roasting, which is done later, or traditionally at the shop rather than the farm. The reason the finishing steps in these teas are completed later is that the farmers have to focus on finishing the harvested tea on the day it is plucked or the quality will suffer. And since there is freshly-picked tea coming in every morning during the harvest season, they have little time to sleep, let alone finish the tea, which can be done later. These days, with regard to puerh, almost all *maocha* is sent to be finished at factories who want control over the finishing steps like blending, choosing sheng or shou and also deciding what size or shape to compress the tea into. But before we get to the factory, let’s understand what *maocha* is.

Puerh *maocha* is harvested; withered, out and indoors, depending on the place/tradition and the weather; fired (*sha qin*, 殺青) to arrest the oxidation of the withering and de-enzyme the tea; rolled (*rou nian*, 揉捻) to shape the tea and further break down the cells; and then sun-dried.



Samadhi (安止定)



Yunnan, China



Late 1990s Shou Puerh



Yunnanese



~500-1000 Meters





茶 Shou is compressed right after piling. If the leaves dry, a much deeper steam would be needed to re-moisten the leaves, which are stiff from the piling. This would change the flavor of the tea, so shou is almost always compressed while still moist from the piling. Then, the cakes are dried on racks or pallets before the final wrapping and packaging in a tong (筒, seven cakes).



The two defining steps that make puerh unique are the firing and drying. The de-enzyming of tea is done to stop the withering and also to remove green enzymes that make the tea bitter and astringent. Like most teas, puerh is fired in a wok (often wood-fired), but it is done at a lower temperature and for a shorter duration than most kinds of tea. This, along with the varietal of puerh, is why young sheng is so bitter and astringent. Puerh is fired in this way to allow the heat-resistant spores to survive the processing, since they will be paramount in the post-production fermentation process. The sun-drying is what also separates puerh from most kinds of tea, and it is done for the same reason as the firing, since sunlight and heat are just what the spores need to start colonizing the tea again.

After the maocha is dried, it leaves the farm for the factory. However, it is ideal to finish the tea at source, since the water and micro-ecology will be unique for each place, but that rare-

ly happens nowadays. The tea is then blended or left single-region and compressed into various shapes of cakes as sheng puerh, which can then be enjoyed young or aged for later. The tea is steamed, compressed and dried on racks (often with fans, but traditionally in the sun) before being wrapped individually in natural paper and then often in stacks made of bamboo skin called a "tong (筒)." But if the tea is to be shou, it has a whole other journey to travel.

Shou puerh is artificially fermented by piling in a process called "wo dui (渥堆)," which is essentially composting: the tea is piled to about a meter, sprayed with water and usually covered with a thermal blanket. The heat inside is why shou is sometimes called "cooked" puerh. The pile is then stirred regularly until the desired degree of artificial fermentation is reached. To fully ferment the tea takes between forty-five and sixty days, which is how most shou is made these days.

Shou piling actually happens in two phases, wet and dry. The first, wet-piling is primarily a fermentation of bacteria that break down the cells of the puerh. This piling is much deeper, usually a meter. During the second, drier piling, the thermal blanket is removed (if one was used) and the piles are thinned out (usually to around 20cm). This is when the yeasts and molds become more active in the tea. If the tea is destined to be loose-leaf shou, then the tea will be stirred and dried thoroughly. If the shou is to be compressed, the second stage of piling will be cut short while tea is still slightly damp.

Shou tea has to be compressed before it dries—right after the piling. Some factories do compress aged loose-leaf shou later, but doing so always damages the quality of the tea. Once shou tea dries, the leaves are tight and twisted from the heavy fermentation, so getting them to stick in a cake at a later date requires a much heavier, hot-

THE PROCESSING OF SHOU PUERH

熟普洱製作工藝

THE PROCESSING OF MAOCHA

採摘
Plucking

萎凋
Withering

殺青
De-enzyming

揉捻
Rolling

晒干
Sun-drying

THE PROCESSING OF SHOU

分級
Sorting

堆
Piling
Artificial Fermentation

干燥
Drying

蒸氣
Steaming

壓制成餅
Compression

裝袋包裝
Packaging



ter and deeper steaming than with other puerh, which effects the quality of the tea, lending it boiled-tea flavors. It is, therefore, always better to compress shou right after piling. If one wanted to use aged tea, it would be better to age the maocha as sheng and then pile/compress it later, when it has matured to the desired age.

Loose-leaf Puerh

As the value of aged puerh has grown over the last twenty-five years, it has become increasingly important for experts to develop techniques for verifying vintage. This is mostly achieved through what one could call “wrapperology,” which is the study of the packaging of vintage puerh to determine age and authenticity. This study does include an understanding of the tea leaves—their appearance, aroma and flavor (if one is permitted to taste the tea before purchasing, which makes

things easy for the experienced puerh lover). It also includes the large trademark ticket (*da piao*, 大票), which is often included in a *jian* (件, 84 cakes, or 12 *tongs*); the wrapping of the *tong* (7 cakes), including the bamboo skin and whether string, bamboo or wire is used to tie it; the wrappers on the cakes themselves; and, finally, the inner trademark ticket (*nei fei*, 內飛), which is compressed into the tea cake itself. Using a combination of these factors, an expert can determine the age of a puerh cake quite accurately.

Not only does the tea age in a particular way, but the paper does as well, since cakes were always wrapped in natural-fiber paper (and still are nowadays, for the most part). In fact, you may notice bug bites in an old puerh wrapper, which is because of the fibers. There are actually more bugs interested in the paper used to wrap old puerh cakes than the tea, especially in Southeast Asia, which means you'd be hard pressed to find an old cake without

some munch-marks on the wrapper. A good example of the paper/ink aging in a significant way is the famous “Yellow Mark” cakes of the 1970s. The tea character in the center of the wrapper (*cha*, 茶), surrounded by the 8 “middle” characters (*zhong*, 中), which represent China and the directions, characterized the tea cakes from the Masterpiece (1949–1972) and Chi Tze (1972–1998) eras of puerh. Many (not all) of the Yellow Mark cakes have a yellowish tea character on the wrapper. However, when the cakes were new, the 茶 character was actually green. It has only become yellow over time, as the ink has aged and the blue in the green has faded.

Sometimes wrapperologists can even determine the exact year of a cake, even though the exact same wrapper was used for five years, or even a decade. Changes in the wrapper are the obvious way to distinguish different vintages or eras, but sometimes the changes are subtler.

Factories used wooden stamps to print the wrapper back in the day. Eventually, the stamps would wear out and be replaced. Sometimes, a particular character would have a nick in it, as the wooden stamp was dropped or hit against something, creating a small indentation in a particular character. Wrapperologists can track the changes in the stamps as they wear down and are then replaced every few years.

Along with the tea leaves themselves, and an in-depth understanding of what a particular recipe looks like, as well as the changes in puerh over time, resulting in different colors of leaves, liquor, flavor, aroma, etc., one can therefore use the *jian*, *tong*, wrapper, trademark tickets and other features to verify the vintage of puerh to various degrees of accuracy. It is important to understand all of this as context for a discussion of aged loose-leaf puerh because one cannot rely on any of these methods to date aged loose-leaf puerh, which is to say loose-leaf puerh doesn't really have a vintage.

A tea lover has to be careful when shopping for aged loose-leaf puerh, as there is really no way to verify the age with any kind of accuracy. It is therefore better to ignore the date of tea, as it rarely means anything when evaluating an aged loose-leaf puerh for purchase. Obviously, except in the rarest of circumstances when some original packaging remains for a loose-leaf puerh (these are extremely rare and expensive), there is no *jian*, no *tong*, no wrapper and no trademark tickets. There is only the tea and the word of the vendor, and the latter is, of course, useless, as it is often just marketing. Even if the vendor is honest, the age of loose-leaf puerh tends to grow as it passes hands—with each vendor adding some time as they pass it on. An early 2000s loose-leaf tea is sold as “late 90s” to one vendor, who passes it on as “mid 90s” to an honest vendor who now labels it as “mid 90s,” because that is the information they were told when they bought it. Even if you do trust your source, the only

way to really be certain of the age is if the shopkeeper bought the tea new and aged it themselves, so it only ever had one owner (our Tea of the Month is like this). Otherwise, we cannot rely on the label or what the merchant says in person or on their website. And so, without accurate description and absolutely no wrapperology to rely on, we are left only with the tea leaves themselves, but that is tricky as well.

Blending in Loose-Leaf Puerh

Nowadays, there is also a lot of confusion about blended versus single-region tea, as well as what defines “old-growth” puerh. It is good to have some clarity on these issues, at least in terms of what we are writing about in the pages of Global Tea Hut. As for the first issue, there are great blended teas from the Masterpiece (1949–1972), Chi Tze (1972–1998) and Newborn



(1998–present) eras of puerh. Sometimes, teas from different regions, or even the same region, enhance each other beautifully. All teas are technically blends, since different sides of the same tree will produce different leaves, let alone different parts of the same forest. Still, there is something to be said for single-region puerh since that was the way that all puerh tea was traditionally produced. All the teas from the Antique Era (pre-1949) were single region. The terroir of a place, including the culture of how to process the tea is then homogeneous. This includes the genetic heritage of the trees, the climate and soil, the microbial environment so important to the tea's fermentation, and ideally also the spiritual/cultural rituals that surround harvest and production.

Strictly speaking, then, every puerh tea is a blend, but for the purpose of our discussion of aged loose-leaf puerh, we have to distinguish two kinds of blending in puerh. The first is blending during production and the

second is blending over time, which is more detrimental to properly dating aged loose-leaf puerh. Almost all loose-leaf puerh from the '90s or earlier was blended when it was released. For the most part, the best teas were always compressed in cakes and lower grade teas were blended and sold as loose-leaf. Most of the traditional loose-leaf blends were what was called "border tea" back in the day, which meant tea from more southerly regions of Yunnan, or even Laos or Vietnam. These days, such teas can be superior to Yunnanese puerh, especially as agrochemicals have found their way into puerh production, which adversely affects quality if you are someone who cares as much about the environment as we do. We would rather have a clean, simple tea over a tea from a famous region or garden that uses agrochemicals in other words. However, back in the day, this wasn't an issue and so-called "border tea" was considered inferior.

Over the last fifteen to twenty years, it has become more common to sell

single-region loose-leaf puerh, which is technically *maocha*. But the majority of loose-leaf puerh is still blended at the factory. When dealing with aged loose-leaf puerh, we can assume that it was all blended and packaged and that it was almost always inferior to the compressed products the factory was producing. But this kind of production blending isn't the real issue when it comes to understanding the vintage of loose-leaf puerh—that would be blending over time.

Virtually all aged loose-leaf puerh teas are blended over time, which means that the various merchants who have the tea add to it to increase the volume. They also create blends. Most aged, so-called "sheng" loose-leaf puerh teas are a blend of some aged sheng, some young, wet-stored sheng and a bit of shou. You can see this in the spent leaves, which often betray the differences in age of the various teas blended in. Adding tea to increase weight and make more money is only a small part of this kind of blending.



Other times, especially back in the day in Hong Kong, before aged puerh became so valuable, many of these blends were about flavor, and therefore produced to make nice tea. As long as we are aware that this is happening, this need not be regarded as a bad thing. The fact of the matter is that loose-leaf puerh is cheaper than cakes by orders of magnitude—and most often because it doesn't have a verifiable vintage (as we said earlier, factories often reserved their best teas for cakes which also influences loose-leaf quality), so not having a vintage can actually be a benefit, especially as the price of aged puerh soars further into astronomical realms that only the richest people can venture into. This means that aged loose-leaf puerh may be the only kind some of us can afford at all, let alone enjoy on a regular basis, so the issues that surround this genre of puerh are also, from another perspective, its strengths.

Aged & Aging Loose-Leaf Puerh

The best way to really and truly verify vintage in puerh tea is to drink it, especially if one has a lot of experiences drinking aged puerh of various vintages. The truth is always in the cup, no matter what the merchant or even the wrapperologists says. The experienced tea drinker will be able to taste the relative age and the storage conditions of a tea, and thereby know its value. However, this is also tricky with loose-leaf puerh, as it ages differently than compressed puerh.

Setting aside the issue of blending over time, and the effects of adding wet-stored sheng and a bit of shou to aged sheng to increase weight or make it seem older than it is—aside from that, loose-leaf puerh ages faster and worse than compressed tea. We invite all of you to experiment as we have, many times over the years, with aging a maocha alongside the same tea compressed. Not only will the loose-leaf tea age faster, it won't be as good. There is more to compression than just the convenience of transportation, as some authors would have you believe. Compressed

tea does age more smoothly and better. This is probably in part due to the steaming process, which softens the leaves for compression. We have also noticed a difference in traditional stone compression, which is looser, and machine-compressed tea, which is tighter. No doubt the heat, moisture and loose compression creates the ideal environment for the microbes which are active in fermenting the puerh over time. Also, puerh doesn't just ferment over time, it also oxidizes, and the compression probably slows this down, creating the ideal rate over time. Loose-leaf puerh has too much surface area exposed to oxygen and therefore it changes more rapidly and less smoothly. The increased airflow also means more humidity, which is why these teas are ideal candidates for wet-storage. They are also more susceptible to mold. At the end of ten years, a loose-leaf puerh will appear more aged than the cake version, and have a darker liquor, though it will be far less enjoyable than the compressed version of the same tea. (This is assuming that the storage environment was the same, as different storage conditions would add another variable to complicate this scenario.)

Since loose-leaf tea ages faster, especially if you accelerate it with wet-storage, which means keeping the tea in an environment with high humidity, it is no wonder that merchants started adding on some years to their descriptions, since their customers would also have experience drinking compressed puerh. It is also no surprise that these were the teas that were often chosen as candidates for wet-storage, as they can be fermented faster. When you couple this with the fact that almost all vintage loose-leaf teas are blends of aged sheng, wet-stored sheng and a bit of shou, you begin to realize that loose-leaf puerh teas do not have a vintage at all. Except in rare cases, there is no point in dating loose-leaf puerh teas. You can discuss them in that way, but only if you do so with a proverbial grain of salt—without letting the “date” be the criteria for evaluating such teas. But if we cannot rely on the “age” of a loose-leaf puerh, how then do we evaluate them?



History of Shou Puerh

熟普洱歷史

Deciding when to begin the history of shou puerh depends on how we define shou. If shou is any artificially fermented puerh, then it is actually quite old, since aboriginals have been artificially fermenting puerh tea in many different ways for centuries: roasting it, burying it, stuffing it in bamboo, etc. Different tribes had different ways of consuming puerh, but it was rare to drink it young and green, as young sheng puerh is astringent and considered “cold” in Traditional Chinese Medicine, and therefore not so healthy for most Chinese people that have “cold” constitutions. Consequently, most tribes developed their own way of artificially fermenting, roasting or boiling puerh to make it more palatable. For the sake of this discussion, however, we are going to restrict the term “shou” to its modern sense of piled puerh that has gone through *wo dui*.

Piled shou puerh is a modern sub-genre, beginning in the 1960s. In most books and articles you will find either the dates 1972, 1973 or 1974 listed as the beginning of shou puerh. There was some confusion, but recent research into historical records has verified that 1973 is the correct date. 1973 is the date the government licensed the first commercial production of shou puerh tea for sale, starting with the Kunming Factory. However, research and under-the-table batches were being produced as early as 1965 (perhaps even earlier). It took the factories a number of years to demonstrate a consistency, safety and quality that the government would license (all factories were state-run during the Communist Era, of course). We actually have a ‘60s shou brick here at the Center. More of the batches from that time were done for research, though it is likely that the factories tried to mitigate costs by selling some of this tea illegally as well.

Sheng puerh takes seventy years to reach full maturity. That number is not arbitrary. As sheng puerh ages further and further, the aging process itself begins to slow down. The cells crumble onto one another and the fermentation therefore relaxes. Even a beginner can tell the difference between a one and three-year-old puerh, just as the difference between five and ten years is obvious. But the difference between ten, fifteen and twenty years becomes harder to detect, requiring more experience with aged and aging puerh. After that, even the experts have to start gauging the tea in terms of decades. At seventy years the physical appearance of the liquor will not change anymore: black in the center, moving out into browns, then auburn and maroon with a golden ring at the edge. The tea will change beyond that, adding depth in Qi and flavor, but those changes will be for the next generation. Of course, puerh can be enjoyed long before full maturity—even thirty-year-old puerh is marvelous. Nonetheless, it is easy to understand why producers,

distributors and consumers would look for ways to speed up a process that is measured in decades or even generations.

The process of speeding up fermentation began long ago with wet storage. Puerh lovers, especially in Hong Kong, would carefully store their tea for a few years in warehouses near the sea or in basements with very high humidity, rotating it to higher, drier warehouses occasionally. This “traditional storage” would greatly speed up the fermentation process, decreasing the quality of the tea but allowing people to enjoy it much sooner. In those days, the raw material used to make puerh was very, very inexpensive (especially compared to these days), so they didn’t mind such compromises. Factories wanted to speed this up even quicker, inspired by the artificial fermentation that was already well established in the black tea industry of next door Guangxi, which produces Liu Bao. Liu Bao and Yunnan had already been exchanging raw material and ideas for decades, so it came as no surprise that researchers from factories in Yunnan would one day show up in Liu Bao to study the artificial fermentation there. Of course, they had to adapt the process because the varieties, trees and leaves of Yunnan are different from Liu Bao and other black teas, and also, perhaps more importantly, the microbial ecology is very different. The “microbial terroir” is why various kinds of beer in Germany, wines in France or even Mao Tai alcohol in China were not reproducible elsewhere, despite many attempts to replicate famous examples. The same is true of cheeses, which will be very different when fermented in different places, even if the milk and cultures are the same.

The main difference between the piling of shou and other black teas is that the piles are deeper, wetter and hotter. The thicker, larger leaves of big-leaf Yunnanese puerh require a deeper pile and the wetness perhaps was inspired by the “traditional” wet storage—shou puerh is, in fact, the wettest of the wet storage. Wetter piles also work faster. Finally, the factories in Yunnan added the thermal blanket to increase the speed and degree of fermentation.

It may go without saying that the puerh factories were not successful in reproducing in a month what Nature makes in seventy years. Like “traditional” wet storage, the shou process of artificially fermenting (piling/composting) the tea reduces its quality in terms of flavor, and even more so in Qi, sacrificing much of the energy of the mountain and tree. What they were successful in achieving was adding complexity to puerh by creating a sub-genre that needs to be understood and evaluated on its own terms. You really cannot compare shou to sheng in any meaningful way, whether the sheng is young or aged. Shou is a genre with its own life, qualities and profile in the cup.

Quality in Loose-Leaf Puerh

Those of you who bought the shou puerh Expansion Pack last November will remember that we explained that Bindbole and Shaman's Drum are both such rare and amazing teas because they are unblended (over time; they were blended upon production). Most of the time when you find such a tea, it was either stored privately or held by very few owners (only two in the case of those teas). Otherwise, most all loose-leaf puerh will be a blend of vintages. As we stressed throughout this discussion, this means that you cannot use the age to evaluate most loose-leaf puerh teas. In fact, we often encourage merchants to move away from dates when listing loose-leaf teas unless they are sure of the date, stored the tea themselves or have some other reliable information about the vintage. Even in such cases, the customer would still have to trust the vendor or have the experience to recognize the fact that the tea is, in fact, unblended over time. We think it is more honest and clear to create some other kind of system for expressing quality in aged loose-leaf puerh, perhaps using terms like "aged," "well-aged," "vintage" or "antique," all of which could be used to talk about the relative quality of the tea, even if it is a blend.

And relative scale really is the best way to mark quality in aged loose-leaf puerh, whether sheng or shou. In other words, one has to drink more of these teas and create a whole scale of quality that applies only to aged loose-leaf puerh, comparing one to the other. Usually, when we drink the so-called "aged sheng" blends, the age of the aged sheng is relatively older as we move up in quality and price. But, as we mentioned earlier, these teas are usually blends of aged sheng, younger wet-stored sheng and a bit of shou. Consequently, the quality can be driven up by adding older aged sheng, older young wet-stored sheng, older shou, any combination of these, or perhaps the whole blend was not tampered with for some time and is therefore more aged.

As one drinks more aged loose-leaf puerh, one realizes that you cannot really evaluate these teas in terms of age, as you would for compressed teas that actually have a vintage. Quality is not so easily determined with such teas. You really have to drink a lot of them and start to create some scale of price/quality which is internal to the genre and relative to all the others, understanding how such tea is bought, blended and sold and knowing what such teas should cost in the market. There are the exceptions, like Bindbole or our Tea of the Month, where we can be much more certain of the vintage for some reason (usually a single collector we trust), but in most cases we cannot rely on the date of the tea, as blending and storage influence the experience.

We should state once again that the lack of vintage in these loose-leaf teas need not be considered "fake" or negative in any way. It is actually a positive thing from a certain perspective, because it means that such teas are much more affordable. It is difficult to keep anything for decades. A mint condition antique may be worth a fortune more than a dinged or dented version of the same, and if you are an ordinary person, you may have to choose between owning the dented version or none at all. If you love aged tea, you may indeed have to choose between drinking loose-leaf tea or none at all, as cakes with vintage can be incredibly expensive (you can also age tea yourself, which we suggest doing). Once you accept that the storage is never as good in aged loose-leaf puerh, and that it is often blended over time, making the dates unreliable, you can learn to recognize what makes one such tea cost more than another, to evaluate the genre with discernment, and, most importantly to enjoy sharing these teas in your sessions, as aged puerh is amongst the most powerful and meditative of all teas, and for many of us, drinking loose-leaf is the only way we can afford to share puerh tea with our friends, families and community.

藏茶豐富的開創
散茶品質

茶 Storing loose-leaf puerh is great, as it ages faster than compressed tea, which means we can create a fine tea within a lifetime. We like to fill up jars with nice loose-leaf sheng or shou and cover the top with cloth to let in air, while keeping out particulates. We store the jars in places with low humidity so the tea doesn't mold.



茶 Samadhi

安止定

Samadhi is a beautiful tea filled with bright, calming energy that centers you—perfect for an issue about Tea, Zen and meditation. It is difficult to find truly clean, chemical-free shou puerh tea, since it is often made up of left-overs, and usually from various regions. This shou is made from a small batch of better leaves, including old-growth. Usually shou puerh doesn't have any old-growth tea in it because tea from old trees is very expensive and the piling reduces the quality and essence of the tea, which is a shame. Using such tea would also mean that the sheng and shou versions would have to be sold for the same price, which is very challenging for a producer. Part of why Samadhi is able to contain old-growth tea and still remain affordable is that the leaves are larger, lower-down, thinner and bigger leaves, called "*huang pian* (黄片)." In our Tea of the Month, these were blended with other kinds of leaves, bringing a nice, balanced flavor.

Huang pian are essentially the leaves left on the tree to grow. They are often sorted out of tea, whether puerh or other kinds like oolong, in post-production. Tea pickers are often paid by the weight of what they have picked in a day, and therefore often ignore the instructions of the foreman and pick larger leaves to increase the weight of their bags/baskets with less effort. In oolong production, such larger, thinner leaves turn yellow in processing, which is why they are called "*huang pian*," which literally means "yellow piece." As leaves grow, their cells stretch out and become photosynthesizers. From a more traditional perspective, you could say that the emerging buds are the outward Yang expression of the tree's energy from the root up and out, whereas the older leaves are taking energy inwards and are older and more Yin. Since the leaves are stretched out, it means they are far less juicy, thinner and more brittle when dried. They lack the vibrancy of younger leaves, which is why they are rarely used in tea production. Such leaves are often kept by the farmers and served in the household as a result. Since these leaves were not used in more premium cakes, they were often blended into loose-leaf teas like Samadhi.

In puerh, *huang pian* also age faster. The thinness of the leaves means they decompose quickly, like autumn leaves in climates with four seasons, which turn brown and decompose very quickly. In fact, *huang pian* puerh like our Tea of the Month has flavors reminiscent of our childhood days playing in such leaf piles. It pleasantly reminds us of autumn afternoons as children, frolicking in the raked piles of leaves. Such fragrances and nuances are warming for the soul.

Samadhi is also special because it was only ever owned by one merchant, whom we know and trust. He bought a quantity of it in the late '90s, since it was cheap and would age fast due to the *huang pian* in the blend. Samadhi is rich and bright, with a clarity not usually present in puerh, especially shou. This is also due to the older leaves. The softness and clarity of the liquor also translates to the energy, which is Yin and calming. This is a quiet tea, without any fancy cymbals or fireworks in the mouth, leaving you and your guests clear, which is often so needed in our busy lives. May it foster a meditative session for all of you!



Gongfu

Sidehandle

Water: spring water or best bottled
Fire: coals, infrared or gas
Heat: as hot as possible, fish-eye, 95 °C
Brewing Methods: gongfu or sidehandle (they make different brews)
Steeping: longer, flash, flash, then growing (you can only get one flash)
Patience: twenty steepings

茶 Use more leaves than you are used to with most teas. The *huang pian* in this blend make it less patient and also lighter. You won't regret leaning on the strong side.

Brewing Tips

Samadhi is made of thinner, softer huang pian leaves. Such tea is not as patient or as strong as you are used to in a shou puerh, especially one this old. In order to make a deep and satisfying brew, you will have to use a few more leaves than you are used to. We all may have fewer sessions this month, but they will be deep and meditative. This applies to such blends in general—they become deeper, brighter, thicker and more patient when you add a bit more than with other kinds of similarly aged puerh. You'll be glad you went a bit stronger with this tea. Of course, as with all aged sheng and shou puerh, temperature will be important to bring the best out of this tea as well. For that reason, you will want the water to be at a boil and have a penetrating heat. We always recommend charcoal for teas such as Samadhi, as it will create a deeper, brighter brew with a longer, lingering aftertaste and more powerful Qi As well. But don't feel like you need charcoal to successfully prepare this tea.

This month we would also like to offer some pouring tips, both from the kettle and from the teapot. Whether you are brewing this tea sidehandle or gongfu, aged sheng and shou puerhs require more temperature. For

that reason, it is always ideal to fill the pot as quickly as possible and from as low as possible. Try bringing your kettle in as close as possible and creating as large a stream as you can, steeping the tea as quickly as you are able to. Your ability to do this may be influenced by your kettle and its spout. The best kettles afford us more range in distance and speed of pour, like teapots. The shorter distance means the stream of water loses less heat, fills the pot quickly and the water is less affected by the air during the pour. We always keep moving as we fill the teapot, so we do not scald any of the leaves. Since this is a quicker pour, we have to move a bit faster in circles as well, at least until the water is above the leaves. You can experiment to see whether a shorter distance and quicker pour improves your tea from steeping to steeping.

When pouring from the pot, we always pour onto the sides of the cup or bowl. This prevents the tea from rippling and bubbling. Bubbles in tea make the liquor rough and dissipate Qi. You can experiment from steeping to steeping, pouring on the edge versus splashing into the center of the cup or bowl, and pay attention to the difference, using the Ten Qualities of a Fine tea as your guide.





Zen & Tea

茶 禪 一 味

One Flavor

LOST, TRAINED FOUND

茶人: Wu De (無的)



This article is taken from Wu De's book, "Zen & Tea One Flavor." It is one of our favorite chapters, and highlights much of what Zen and Tea have in common. This is a great way to begin this issue, by diving head first into the depths of these ancient traditions, exploring the profundity that they both try to capture and express through simplicity. Zen is no ordinary religion. It has no prevalent dogma, rites or rituals; there isn't even any coherent soteriology—Zen is an experience! And throughout the ages, masters have used a wide variety of techniques to help instigate that certain sensation in students: a recognition of the fact that the so-called "self" is an illusory construct of social programming and the nature of rational, as well as linear, linguistic thinking. This experience cannot, however, be easily described or conveyed in words, concepts or ideas; it must be lived through. And in imagining these ancient gardens, monasteries and forests where intuition was passed on from master to pupil, we invariably find steaming bowls of tea nearby.

From a very early age the noble Lin's third son Chung Chi was inclined towards the religious life, and it was therefore no surprise when he came of age and asked his father for permission to leave the household, casting off the Red Dust of the World. His father assented and blessed him for the last time.

Chung Chi spent ten years living in a monastery at the foot of the mountains. He was a devoted monk and walked with reverence. He was humble before his master, the abbot, though often distant. His heart lay deeper into the forest, higher in the mountains. The comings and goings of lay people and all the rituals, as well as work, distracted him. He felt his answers were in the heavier waters at the bottom of the lake.

Like any master should, the old abbot saw this sorrow in Chung Chi's eyes. One day, as they were drinking tea, the master told him: "Near here, deep in the mountains, past the oldest tree and Dragon Falls, there is a monk like you. He was once my dharma brother. We shared the same master—the previous abbot. When our master passed away, we agreed that I would stay here and run the monastery and he would retreat to the mountains to find enlightenment. He promised that if he found the Shadowy Portal he would leave me a sign, to comfort me in my old age. One morning, I found this at my door..." He handed Chung Chi a shiny, black stone. It seemed otherworldly, humming with power. It was

translucent and glassy, and he could see himself reflected wavy and distorted in its depths. "Take it," continued the old monk, "and go find him. He knows all about that which you seek."

Chung Chi thanked his master and headed off into the mountains. He searched for days all around the Dragon Falls, but found nothing. After two weeks he gave up and returned to the monastery. He wasn't crestfallen, though. He had permission to wander, which put his heart at ease. Once every fortnight, he would leave before dawn and spend a few days roaming the mountains—an occasional, reassuring touch to the stone in his pocket, encouraging him to hope. Just knowing that enlightenment was possible for him was solace enough.

After a year or so, Chung Chi finally stumbled upon a small clearing, and there beneath some very old tea trees was a small hut. He waited there a few days, but no one came. Having a destination made the walk into the mountains all the more enjoyable, as did the warm hut to sleep in. The master was never there, but Chung Chi began to care less and less as time passed. He started finding great joy in the walk—the mountain air, clean water and quiet hut. He was in no hurry. He had the stone and knew where the hut was.

Over the years, Chung Chi's trips to the mountain hut changed him. Even his duties at the monastery weren't so bad. He began to accept them, sometimes even enjoying the rituals and chanting. The mountain seclusion and

communal life in the monastery began to be stitched into the robes of a single life, the distinction fading away over time.

Around that time, Chung Chi returned to the hut one day and to his great surprise found that the fire was still burning, the coals still alight under a thin layer of ash. And there on the table was a tea bowl and some leaves from the nearby trees. He was radiant, thinking the hermit had surely left these for him—which meant he knew he was there. He drank the tea and sat enjoying the quiet of the hut. This continued, and each time Chung Chi arrived the tea, bowl, fire and water would be waiting for him.

A few more years passed and Chung Chi forgot all about the master and his quest. He still went to the hut, but it was for the tea, fresh air and quietude. He'd meditate and drink tea there for a few days and return to the monastery when his food ran out. One autumn afternoon Chung Chi was sitting in the hut. He had just finished his tea and was meditating contentedly, noticing how marvelously the trees changed colors. He was very surprised to hear some footsteps approaching. A shadow filled the doorway. When the figure stepped in out of the light, Chung Chi was amazed to see the abbot, his own master, standing there. Chung Chi understood everything. He prostrated himself. Then, rising up, he opened the old man's hand and placed the worn stone in his palm. He didn't need it anymore.

評論 COMMENTARY

In all the vast volumes of *sutras* the Buddha taught over forty-seven years the word “*nibbana*” is barely mentioned at all. He never spoke of enlightenment, and dismissed inquiries when it did come up—usually by witty scholars or monks trying to intellectualize. Instead, he taught about this life: our own winding way across this earth. You can’t practice what is taught anyway, and there is no need to discuss the things that should be lived.

When you get rid of ideas of enlightenment and delusion a lot of mind-made complications also dissolve. The idea that Truth is only living in remote mountains is one such distinction. The Dao is the movement of this universe, in all places and even through humanity and all its creations. It is difficult sometimes to recognize that the side of human existence we label “negative” is also a part of this vast and perfect universe. We want to envision imaginary worlds where such things as human greed and violence don’t exist, but those worlds aren’t *real*. We live in this one; and in this world human nature is thus—as it is. “*Ya ta bhū ta*” were words the Buddha did repeat often—unlike “enlightenment”—and they mean precisely that: “as it is, not as you would like it to be.” Only when the sacred and profane have unified can you see what the Buddha meant by “suchness” and why he called himself “Tathagata”—“the one who has walked thus.”

In ancient China, before the dawn of civilization, sages were seeking to communicate with the universe by retreating to the mountains where they could look deeper into themselves. With great insight, they chose to call the great movement of this cosmos “Dao,” which means the “way” or “path.” It is of course impossible to capture the universe and condense its meaning into a word, but in reference to that movement why not choose a word like this, which already corresponds with the road we all travel—making the journey of our life itself a reference point towards ultimate Truth.

When you are searching for something and working towards something,

you lose sight of the path, focusing instead on some imaginary goal. And the path is the Path, which means that your own silly game is stopping you from seeing that which you yourself are looking for. Instead, seek out the universal in the particular: find the Dao of Cha, and you’ll have found the Dao.

When you are bent towards the goal of a new and better you, the focus is still on the ego—albeit a bright, shiny and golden ego. Only when the monk in this cup-story stopped looking and started enjoying the mountain paths for their own sake did the master start leaving him some warm tea to refresh the end of his journey. And only when the journey and goal had both been forgotten, merging into non-duality, did the master himself appear to verify his student’s awakening—though he had actually been there all along. Everything becomes alright when we stop seeking—the answers just fall into our laps.

In the annals of Zen, masters often use the metaphor of “strolling through the mountains” to refer to an existential freedom from logic and discriminative thought patterns, wandering free of all attachments, as the monk began to do in this cup-story. Thus in the famous *koan*, the student asks the great master Chang Sha exactly where he’d gone on his “stroll.” “First, I followed the aroma of fragrant grasses, then I returned trailing scattered blossoms,” he rejoins.

The true master works from a distance, until the student is ready to recognize how ordinary a master is. Then the game of master and student is seen for what it is: more drama. In drinking the tea and walking to and from the hut, the monk found the insight himself. This cannot be taught, because it’s already here. You just need to discover that you are what you seek, and then all seeking ceases. Then you can have a cup of tea.

My master can teach of Zen and meditation, or even answer philosophical questions; but all that is too often confused with ego stuff: isms and schisms, arguments about points of logic, traditions, opinions and beliefs. He can fulfill that role, but it isn’t the

one he shines in. If you instead ask him with earnestness how to clean a teapot, his eyes light up and everyone around becomes transfixed in Presence—here and now focused on this teapot and its cleaning. Could there be a better discourse on Zen?

The greatest truths aren’t just in the forest or mountains. Even if you move to the mountains, won’t you bring your mind? Would you be seeking states you thought were higher or better? And would your mind think you had achieved something through your renunciation?

Maybe it’s better to let go of enlightenments and delusions and just see how alive you are. Isn’t it marvelous that the universe evolved from stars to minerals, minerals to life—and then after eons transformed into these very eyes and mouth?

If it helps, rub the Zen stone—knowing that the masters and buddhas of before have left us *sutras* to show that enlightened living is possible. But try to drink as much tea as you can, living here in your only life. Then maybe one day you will also find you can return the stone, sure that there is always another empty pot waiting to be filled with leaf.



*Leaves and water
Crafted by the heart,
Not the hand.
Prepare tea without preparing,
In the stillness at the center of Being.*

—Wu De



HALF-DAY TEA & MEDITATION RETREAT GUIDE

茶人: Shen Su (聖素)



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

In last year’s February magazine we featured an article on a tea & meditation self-course. We covered everything necessary to organize and carry out a self-guided tea and meditation retreat from one to ten days, favoring a longer retreat if possible. Of course, the more days you have to dedicate to focused tea and meditation sessions, the better. This is why it is often recommended to participate in longer retreats annually. However, we understand that it’s not always possible to do this. In fact, the very notion of organizing a meditation retreat of more than one day can be intimidating. There are quite a few logistics that go into planning a successful retreat. Organizing meals, codes of conduct, cooking and cleaning periods, inventory management, and designated tea and meditation spaces are all very important factors to consider. But if the consideration of them is used as an excuse to not go through with the retreat at all, then what other options do we have? In general, there is always time for meditation. If you have time to breathe, you have time to meditate. However, it is easier to intellectually accept that there is time for a half-day retreat as opposed to a ten-day, for example. That’s why we’ve outlined a simple half-day tea and meditation retreat for you try, regardless of how busy you find ourselves.

The Primary Meditation

Wu De often quotes an old Buddhist slogan: “Making space for meditation is the primary meditation.” This is a powerful statement. It reveals that the very act of creating time and space for meditation is the most important step in our self-cultivation. It is, in fact, more important than choosing a technique or learning the intricacies of that technique over time. For if one does not have the time and space to meditate, it doesn’t really matter what technique one chooses or how to navigate that path.

Meditation is a state of mind, not a particular posture, mantra, or action. But for the sake of this discussion, let us very generally define it to mean taking a seated posture and working with the breath in the present moment. That process, then, is actually secondary to sitting down—committing time and space and planning a meditation schedule. It’s easy to imagine that if we don’t take time to plan, then we don’t meditate at all or at least not with any consistency. But for some reason, what’s not easy to understand is just how important that first step of planning is. It gets put off because it’s not considered primary. We focus too much effort on reading books about cultivation, philosophizing and planning, and not enough time and energy on the practice itself.

Wu De often tells us that as a teacher he always recognizes when students are asking questions *about* practice or *from within* practice. Questions about practice are philosophical, general and based on exploring practice from a distance, whereas questions from within practice are the natural result of doing the work and finding difficulties, challenges or confusions along the way. Sometimes Wu De says that the answer to questions about practice is always “Start practicing!”

Perhaps you’ve always wondered why it’s so easy to meditate daily in a retreat setting or in an intentional community and why it’s so difficult to carry that practice home with you. Once the post-retreat momentum slows down and our old habits kick back in, it is very easy to go from daily meditation to weekly, then monthly, and before we know it, it’s completely lost in our daily distractions of work, life, relationships, entertainment, etc. Yet, amongst all these distractions, it is easy to imagine committing to a half-day retreat. It’s only half a day, after all. Because that idea is easier to accept, it is, therefore, a good place to start our primary meditation. The idea of a half-day retreat itself is therefore part of the meditation practice.

PLANNING A HALF-DAY TEA & MEDITATION RETREAT

I wouldn't suggest substituting a longer meditation retreat for a short, half-day one like this just because of a busy schedule. I would suggest strongly considering this half-day style retreat as opposed to not doing a retreat at all. I'm not trying to offer you an easy way out, but a simple alternative retreat that can be exercised virtually anywhere and anytime.

Now with the understanding of creating the time and space as the primary meditation, it's easy to understand what it means when we say, "plans are meaningless yet planning is *everything!*" The plans are meaningless because you never know what's going to happen and your entire retreat might be undermined by an unexpected visit from a relative or some other unknown factor. But the very act of planning is primary, which is why it is everything. If you plan the retreat, the likelihood

of its happening is high, even though it might not go as planned. If you don't plan the retreat, the likelihood of its happening is next to nothing, even if circumstances are in your favor!

So what is there to plan for? That's what makes a half-day retreat so appealing; there's not too much to plan for. Only so much can happen in the first half of a day. While you could conduct the retreat in the second half of the day, I'm going to suggest the first half because it will be an excellent example of "being before doing," which is often in stark contrast to our normal daily routine of waking up and getting to work before our eyes are fully open, let alone our mind.

Essentially, the half-day retreat will consist of waking up early, meditating, drinking tea, and eating a couple of simple meals. Normally, I would stress the importance of ending a re-

treating carefully because re-entering our daily routine after long periods of stillness and silence can be quite shocking. However, in the case of a half-day retreat, the transition back into our normal routine should be much easier.

Without going into too much detail, I want to offer you the bare minimum information to do a half-day retreat. You are going to learn more by just initiating the retreat than by reading a lengthy article covering all the details. Because the retreat is so short, it will be easy to replicate and alter based on your experience.

Here's a simple checklist of things to consider for your half-day tea and meditation retreat.

Approach to Meditation

Remember the affirmation, "This is my practice." During such a short retreat, if you focus on this mantra, it will greatly benefit your mindset towards whatever falls between tea and meditation sessions, be it cleaning, feeding your pets, watering the plants, or whatever task that unexpectedly calls your attention. Be flexible and understanding if things do not go according to plan. Perhaps just as important as actually doing the half-day retreat is understanding the concept of the primary meditation as mentioned above. Though it may be much easier in the beginning to create time and space for a half-day retreat, it is this skill of creating that will lead to a willingness to plan more or longer retreats. And that will lead to a greater likelihood of actually doing more retreats. May you all find time and space enough to plan and carry out a half-day tea and meditation retreat and further hone and exercise that creative skill in other facets of your life.



Meals

Because there are only two meals, plan and prep them as much as possible so you can focus your time on tea and meditation. However, also treat these meals as part of your practice. Eat slowly, reverently and gratefully. If there is someone willing to prepare these meals during your retreat, then that is ideal. Keep them light and vegetarian to aid in your tea and meditation practice.

Tea and Meditation Space

Set aside space for tea and meditation. It might be a multi-functional space or two separate spaces. Work with what you've got and keep the space clean. Make sure you have everything you need for tea and meditation, like meditation cushions, a timer, teaware, tea, water, etc. I would suggest simple brewing methods such as leaves in a bowl and sidehandle bowl tea. Just a few leaves in a bowl are enough for the first tea session, especially because it's so early in the morning and precedes breakfast. The meditation practice is, of course, up to you.



Noble Silence

Practice noble silence as soon as you wake up. This means silence of body, speech and mind. Absolutely avoid all forms of sensory stimulation like cell phones, computers, books, notebooks, music, etc. This is a very short time to be present, introspective, and disconnected from the world. Take advantage of this short and temporary ordination.

SCHEDULE

Here is a very simple time line for a half-day tea and meditation retreat. It can be tailored to suit your needs, but this is a basic guideline to work with. Remember, the schedule is an ally not an enemy!

4:00AM: Wake up

4:30–5:00AM: Bowl Tea
(Leaves in a Bowl)

5:00–6:30AM: Meditation

6:30–7:00AM: Breakfast

7:00–7:30AM: Clean-up/Shower

7:30–9:00AM: Meditation

9:00–10:30AM: Sidehandle Bowl Tea

10:30–11:30AM: Meditation

11:30AM–1:00PM: Lunch/Cleanup/Finish



THE BEST TEA SESSION

茶人: Wu De (無的)



This article is also taken from Wu De's book, "Zen & Tea One Flavor." These chapters are a great way to explore Zen, Tea and their relationship. Wu De's teachings on Zen always make our next tea session a bit deeper and more fulfilling. When the ancients said Tea and Zen were the same flavor, they didn't mean tea as a kind of Buddhist ritual. They were talking about that wordless hush before the Buddha raised the lotus on Vulture Peak. They were talking about Bodhidharma's marrow—given to Hui Ke for the perspicacity of his silent bow—and Hui Neng's sieve. They were saying that the essence of Zen is often more easily communicated through art and life than it is in words, though it can indeed be instigated by language. You could say that Zen has always been based on the intention of the Buddha and all the masters who followed to cast the light of that one primal illumination: our true self is not this egoic I-subject, and there is no-thing apart from Mind. All the meditation techniques, the moral precepts, the slaps and whacks, the nonsensical gibberish and the pots and pots of tea have all steeped in this truth, since before anyone ever said the word "Chan (禪)."

There were three samurai who met regularly for tea. All of them had studied for decades, and they considered themselves spiritual brothers since they were all students of the same Zen master.

One fine day they met for tea, sitting in silence by a creek, listening to it rattle on over flattened stones like distant sutras chanted by a chorus of monastics. After some time, they decided to have a walk, the Qi from the seven bowls of tea they'd enjoyed pleasantly carrying them onward. They talked openly and freely, without any of the semblance they ordinarily adhered to in society. Part of why they gathered, in fact, was to abandon their roles and responsibilities for a time. Somehow the conversation turned to the best tea sessions they had ever had.

The first samurai captivated them with a story of a pilgrimage he'd taken years ago with their Zen master. On their way to a distant temple, they had stopped at a small country inn. A bright and forthright young boy offered them tea since his father, the proprietor, was out picking herbs in the mountain. The samurai explained how both his master and himself had been captivated by the boy's honesty: trying to steep the tea as his father had taught him, he did it with care and joy, patience and mindfulness—all without any affectation. The master later said the tea tasted so pure for that reason—the boy was unusual in that he wasn't at all embarrassed or trying to impress them. Though he made mistakes, they

were natural and only brought grace to the liquor. He didn't need to apologize for the tea he spilled. His innocence was there in the tea, and the samurai thought it delicious and memorable.

The second samurai spoke of the time he had drunk tea with a famous tea master, whose skill in tea preparation rivaled any of the greats in history—even Master Lu Yu himself. He used the highest quality tea the samurai had ever seen. He heated the water in a pure silver kettle and steeped the tea in an ancient clay pot and equally old cups, painted porcelain with bright blue dragons. The liquor was exquisite, coating the mouth and throat and lasting on the breath for hours. The Qi also was delightful, and he could remember feeling it course through his limbs even late that night as he lay down to sleep. The lingering sweetness had impressed his soul, lasting until that very day they walked beside the stream.

The last samurai said that if they would deign to indulge him, he would save his tale for the following afternoon—if they would meet him at a certain time. Curious, his two companions wholeheartedly agreed. They couldn't wait to hear his story.

The following afternoon he led them down to the city park, near the banks of the river where they found the rickety, old bamboo stall of the Old Tea Seller, Baisao. He had a small wooden table and simple pots and bowls. The old monk had long ago abandoned his monastic robes, donning the white and black Crane Robes of the ancient Dao-

ist hermits, offering tea by the roadside for donations. Through connections with his hometown, the only open port in the kingdom, he was able to get small quantities of rare teas from the Mainland—some even aged and deep. The samurai thought their friend wished to buy them a cup of tea to drink as he regaled them with his story, but the true tale had already started with the simmering of the kettle on the coals.

The old man's clothes were stained and his teaware chipped, but there was obvious grace and mastery in his hands—there for any that had the eye to notice it, and the three samurai definitely did. They soon forgot all about why their friend had invited them, slipping into the dark tea the master prepared. Some of the few who knew about his small stall bragged that while the famous Chinese master Lu Tong needed "seven bowls" to reach the Land of the Immortals, Baisao could take you there in one.

The tea transcended quality. It was neither simple and unaffected, nor refined and delicate. The samurai lost themselves in its depths, though the cups seemed shallow. Afterwards, they understood why their friend had invited them. The old master smiled and his eyes twinkled like an innocently naughty child. They each put a coin in his bamboo tube, which read: "The price of this tea is anything from a single sen to a thousand gold pieces. Otherwise, it is free. I only wish I could give it to you for less!"

COMMENTARY

The word “Zen” comes from the Chinese “*Chan*,” which is itself a derivative of the Sanskrit “*Dhyana*,” meaning “meditation.” Zen is meditation. But not in the sense of “contemplation.” Actually, *Dhyana* could be translated as “being-onto.” It means being an open space for awareness. In being-onto a cup of tea, the distinction between the I-subject and the tea is erased. Zen is this open space—direct and unaffected observation. There is no word in all the ten-thousand languages that can really capture it as such, though any organization of words might instigate it if you’re in the right space. “Spirituality” also falls short, though it is perhaps a step in the right direction to recognize that the world is “spirit,” rather than these clunky “objects” we think are so solid. Modern scientists have also verified that matter truly is energy, after all. Some people think that spirituality of any kind is hocus-pocus and wave it off as fantasy: “I’m an ordinary guy. I get paid, watch TV and date my girlfriend. I have more important things to do with my time,” etc., etc. But who is really fantasizing? The one who is deluded into believing they can actually own things, living through virtual entertainment and not in touch at all with such obvious and very real truths as how fleeting a life on this giant rock whirling millions of miles the hour through space really is or the one sitting with complete sobriety, upright and aware as she quietly observes all the subtle nuances in a bowl of tea? (And that wasn’t meant to be a rhetorical question—I’m really asking!)

As the Mahayana teaching in sutras like the Prajnaparamita Sutra, which emphasized direct, experiential wisdom, came to China and blended with the meditations and philosophies of Daoist hermits, all kinds of new approaches and spiritual ways were developed, including the first ever self-sufficient monasteries. These Zen monks were among the first tea farmers, in fact. And since that time the paradox of such direct, intuitive wisdom in the present, ordinary moment in opposition to the need for meditation—often called “Zazen” after the Japanese pronunciation—this illogicality has

been central to all Zen thought and discourse. After all, why meditate at all if we are already enlightened? Wouldn’t such practices then just be polishing the ego, using spirituality itself to be a brighter, stronger identity? Other masters, like Dogen-zenji, taught that when meditation is done purely, and for its own sake, that itself is enlightenment—and in that state it isn’t “you” who meditates, but the Buddha.

The famous passing on of the bowl and robe from the fifth to the sixth patriarch holds a clue as to how we can transcend this absurdity, not metaphorically but actually. The fifth patriarch was getting old and it was time to pass on the staff. He suggested a poetry contest—the award being the robe and bowl Bodhidharma had himself carried from India, handed down from the very Buddha himself. The senior disciple Shen Hsiu composed a poem, which captured his understanding of Zen. He was, however, a bit trepid and decided to first tack it to the abbot’s door anonymously. It read:

*The body is a Bodhi-tree,
the mind a stand of mirror bright.
Take care to wipe the mirror clean,
so there is nowhere for the dust to light.*

The next day the old abbot had incense burned before the poem, calling it brilliant. That night, after the evening meditation, he read the poem before the congregation and said that anyone who put this into practice would surely become a buddha. But in the middle of that night, a little kitchen boy named Hui Neng tiptoed to the abbot’s door and tacked another poem beneath it. It said:

*There never was a Bodhi-tree,
nor a stand of mirror bright.
So please do tell me,
where is the dust to light?*

Despite the fact that the entire community was against him, the old abbot led the young man to a nearby hill and bestowed the bowl and robe on him, as he had indeed proved himself worthy of the role and of the tradition of Zen.

Commonly, this is interpreted to mean that Hui Neng “won,” and that his poem was “better” or somehow “higher.” But if Shen Hsiu’s poem did not capture Zen, then why did the master have incense burnt before it and call it brilliant, admonishing his students to heed its wisdom? Obviously, the master understood and recognized Hui Neng’s insight, even before it was written, so why would he commend Shen Hsiu’s if he felt it was incomplete? Also, according to the legend, the fifth patriarch instructed Hui Neng to travel south and spend the next years in retreat, practicing—so again why would he recognize Hui Neng’s insight on the one hand and tell him to go practice on the other? Are the two poems really antithetical? Are they mutually exclusive? Can only one be true? And, finally, did Hui Neng’s poem really trump Shen Hsiu’s?

Perhaps Hui Neng’s natural grace or deep understanding of Zen allowed him to penetrate the issue. But it was not, as is often proposed, that he outstripped Shen Hsiu. That is not why the abbot gave him the robe and bowl. No. The true power of Hui Neng’s poem is in the relationship between the two poems and the way they compliment each other. One does not negate the other; instead, they dance together as partners. And this waltz is Zen—when the music is so great that both partners forget themselves and their roles, merging into the Dao itself.

There is a very real sense in which you cannot put energy into a future, enlightened “you.” The ordinary life, living here and now is already it—this tea you drink is Zen practice, without remainder. And yet, philosophically this falls short, becoming at worst a justification to do anything you want including excess or laziness. While Zen would not judge debauchery, neither would it justify it—no matter what intellectual acrobatics you can perform, the monks of old were all chaste, practicing temperance and moral uprightness. Zen does offer spiritual freedom—to interpret the precepts as you would—but it does not shirk the consequences of behavior either. This doesn’t mean there necessarily is

a judgment or even the need to believe that the universe is karmically interested in our moral behavior, as some do; it is only to say that actions have consequences, and we are not able to foresee any of the unraveled ends of our actions, which spiral off and affect the world in myriad ways. The precepts are, in their purest form, but more skillful means—*upaya*. Actually, when you are pure, all that you touch is pure. There is no real formula for purity, just as there is no 1-2-3 recipe for Zen tea. I like St. Augustine's simple advice regarding our moral base (*sila*): "Love, and do what you will."

The innocent boy in this cup-story is beautiful. He is our buddha-nature, free of mind and its burden. He needs no discipline or practice. How can you practice being what you are? He is spontaneous and unaffected. He is the brush behind Hui Neng's poem. But his purity is short-lived: soon the vicissitudes of life will solidify his ego and he'll grow separate from the world before his return at death, or by grace in transcendence. He makes great tea because his mind doesn't tamper with the moment. It's almost as if the preparation were a natural extension of the tea bush's growth. There is indeed harmony in such a cup.

Then there is the expert of the second samurai's story. He has mastered the Cha part, but hasn't yet realized that tea prepared in this way always falls short, even if it be only slightly so. No matter how masterfully processed and prepared—no matter how great the tea and teaware—without the Dao, Cha is still in the material realm, and therefore often inspires greed and possessiveness. Most (not all) such Tea men (Chajin) end up lost

in snobbery—without realizing that in Nature, beyond the mind, leaves are just leaves. The quality they value so highly is mind-made, in other words. In Zen, such "experts" get busy huffing and puffing their 'isms' and schisms, arguing the fine points of what is "True Zen" and who it's taught by—just as the former kind of experts do with varieties of tea and teaware.

Finally there is the true master, Baisao, who has learned the ways of the world and is wise. He meditates and understands Zen because he has read scriptures and books. He also has great skill in his hands, brewing the tea expertly and with grace. He knows the ins and outs of tea, and can caress the best out of it in all circumstances. Nevertheless, he is not lost in the "Cha" part of Cha Dao, which only leads to snobbery and materialism; but neither is he dreamy, lost in the "Dao." The Cha and Dao of Cha Dao must each be balanced. Too much Cha leads to possessiveness and greed—stuff we're using to fulfill some sense of lack. But tea is also not escapism, and neither is Zen, so too much focus on the Dao leads to cloudy, blissed-out meditations that are too far from the daily life. The master is grounded in Cha Dao, with skill in meditation and the material side as well. All the subtle additions he adds in technique and the great teaware he uses add up, and the cup is so refined you barely feel the tea liquor passing through your mouth—though it coats the throat and stays with the breath for hours to come. This tea is more refined, deeper and wiser. His mirror is clean of all dust: it shows you your ego and asks you to look upon it with insight; look upon it and realize there never was a mirror.

The real, indescribable Zen, is beyond the whole distinction of quality. In this space—the truly "enlightened" space, so to speak—there is neither enlightenment nor delusion. The innocence and mastery have merged and the paradox is resolved. That is the space between the poems, where they fall hopelessly in love with each other's eyes. There are then no more isms and schisms; no more agreeing or disagreeing. You can't disagree with Reality—not when it's fully present. There are many koans where a student says that he heard something like, "Bright and clear are the hundred grasses; bright and clear our ancestor's teaching" from some other master. The student then asks the master if this is correct, and the master answers that it's a terrible excuse for an understanding of Zen. When the student then asks the master for his understanding, he replies: "Bright and clear are the hundred grasses; bright and clear our ancestor's teaching!" Though the phrase changes, this formula repeats throughout many Zen parables. The master is attacking the student's tendency towards distinction itself—the division is itself the issue.

Sometimes we have to wait for the right catalyst to come about—the right smack on the face or cup of tea. Then everything falls into place. There is then Zen in the tea, sparkling just near the rim where the liquor turns golden, but no Zen in the mind. Master Rikyu's name, given to him when he was ordained, is a testament to this since "ri" means "sharpness" and "kyu" means "leisure," "rest" or "non-doing." Zen is a sharp leisure, an adroit rest. Zen is Rikyu.



佛法僧

*It is the mind
That aspires
To set out onto the path
That is my very own
And revered master.*

—Attributed to Sen No Rikyu



茶和靜坐課程

Tea &
Meditation

Retreats
2017

TEA & QIGONG RETREAT



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We were very excited to host our first themed retreat in Taiwan last year. It was a herald of many more to come, as we plan on hosting topical retreats throughout the year once Light Meets Life is built, including Tea & Qigong, meditation intensive, various levels of gongfu tea, bowl tea and other linear courses as well. Dave is a great teacher, and we plan to incorporate some Qigong into all our ten-day courses this year!



 **Connor Goss**

Standing as the Mountain

Last September I had the great honor of participating and serving during our first Tea & Qigong retreat here in the mountains of Taiwan. Wayfarers from around the world journeyed to undertake a retreat from the world, to clear away the clutter of their minds, receiving inspiration and fuel on their journeys, and learning many wonderful things about tea and Qigong. They each received the opportunity to deepen their tea practices, and for some receive the first few bowls to begin their practice. Each day flowed around meditation and Qigong—creating the space for cultivating a balanced way of life, between stillness and movement, tension and relaxation. It was a profound period of transformation for everyone. Where we rooted ourselves strongly in the ground and said enough is enough—in this moment, I am free.

Surprisingly, this was the first retreat I have undertaken. It illuminated how profoundly beneficial these periods of quietude and meditation are for beginning or renewing one's practice, as we all need fuel for our practice occasionally, so that we may continue on with strong determination and discipline—to serve all beings.

An important part of any balanced life is undertaking retreats into the mountains—journeying away from the city and into the quietude seeping from the veins of ancient mountains. You do not even have to journey up into the mountains; while romantic, such an undertaking has become diffi-

cult for many. Periodic retreats from the world are beneficial for clearing away the clutter of our inner world—that place which we often forget amidst the busy-ness of daily life, of the unending tasks begging for our attention, of the countless distractions that disrupt our focus, of the unimaginable amount of information and mental stimulation that has neither end nor beginning. We can too easily become lost in the world of the external without turning our gaze inwards, focusing, even momentarily, on the inner world—on the place where strange creatures lurk, threads of thought flowing through the unconscious mind, habit patterns that have taken root within the most impenetrable of places. When we first turn our gaze inwards, what we see can be overwhelming and slightly terrifying at first. We do not have the capacity initially to face all of these areas that need to be nurtured. We, then, avoid turning our awareness inwards, favoring instead external experiences and a world that numbs our awareness. This is why retreats are profoundly important for our wellbeing. They offer us the inescapable space to focus on the inner world, on the places cluttered and overgrown by weeds.

As we participated in the retreat, we were actively attempting to clear out our mind and body, purifying the internal spaces, letting go of what no longer served us, through long hours of meditation. This was balanced out wonderfully with periods each day focused on movement, practicing

Qigong each morning and evening. Alongside healthy food, that nourishes the body and soul. I spent much of my time serving in the kitchen, receiving insights through direct service.

The retreat offered everyone the space to strengthen their meditation and Qigong practice or begin their practice. There is no place more inspiring to begin, or to continue, a meditation practice than the fertile space found within a retreat. One is surrounded daily with fellow meditators, each going through their own inner challenges. Meditating with a community or group is something I find great joy in. It gives me the chance to show up more, encouraging me to stand steadfast against all the enemies of my meditation practice—or rather the greatest enemy of all, my mind, and its incessant seeking.

We had the honor of welcoming a dear brother, David Melladew, to teach us Qigong. Almost everyone had no formal experience with Qigong, inhabiting the beautiful space of beginner's mind. It was my first experience practicing Qigong too. Halfway into the retreat, the realization emerged, that this is something I must bring into my daily practice. I must create space for Qigong, just as I create space for meditation and tea. Each of these practices is fundamental to a well-balanced life, filled with joy and calm focus. They all flow harmoniously together, aiding each other in cultivating the mind. Qigong for me became the bridge into a more balanced practice.



It has allowed me to cross the abyss that had until then seemed impossible. It allowed me to bring movement into my practice.

Now, allow me to try and express the deeper threads of my experience during the retreat. Writing this article has led me to many unfamiliar parts of the mind, into dead ends, and into places that make me feel uncomfortable. There are threads from the retreat, which may take months or years for me to understand, parts of the mind glimpsed that cannot be concisely expressed within the language and words I have by my side now. These are the brightest threads to surface, and, as I write they come further to life—animated by my focus and awareness. And just like how great writing should make us feel uncomfortable, so do

retreats; they bring up to the surface what challenges us. They act as an invitation to become who we want to be, free of unconscious habits and all that causes us untold suffering.

Purification

Meditation is a way of purifying the mind, deep purification of the body, mind, and soul. Purification rituals can be found in every human culture. I have found great joy and lightness. During the retreat, we journeyed deep into a space of purification. At the beginning of the retreat, Wu De gave a profound discourse on the importance of purifying the mind, clearing away the internal debris, through the Japanese concept of “*osoji*,” which

is a deep New Year cleaning. In practice, we focus on cleaning and clearing away the clutter of the mind and our physical space. If there is any culture in the world that embody purification the most deeply, it is the Japanese. Purification flows through the breath and rhythm of their culture and its soul.

Throughout the retreat I found great joy and lightness as I journeyed into part of my mind I had never seen before, clearing away the debris and many cobwebs. You can sweep ten thousand times and there will still be leaves left. The same is true of your mind. As we begin to purify the mind, we vow to take on the impossible.

We say enough is enough, and stand steadfast against the endless distractions of the world. We choose, in this moment, to face the jungles of the

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mind, and begin clearing away all that no longer serves—of practicing *osoji* in all its fullness and vastness. We clear out our hearts, lightening the weight we carry around unnecessarily. We empty ourselves. Purifying the empty spaces within. We focus on sitting with what should be placed back inside again, and what should be left for the elements to reclaim. It is through these periods of deeper purification that teachings and insights can be more skillfully woven into our souls. Ultimately many humans fear this space that arises when all external stimulation dissolves and we are forced, whether we like it or not, to face the internal layers of our being—those countless layers of conditioning that have resulted in who we are today. It is important to be gentle to oneself during the process of observ-

ing these layers of the mind and not to be too hard upon oneself over one's past actions and ways of engaging with the world. Practice compassion and forgiveness for all beings, especially for yourself.

The Interplay Between Tension & Relaxation

In many of the lessons and teachings Dave gave, he spoke about the importance of tension and relaxation. A balanced life must have the constant interplay between inhabiting states of relaxation and states of tension. It is somewhere in between these two that one experiences growth through the friction the two states creates, and this

friction offers great fuel for one's spiritual practice. It creates the conditions where one learns whether what has been cultivated on the cushion or in the space that peacefulness and compassion naturally flow, actually have roots deep into the earth—otherwise those qualities dissipate immediately. They evaporate into nothingness once exposed to the flames, leaving only echoes behind.

I will be the first to admit that I am incredibly tense, as are many humans in the world today. We live in a world that has created the conditions for extreme states of tension to emerge. We constantly inhabit a space of rigidity, clinging tightly to an impenetrable fortress into which the world cannot enter. Thus, there is an overemphasis on relaxation in some techniques.

This can be taken to the extremes of numbing the body and mind through external stimuli. We spend our moments of relaxation fixated on intense, dazzling lights—numbing our senses. We sink too deeply into relaxation, finding it then difficult to effortlessly change states and inhabit tension, inhabit the space of doing.

Married to the Ground

Something that is often spoken about in our tradition is the idea of being “married to the ground.” This surfaced quite often throughout the retreat, with many of the discourses and Qigong lessons touching about the essence of this sentiment. Parallels were observed between the teachings Dave gave and those by Wu De, each coming to the same meeting place from a different path; expressing truth through their Dao.

I find this idea of being married or connected to the ground, to the earth, to be particularly meaningful for me. It touches upon experiences I have had of the times when I have been too far in the heavens, dancing alongside the celestials, and the times I have been grounded—rooted into the earth. It reaffirms my own practice of cultivating a deeper sense of connection to the earth and those energies that help to balance us internally. There is often the tendency when on a path of cultivation and spiritual growth to focus too much on the spirit and the heavens, forgetting that we are part of this earth and that we must maintain that connection if we are to be balanced human beings. Otherwise, we find ourselves unable to navigate the world, unable to go about daily life and its worldly affairs. Wu De often touches upon this during his teachings—the importance of balancing the heaven and the earth in your life and in your practice.

Death as Teacher

Perhaps one of the greatest, most penetrating experiences during retreat was a profound internal shift in my understanding and orientation towards death. At the time, I did not quite understand the internal changes, as I lacked the tools and language

to integrate these new threads of understanding. However, death was the undercurrent throughout the entire retreat for me, showing itself in each moment and each breath. Not really the death, which we know in the Western world, that must be feared and avoided, rather a death that is transformative. The death of what is no longer needed, that only serves the part of us that wants to remain the same and not face our habit patterns—not strive towards cultivating a practice or more skillful ways of navigating the world.

This is the death that I met during the meditation sessions, when I rang the bell for each period during the day, even when I prepared lunch—the chopping of vegetables becoming a physical embodiment of internal experiences.

At the time, I did not realize this, and it has taken a while to unpack the experience, to learn the language required for communicating something that we are deeply conditioned to fear and repress within our lives and society as a whole. In the purest form, I learned how to be with death, to feel comfortable and open to what it has to teach me. We, must, as we do in life, approach death with joy and lightness of heart. It is not something to feel heavy or a great burden weighing one down. It can become one of our greatest teachers if we have an open heart and compassion for what arises.

Movement & Stillness

It was a profound experience for me to observe how gentle, physical movement such as Qigong can move energy, promoting clearing away of stagnation and tension in the body. I have often experienced the ways seated meditation acts as a way of purification, so, to see the parallels in movement meditation was transformative. It offered me the chance to find deeper reserves of motivation to practice, and to cultivate positive habit patterns oriented towards bringing movement into my daily practice—something I have always found challenging. Though, if I am to take anything away from this Tea & Qigong retreat, it is the great importance of balancing stillness and movement. This harmonizes our lives with Nature—micro and macro.

These two practices aid each other, offering insights and wisdom that flow parallel. They work together, enhancing and strengthening one another like a dance.

I invite you explore your relationship to meditation and movement, and may you find the space to deepen your practice, so that you may clear away the clutter of the mind and cultivate emptiness.



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TEA & QIGONG RETREAT DISCOURSES

Over the years, we have collaborated with many beautiful people in our tea ceremonies and workshops around the world. We have held beautiful sessions with tea and music, including the acoustic marvelousness of Timo and Herkko in Estonia, as well as the gorgeous mandolin and violin of Cyé Wood in Berlin and a great tea and shakuhachi evening in Kiev, Ukraine. Wu De has also shared the stage with many great teachers around the world, helping to raise awareness for Global Tea Hut and Light Meets Life. It is always nice to bring communities together and share teachings in new ways, often to the benefit of all the participants.

Though these events have always gone well, Wu De has always viewed them as singular, special mornings or evenings of tea and “other.” He’s never spoke of a continued collaboration before. This is not to say that we wouldn’t repeat any of the amazing collaborations we have had the fortune to participate in over the years—quite the opposite, we’d serve tea while Cyé Wood plays any day of the week! But Wu De has never felt like pursuing an ongoing collaboration with another teacher—until now.

If you read the article on pp. 31–36, you will know that Wu De and Dave Melladew teamed up last autumn to offer a Tea, Zen and Qigong retreat here in Taiwan. We headed up

into the mountains near the Center—to an area called Nan Juang, which is coincidentally where we hope to build Light Meets Life. For seven days, participants meditated, drank lots of tea, practiced Qigong, had acupuncture treatments, took Chinese herbs and listened to these two experienced teachers lecture on these three topics, weaving their teachings through each other. The week was extremely successful, and everyone left a bit brighter than when they’d come, uplifted in body, mind and spirit.

Wu De and Dave both reported that they inspired each other. In fact, Wu De wouldn’t stop talking about it after Dave left, joyfully exclaiming how wonderful the retreat was. He said, “Throughout the week-long sit, there were repeated times where Dave would exclaim that I had already said what he was planning to say in his lecture. The funny thing is that I felt exactly the same! He often beat me to the Zen stick, so to speak, covering issues I was planning to explore later the same evening!” Wu De said that he also felt that Dave had rekindled his martial arts practice and was therefore one of his “*sifu* (masters)” now. For the first time ever, he was very enthusiastic to collaborate with another teacher, suggesting that their methods and teachings complement each other perfectly and that he hopes that this was the first of many retreats. “Dave brings a down-

to-earth approach to Chinese medicine and Qigong that works perfectly with our tradition’s tea practice. The Qigong movements were the missing piece needed to perfect my ordinary Zen and Tea retreats. I always wondered why the annual retreat in Spain was so much better than other Zen and Tea retreats, and now know that it is, of course, due to the hikes which add movement to stillness, which brings balance and harmony. Dave’s Qigong movements actualize this as well, and surround it with theory and approach that further contextualizes the balance.”

Participants also felt the cooperative efforts of the two, and the way their teachings wove together seamlessly. It was a great retreat, and we knew that it would be historic and sadly under-attended, mostly due to financial and geographical limitations. How many of you would love to have joined us? Well, now you can. We had the foresight to record Wu De and Dave’s discourses, remastering them and offering all the Zen and Qigong discourses for each day in one set. The tea lectures are, unfortunately, not included as Wu De did not want to record the tea classes, much of which were hands-on and, he feels, demand that participants be there in person. Still, the Zen and Qigong lectures are rich enough for you to listen, learn and maybe even use in your own personal retreats at home.



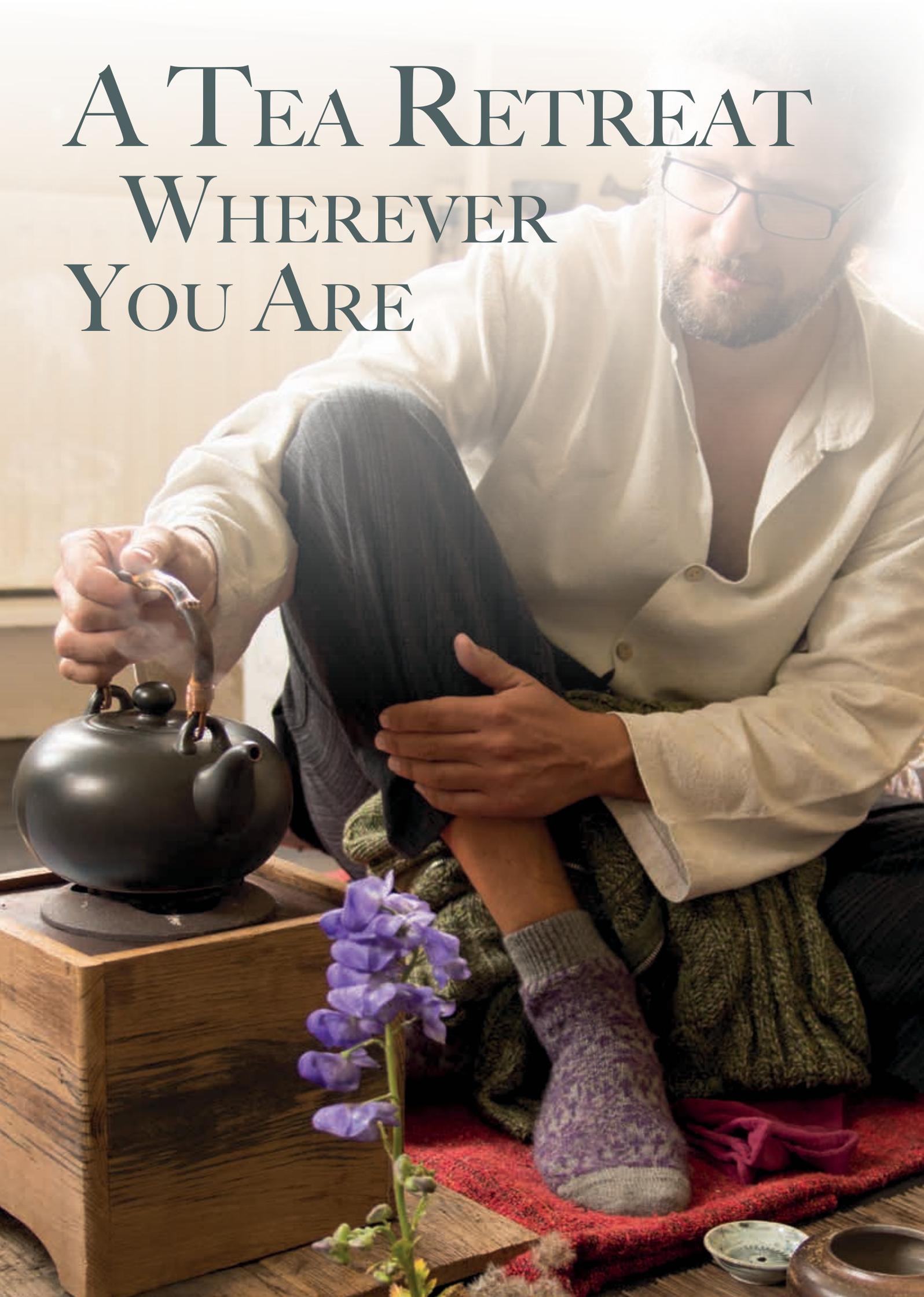
The entire retreat discourses of Wu De and Dave Melladew are available for download at:

<https://globalteahut.bandcamp.com/album/tea-Qigong-retreat-discourses-sept-2017>

(You can also find it by visiting our bandcamp page)

We are asking for a minimum donation of \$99, the proceeds of which will support our Center and Global Tea Hut.

A TEA RETREAT WHEREVER YOU ARE



Jing has hosted three retreats in the Netherlands, bringing together Global Tea Hut members from the Netherlands, Belgium and other parts of Europe to drink tea and meditate together in Nature. This important article demonstrates that you don't need formal organization to host a small retreat. We hope that upon reading this, some of you will also be inspired to host free retreats for Global Tea Hut members. And if there aren't enough Global Tea Hut members near you, start a group and help us grow the community!



茶人: Jing Ren (淨仁)

靜修無論在何處
內在平衡對所有外境

The sun is slowly rising above the mountaintops in the Spanish Pyrenees during this early morning. Wu De sits in front of us, with his attention fully focused on the tea that silently waits to be poured out into our bowls. A day of silence, followed by a morning hike through the glorious surrounds, has prepared my mind in a way I have never felt before. While I enjoy the view of the glorious mountains through the window, a steaming bowl of tea finds its way to me. I lift up the bowl, take the first sip, and find myself in heavenly bliss straight away. The Tea talks to me as never before, whispering answers to all the questions I brought with me to this retreat. I feel like I am home—found in my heart. The peace radiates outward and glancing around I feel such a deep kinship with the other retreatants. Though we have yet to converse, I feel like I know them all, as if we were childhood friends gathered here on a reunion. I wish them all well as I lift the bowl again, smiling at the compassion and loving-kindness that is naturally arising in my heart, as if the tea has tapped its spring and it is now overflowing...

Actually, to tell you the truth, I haven't been present during any of Wu De's retreats, like the one in the Spanish Pyrenees we will discuss later on in this issue. Chances are, you haven't either. Unfortunately, we don't always have the chance to find ourselves in such extraordinary and inspiring circumstances to cultivate ourselves, meditate and listen more closely to what the Leaf is whispering in our ears. Sometimes, we have to do it with what we have and where we find ourselves in the present moment. Sustaining a meditation practice can be quite challenging with all the responsibilities we usually have in our daily lives. Learning to be self-sufficient in our practice and creating supportive practice environments wherever we are can be quite a useful skill. One of the most helpful and energizing ways of doing this is by organizing your own retreats, either by yourself alone, or perhaps even better, by inviting others to join you.

ORGANIZING A RETREAT

I felt inspired to share with you my experience with organizing retreats with fellow practitioners, and to give some advice to those who would love to facilitate such a retreat themselves.

I would highly recommend any of you to organize your own retreat, especially together with others. The retreats we had with fellow Chajin in the Netherlands were truly wonderful and inspiring! They not only supported us in our practice of meditation and tea, but they also helped to forge a local community or “sangha.” It has been incredibly helpful to have people around who motivate and inspire me on my path of meditation and tea. I’m very happy that in the past few years I have made an effort to help this local community take root, and to be nourished by the fruits that have arisen from the same seeds. I invite every one of you to make an effort to surround yourself with people who inspire you in your practice and support you in being a more kind, compassionate and present human being!

Making Space

The first piece of advice for preparing a retreat is very simple: prepare as much as possible. It is already very difficult to maintain a meditative mind if we just sit on a pillow without having to do anything, let alone when we have to organize a bunch of things! The more you prepare, the less you have to think about during the retreat, and the more space you have to focus on the present moment. Our teacher says, “making space for meditation is the primary meditation.” Make up a schedule, write down a menu and then divide the tasks. Prepare to the point that by the time the retreat starts you only need to give a brief introduction talk after which everyone knows exactly what the retreat will look like and what his or her role in it is. Perhaps you want to divide some tasks, such as shopping for food or the preparation of meals. Communicate anything you want to delegate clearly and make sure that the person executing the task understands what to do. Finally, make sure you have some last minute checks in place, of your responsibilities as well as others, so that unexpected organizational issues don’t come up during the retreat. Anything you don’t have to think about during the retreat is one less potential distraction!





Be a Student & Respect

One of the less practical but most important pieces of advice that I could give is to remove as much “I” from the retreat and its organization as possible, and to respect your limitations as a student. Serving tea in a ceremonial way is about offering a space for people to connect to themselves, Nature and each other. Teachers have many different tools at their disposal to point the way. Students, however, have to accept the tools they have and their limitations. Honoring the source of any wisdom or tradition is essential for our capacity to embody and implement that wisdom in our lives. Even Wu De, after decades of practice and being a student, still feels unqualified to teach and says that there is still so much more to learn. Perhaps this little bit of doubt, together with a healthy portion of curiosity and “beginner’s mind,” is exactly what makes him a good teacher!



Awakened Facilitation

Why do I say all of this? Because I feel that the boundaries between the roles as an organizer versus a teacher can become blurry, especially when organizing a retreat. I feel that for the sake of the retreat, it is very important that we do not take on a role that goes beyond our qualifications. That is why I love the word “facilitation” when it comes to organizing gatherings, retreats or events. As long as we remind ourselves that we are facilitating, rather than creating or giving, and use ways of organization and communication that are in line with this wisdom, we create a much safer environment for practice. One where our self-centered ego will not so easily get involved. In this way, just like in our tea ceremonies, we provide clean, empty vessels through which anything can flow freely. We act and make decisions based on what is in the interest of the retreat, the retreatants and their practice.



FACILITATION IN PRACTICE

Organize a Retreat Together

It helps to keep the “I” out of the retreat is organizing it together with one or two other Chajin. This way, whenever you make a decision, you can check with the co-organizers if they think it is beneficial for the retreat and its retreatants as well. Since there is no formal guide in this kind of retreat, it helps to involve everyone. Something I learned early on, when I first started serving tea, is that when the server is uncomfortable talking to large groups, the gathering can be organized to go around and let everyone share instead. This takes the pressure off the server, and makes the gathering communal. I applied this same philosophy to the retreat. Hopefully, that will comfort any of you who were reluctant to host Global Tea Hut gatherings or retreats out of shyness or a feeling of being unqualified. We hope to see more retreats this year!



Divide the Tea Sessions & Meal Preparation

Another way we arranged for equality within the retreat amongst students was by letting different Chajin, with experience serving tea, host one of the tea sessions. It is not only very inspiring to receive all these heartfelt offerings from your brothers and sisters throughout the retreat, but it also creates more balance and equality amongst all students. Retreatants who were not serving one of the tea sessions were cooking one of the meals. This was equally wonderful as this made it possible for everyone to serve in one way or another. The Zen master Dogen spoke at length about the role of the cook in the monastery—a topic we have covered in previous issues. He asserts that the cook is the most important mo in the monastery, as it is her food which fuels all practice. This gives everyone a chance to be the cook!



開示

服務

Meditation Instructions & Evening Discourses

During a retreat, it can be very encouraging and inspiring to receive meditation instructions or teachings. They can help us to stay skillfully focused and motivated to practice. During our last retreat, we used Wu De's meditation instructions. We also used one of Wu De's recent podcasts as a discourse. There are, of course, many other inspiring discourses out there from different teachers. I'd strongly suggest looking for some material that is appropriate for your retreat! I also suggest choosing a discourse that is simple and that doesn't talk about subjects that are outside of the scope of what is practiced during the retreat itself. For this particular retreat a discourse about meditation, tea or both is therefore ideal.

Obviously, the ideal for this would be to purchase the new discourses which we have just published, as discussed on p. 37. This will help support the Center and then you will also have more than enough great material for a retreat, as there are six days of very, very profound talks given by Wu De and Dave Melladew. In fact, these discourses are the perfect reason to organize a retreat in your area, bringing Global Tea Hut members together to meditate, drink tea and listen to these life-changing lectures!

In order to receive and apply the teachings, it is important that we are in as quiet, open and receptive a state of mind as possible. Therefore, it is often nice to listen to a discourse after a meditation period, especially at the end of a whole day of practice.

Serve Freely

Finally, serving voluntarily without receiving anything in return is essential for the health and safety of the retreat as well. I strongly suggest not asking for any financial compensation for the time and effort you put into organizing a retreat. Wisdom and awakening are always freely available for everyone already; there is no sense in charging people for work they do on themselves. It is very much in the spirit of Tea and ceremony to give freely. Once we start asking anything in return it quickly becomes a service, and it loses most of its medicinal power for many different reasons that go beyond the scope of this article. You can, of course, suggest everyone to share any financial costs equally, but do not ask for anything more! That said, we did ask people if they would agree to share financial costs equally when unexpected things came up as well. One time, we ended up having to rent a car at the last minute, for example, and everyone was happy to share the costs because we clearly communicated in the beginning.

There are many more experiences I could share about organizing retreats, and I could probably devote an entire article just to the countless practical details. I recognize that for many it might be a bit overwhelming to step into this role straight away. But remember, there is no need to rush into this. Take your time, start by sitting a couple of mini-retreats by yourself, or sit together with some friends for a one-day sit. You can always ask for help in your local community, which I have done every time, or consult the crew at the Hut or Wu De. At least you can notify them that you are facilitating a retreat and ask them to raise a bowl of tea for all the retreatants!



While I'm Here...

I strongly suggest using some sort of “code of conduct” for your retreat. However, you do not have to call them that. I very much like the way the guidelines are proposed at the Tea Sage Hut, simply stated: “While I’m here...” Feel free to change them slightly, or to add some more, to better suit the occasion. Especially if it’s a short retreat, I’d suggest proposing everyone to stay offline and to maintain noble silence for part or the entire retreat, for example. Noble silence means silence of body, speech and mind.

While I’m here, I agree:

- 1) To attend all meditation sessions, morning and evening, as well as activities, tea sessions, ceremonies and tea classes.*
- 2) To maintain a plant-based, vegetarian diet while staying at the Hut.*
- 3) To abstain from taking any and all intoxicants.*
- 4) To honor the body and refrain from sexual misconduct.*
- 5) To love kindness, treating myself and others with respect.*
- 6) To maintain an open attitude, tolerant and willing to learn.*
- 7) To love tea.*

SCHEDULE

This was our daily schedule for our last retreat. The retreats we held did not involve lots of meditation and gave us the opportunity to connect with each other, share and laugh a lot as well. When coming up with a schedule you can consider what is best for the community and the individuals attending the retreat and their experience with Tea and meditation. Not everyone in our community has lots of experience with intensive meditation retreats, for example. In addition, this schedule facilitated the strengthening of our community very well.

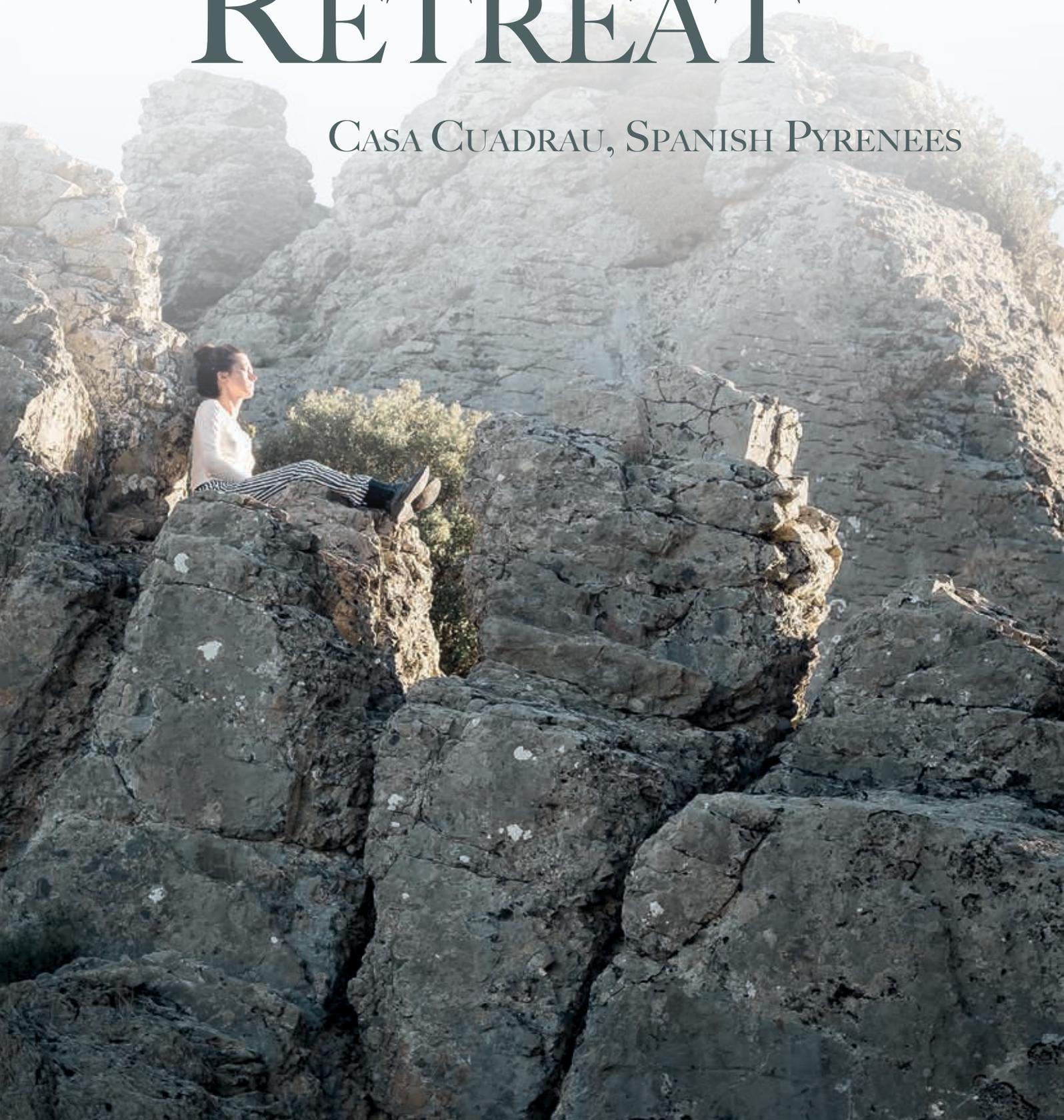
- 6:30AM: Wake-Up Bell (Noble Silence)*
- 7:00–8:00AM: Morning Meditation
(Meditation Instructions on the First Day)*
- 8:00–9:30AM: Breakfast/Rest
(Noble Silence Ends)*
- 9:30–11:30AM: Bowl Tea*
- 11:30–12:30AM: Free Time (Meal Preparation)*
- 12:30–2:30PM: Lunch/Rest*
- 2:30–4:30PM: Gongfu Tea*
- 4:30–6:00PM: Free Time (Meal Preparation)*
- 6:00–8:00PM: Light Dinner/Rest*
- 8:00–9:00PM: Evening Meditation*
- 9:00–10:15PM: Discourse*
- 10:30PM: Lights Out*



SECOND ANNUAL

ZEN & TEA RETREAT

CASA CUADRAU, SPANISH PYRENEES



This was the second in what we hope will be an annual retreat for the rest of our lives, and maybe beyond. Casa Cuadrau is an amazing retreat center, founded and run by the most loving people: Daniel Benito and Katya Ríos Chávez. The mountains are stunning, the food glorious and Wu De says that the collaboration with Daniel is so profound he sometimes has difficulty facilitating the retreat, since he himself goes so deep into Tea & Meditation. The second year was organized better than the first, with many improvements, as well as some lessons for how to conduct an even better retreat in October of 2018. Hopefully, many of you will make it this year! We now present the accounts of retreatants Katherine Aplin, Petr Novak, Keiko, Antonio Moreno, Simon Osten & Rivo Sarapik—all of whom offer good reasons why you should come next year!



A Day of Zen & Tea Katherine Aplin, USA

Under the cover of darkness, the first bell rings at Casa Cuadrau. The setting moon, full and bright, shines its white light into my room and coaxes me awake. I linger for a moment, then dress, wash my face, and brush my teeth. I make my way across the yard and up the stairs in a blanket of quiet. Observing noble silence, we move around each other with the utmost of care. Slow, soft-footed, aware. In the wooden hall we converge and take our seats on the ground; it is time to meditate.

After the light has returned to the sky and we have chanted the Heart Sutra, we meet around the dining table. Hand-in-hand, we bless the breaking of our nightly fast. We huddle over warm bowls of porridge and eat slowly. There is no need to rush. There is nowhere to go. There is only right here, right now, and in this moment, we are free.

With satisfied bellies, we gather on the lawn in a circle facing inward. We connect with the space around us through smell, through touch, through sound, and through sight. We uncoil into a single-file line, then walk out of the gate and into the mountains beyond. Time melts as we trek, each day a different course. Up and down, over fallen logs, across wobbly rocks. We keep our own unique paces, pausing to soak in the wonder of the Pyrenees and to pick blackberries plump with

morning dew. I take notice of the flora that we pass—a piece of moss, a pile of pinecones, a pot of glowing marigolds—and wait for a spark of inspiration. With a clear mind, an idea forms of its own accord and develops organically. I gather what I need and carry the bits of nature in my arms until our journey returns us back to where we began. I arrange the foraged blooms and baubles for the *chaxi* and change my clothes for Tea.

We share three steaming bowls in silence and then shift slowly into speech. We cover folklore and the seven genres, misconceptions and misinformation, brewing tips and ceremony basics. The room is filled with many eyes and ears, all of them open, all of them focused. When the sun is high, we gather around the table once more to give thanks. We fill our plates with food that pulses with love. We eat outside surrounded by a landscape that is rugged and wild, under a sky that is crisp and blue.

Following our afternoon rest, we meet again in the heart of Casa Cuadrau, a room with windows that open out into the world. We settle onto our cushions for the second time and together, we meditate. For an hour we sit as an army of Buddhas; some of us calm, some of us stormy. Separate but one, individual yet indistinguishable. We rise from our seats triumphant and accomplished. We take turns cleaning

bowls, making the leaves spin, and serving one another. We are grounded by the practical application of what we have learned, shifting from the mind to the body, powered by the heart. We help each other with kindness and patience, for no matter where we are on our journey with Tea, we are all humbled as students of the Leaf.

In the early evening, we eat a light snack of soup and fruit. We stretch our bodies or lay in the grass and watch as the sun sets over the mountains. When we open our eyes after our third and final meditation, we are in darkness once again. We listen to the discourse like eager sponges, soaking up the wisdom of teachers past and present. As the profundity and playfulness of Zen intertwine through rascally stories, the room ripples with hushed laughter. When the Dhamma talk comes to an end, we bow to the Buddha and retreat into our sleeping quarters for the night, heart and mind filled with inspiration, and deep wisdom to both settle and unsettle us.

Back in my room, I climb into the sheets and head toward a totality of rest that is both welcomed and well-deserved. I observe as the lessons of the day begin to integrate with the rest of me, making space with their wisdom and clearing away that which is no longer needed. I smile, empty my mind, and surrender to sleep. Tomorrow, another day...

Casa Cuadrau Petr Novak, Czech Republic

When I first heard of Casa Cuadrau, the somehow exotic name was for me impossible to remember, let alone pronounce correctly. But now, after attending the Second Annual Zen & Tea Retreat, it is a part of me, and forever after...

I can happily say that the Zen & Tea Retreat surpassed all my expectations. Honestly, the days fulfilled my dreams. I was happily going to spend some Autumn days with friends, tea family—with the Global Tea Hut tribe. I did not know exactly how the retreat would be organized or what would happen, but I was content to reunite with old friends and make some new

ones. I had the intention to make this time a celebration of life, and I decided to be open to whatever happened, enjoy it fully, taking in and giving as much as possible. Amazingly, in one of the first discourses, Wu De invited us to adopt such an approach to the whole retreat. He asked us to give up all our likes and dislikes, our preferences while we were there, and surrender to the flow. We were to accept all the rules, practices, ceremonies and just see what happens.

Our dear host at Casa Cuadrau, Daniel Benito, spoke to us about the water in those mountains. “In these mountains, there is much more water under the ground than is visible above

ground. The limestone massif beneath us is full of caves and tunnels with underground wells and rivers, ponds and lakes” From that moment I started to look around at those beautiful mountains as living beings, with inner lives. Looking at the other retreatants, I could then see beautiful mountains full of hidden rivers and lakes, secret and sacred.

Reflecting on a single day of the retreat, I am reminded of Dogen’s teachings on a “moon in a dewdrop,” in which he says that if you understand one teaching, you understand them all; and if you truly understand a grain of sand, you understand the Universe. Here is a day in the life of a retreatant:

5:30AM: Morning bell. I wake up ready—feeling the body, trying from the early morning to apply the first of the “Five No-Nos” Wu De taught us: No internal dialog. Funny, that the attempt includes thoughts—indeed! I go outside to see the stars fade away, carried by the dawn and do a bit of Qigong practice before the 5:50 bell invites us to sit down on our meditation cushions. Posture is enough. This is my practice. Shunryu Suzuki said, “What we call ‘I’ is just a swinging door which moves when we inhale and when we exhale.”

8:30AM: Meditation walk. Mountains all around, hiking in silence on rocky trail. There are vultures above our heads. Beauty beyond words.

10:30AM: Tea ceremony Class. How fortunate am I, being asked to serve these sessions as “*cha tong*” (茶童). The Chajin inside me is singing and dancing. There is no better tea practice possible for me at the moment. Each person I offer a bowl to is my teacher at that moment. Wu De lectures, people receive in silence and a few questions are raised and answered. Despite the “no communication” rule between students (Noble Silence), the community feeling is growing. Tea is good.

2:30PM: The gong is inviting us to our meditation cushions again. There is guided meditation every day at this time, deepening our practice—posture and breath, breath and posture and on to other levels... For some reason, my mind is marking feelings in my legs as “heavy pain.” Question: What is the difference between pain and pleasure? Answer: Keeping the posture.

4:30PM: Tea class again. This time we sit in smaller groups and practice tea ceremony forms, from forms attaining essence to essence back to forms. Some of us are trying the tea ceremony practice for the first time, while others of us are skillful already—all learning together how to serve. Seeds are planted.

7:30PM: Evening meditation—quiet inside and out. This is my practice—right here, right now. Mind is waving, so what? Mind is quiet, so what? Curiosity about this practice. Dogen said: “If you are unable to find the truth right where you are, where else do you expect to find it?”

8:30PM: Dharma talk. Intense and cutting. And let’s face it, knowing Wu De, who would expect anything else? I am not sure how to take it—to memorize meaningful parts, write down the stories and profundities for future study and contemplation or rather just take it all in as inspiration for my own retreat life right here and now, which is “Reality,” as he points out. Perhaps the confusion is the point. Zen teachers leave us reeling... I choose to let it all wash over me, watching for words which cling and shake, ring and poke.

9:30PM: Take rest. Short walk alone before going to bed. Under the harvest moon, among mountains and medieval empty village roads. The vultures are sleeping and all under Heaven is quiet.

更深處是一面寂靜的隱藏湖





茶 Meditation, hiking and tea echoing in the mountains...



A Beautiful Retreat Keiko, Japan

Everything was new and fresh experience for me. Despite my fear of the unknown aspect of this seven-day silent retreat and the all-new world of Tea ceremony, it was an amazing experience, which went far beyond my expectations. From the morning meditation at 6:00AM to the teachings of Wu De, which carried on until 9:30PM, the days went by full mindfulness, meditation and contemplation, as well as a gentle atmosphere throughout. I learned so much—from how to meditate, enjoy Nature and the wonderful vegan food to how I can drink three bowls of tea with pleasure and peace. The location was superb and the house was well taken care of, everything was full of love. Next year's retreat dates are already highlighted on my calendar!

失去自己 找到自己

Zen Sketches Antonio Moreno, Spain

The following are the sketches, notes and thoughts I wrote down during the Second Annual Zen & Tea Retreat. I could of course reflect back on the retreat coherently, but I thought that a direct account in "stream of consciousness" format would be a poetic, metaphoric way of approaching a week-long way of life—a way of being and living in which I see the world differently than I ordinarily do. Since the retreat mind is apart, perhaps the language should be as well. Not only are these notes my own contemplations, but they are also highlights from the discourses, which I felt the need to record for later contemplation.

Second major retreat... Sketches of silence. Pen scratching notebook. Take Rest... Two weeks removed. The retreat is very much still with me. Still-motion. Devotion in Motion. I'm applying the teachings. My life is taking on a different shape. I'm fully charged, fully present. Fully aerated! Growing new roots.

These are challenging times for me and this retreat was a highly anticipated parenthesis to gain a new perspective and sharpen my senses. I didn't let myself down and made the most of it, new insights, new questions, new oaths. Exhale. I share words, ideas, concepts, revelations, determination, love. Inhale. Heart.

I had never heard of the *Cintamani*, the "wish-fulfilling jewel" of the enlightened masters... Endless roads, infinite

possibilities... The power of granting wishes true. Take heed (that old and familiar warning). Be careful what you wish for! The way becomes easiest when unguided by preference.

I have the *Cintamani*. My mind is the wish-fulfilling jewel. Cherish the *Cintamani*! There is no issue, only my orientation towards the issue. I have exclusive power over my orientation towards the issue. You always lose when you argue with reality. There are no enlightened beings, only enlightened actions. My dreams will all come true when I only wish things be as they are. To be aligned with reality. Accepting. Inviting. Loving. I say yes with an open heart. Bring it on! When I trust my happiness to the hands of others I give up my only true power—the power of my orientation.

Though the forest is dense, water flows though it freely. That which you resist, persists. Sharpen the tool. Sharpen the *Cintamani*. No comfort orientation! If every rub bothers/ticks/annoys/repels how will I ever be polished? Shine on you crazy *Cintamani*!

Looking out at Mondoto Mountain and the Sestrales... Deep teachings. Breathe-taking magnitude. Dylan: How many years can a mountain exist before it is washed to the sea? Sedimentary mountains. Calcareous mountains. Once a deep seabed. Once a 5,000m. glacier. Eons of erosion... Limestone returning to the sea. Water the source at the Spring returns to the source at

the bottom of the sea where pulverized fossils come back to life. Strata. Layers. Stripped. United.

We are constant change and evolution. Nothing stays the same. Embrace the change. Flow. There's nothing to be done and yet there's a lot of work to be done! If nothing changes, nothing changes. Put my devotion into motion! Again!

A new seed of love planted in re-nourished soil. Aerated by retreat. I must water now. I turn the kettle on. I'm alone with the heart of my matter now. Crossroads. The crux... Zen is a stall selling water right beside the river. I have power over my orientation. I pour my heart. Awakening. Death of romance. Birth of love. My mistress, my lady, my soul, my spirit. The man of the Dao retreats to his sphere of influence.

Teachings are like stones we throw at the stars. They can guide our way through the dark sky or they can come right back down and fall on your head.

Who is it whom I address? Who takes down what I confess? Are you the teachers of my heart? We teach old hearts to rest. Oh teachers are my lessons done? I cannot do another one. They laughed and laughed and said Well child, Are your lessons done? Are your lessons done? Are your lessons done?

—Teachers by Leonard Cohen

A Tea Journey *Simon Osten, Germany*

At the time these words find you, months will have passed since the retreat, and since I wrote this, so I can't miss the chance—as a time traveler or voice from the past—to wish all of you a light & pleasant, healthy & exciting New Year, since we're now probably close to the Chinese Year of the Dog.

Thinking of the retreat in Spain, thinking of the village of Vió where it happened, so many profound and vivid impressions, experiences, memories and thoughts occur to me: The cold indoor sequence of reflection is now about to begin in the course of my year (German winter), and I will try to shape and share some early results of this digestive process—digestive truly, since the days this article is dedicated to were such a nutritious and intense time, which not has left me with so much gratitude to express and work to do.

I am aware of the fact that maybe some phrases of my articulation/attempt to capture what the retreat “was like” could be quite similar to other formulations of the daring dear fellows from the past-present-future Zen & Tea retreatants, who also will try to pour these experiences into vague word-vessels that seem so very inadequate. Similar because we all were allowed to spend the same outstanding time in the same beautiful part of the world, eating the same incredible food under the same stars, accompanied by the same kind of wonderful people, listening and practicing the same or at least similar Tea-chings. But please keep two important and valuable things in mind which Wu De also used as an introduction in our retreat: Tradition and Repetition.

Although we probably can all agree on this same framing, was it really the “same” experience for me as for you? Some maybe will remember the little story (Wu-necdote) about the difference of food (quality/experience) between the “mom-made pasta,” which is not the same if it is made with home-grown ingredients as opposed to the instant kind, but also not the same if her two sons eat the same meal at the same time but with a different orientation: If one son lives a boring life in the

basement and the other comes back home from a tough time on the streets, they will not experience the “same” pasta. What matters and leads to the differences in our articles is the personal heart and perspective towards a similar experience, with varying emotions and emphasis, often chosen afterwards. So, to serve you my pasta, I will try to use two different forms, which is to say that this article has two main ingredients: noodles and sauce, because my experience was kind of divided into two aspects or layers. But actually, since we didn't attend a cooking workshop in Italy, a more appropriate metaphor would be to say the Tea (text) I'm preparing consists of *leaves* and *water*. One part is the *Way to Vió* (arrival/leaves) and the other is the *Way Through Vió* (retreat/water). Therefore, here is a short story in two chapters about gathering leaves alone, placing them in a bowl in Vió and pouring hot water over them (the teachings). Notice that they are still spinning...

The Way to Vió

My journey to the retreat began much earlier. One could say the first step in the direction of Spain was taken exactly one year earlier. It was a rainy German October and I was happy to spend a whole, incredible and life-changing Tea-day in Berlin. There, for the first time I met this beautiful Global Tea Hut community in real life. I met great sisters and brothers (mostly from Berlin) together with Wu De, Antonio and also Morten, who had just come back right from the first retreat in the Pyrenees. The warm and deep impressions of this touching, unique day and meaningful experience still lingers in my heart (and will forever), especially through the personal connections which began with this first encounter and still continue to unfold today. The strong wish to deepen all those relations (to Tea and her People, including myself) in the coming months confirmed the decision to attend the Zen & Tea Retreat if possible, although I wasn't completely sure whether it would happen in 2017 or not. But through the whole

time, before the dates were announced, I had the feeling and confidence to be in Spain the next Autumn. To finally fulfill this longing, I tried to make this forthcoming occasion even more special, since I knew it really would be the next step on my Way of Tea, and also the very first ever retreat I would attend in this life.

If circumstances would allow, I knew I would embed this extraordinary week (about which I could read the nicely-written and inspiring words in last year's issue by the likes of Rich Allum and other participants) into an extended, even bigger Tea journey. It was clear for me that I should not arrive at what was then an imaginary and remote place called Vió in a quick, regular and direct way. So, I decided to embrace the Tea and Zen week with a little trans-European journey, visiting some wonderful Chajin on my way to the village and back home afterwards. In this way, I connected existing dots and discovered or added new ones on my Global Tea Hut map.

Visiting people in Germany, France and Spain was just one step. The next phase was to plan a different kind of trip, which would require a little more willpower and vitality, because I decided to reach Vió by foot. My plan was to cross the Pyrenees from the French to the Spanish side and hike the distance through the mighty and yet unknown mountains over the massive border. This would make the retreat into a pilgrimage—a personal rite of passage. Spending ten days or more alone in Nature, I thought, would be the perfect initiation into my first deeper meditation-week. And now that I have returned safely and heavily enriched back home, I can tell you that it really was worth the trouble! Through this the trip I experienced multiple dimensions of myself and tea: an outer physical aspect of body-work/exercise (the hike), followed by a second inner aspect (the retreat), which trained different kinds of “muscles.”

What could be a more adequate introduction to Tea and Zen than becoming a lonesome Wayfarer through beautiful hillsides—a cloudwalker on cragged mountaintops and a silent guest among numberless trees and an-

imals, waking up and going to sleep in a natural rhythm of the sun, simply caring about the next water source, a passable path or a safe place to stay the night creates a state of strong alignment with what's important in life. Being quiet for such a duration, alone with your body and thoughts became so much more than just a nice hike through beautiful landscapes, or even preparation for a meditative week of Zazen.

I cannot overlook the fact that this adventure at some points really deserves description, because this hike not only became one of the most impressive and amazing things I have ever done, but also maybe the most dangerous. There is probably not enough space for all the details, but walking and climbing (GPS- and equipment-free) alone with a huge and too-heavy backpack down from the 3000m peak in autumn, on a super-narrow "path" with a free fall of just one or two steps next to you, really forces you to concentrate, placing one foot in front of the other most carefully, which turned the whole hike into one giant walking meditation!

All the spirits of the weather, the mountains were gracious and helpful. I trusted my intuition, which led me to experience and learn so much along the way. Already focused, connected, quiet and enriched, I finally arrived in the small village of Vió, on the drier Spanish side of the Pyrenees, notably grateful for my life and health.

You can imagine how much this sweaty vagabond needed a good hug after all that, arriving at the now-real Casa Cuadrau, and how much he enjoyed and appreciated even the simplest food prepared by the truly wonderful people there, after so many days living on just a handful of oats. Not only my did my heart open strong and wide, but there was also a palpable energy-absorbing hole in my stomach which was quickly filled with food and love. If we remember now the metaphor of the Love-empowered pasta made by the mom, I was like a third hungry son not mentioned in the anecdote, who did not come from the street, but from an adventure in the mountains, full of rivers and night skies...

The Meaning of Vió

The retreat itself doesn't lend itself well to prose, so I have chosen poetry to express the culmination of my voyage, as it captures the essence of sitting, hiking and drinking tea in such beautiful surrounds, with such wonderful people. Those days have changed me in ways that will still be unfolding long after you read these words, which are missives of a precious time.

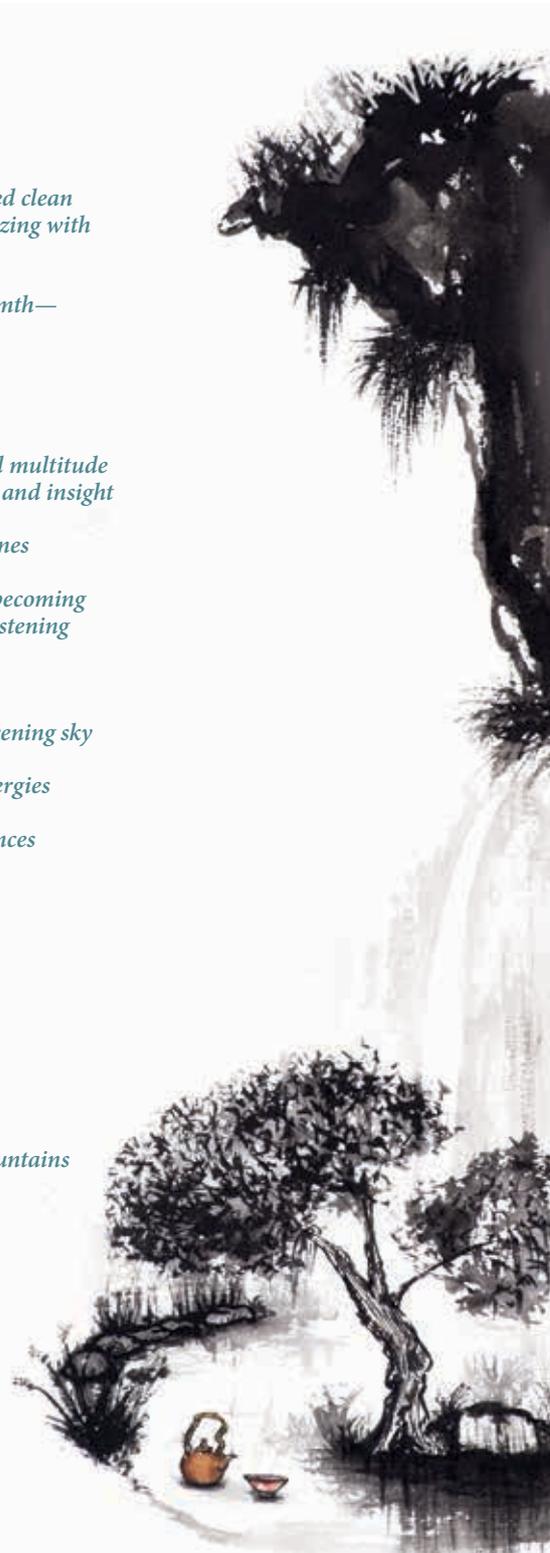


*Arrived at the end now
Arrived at the beginning
A shower together with a hug
The most necessary
Rinsing off travel and worldly dust
The brewing-vessel I've become is washed clean
Warming the body-walls and synchronizing with
The still-traveling soul,
Together clean and calm
Ready now to steep and spread the warmth—
Together now*

*I dreamt of an arrival
I dreamt of a journey
Following a golden thread to the source
I dreamt of the changing of solitude and multitude
I dreamt of vitality leading to elevation and insight
Following a feeling
Following the dewy path beneath the pines
Along the old grove's crossing
The forest bridges and mountain gates becoming
The old man the stream-enterer who's listening
To the forest songs
Cloudwalking and resting
Cloud-hidden in mountain rain
Finding the ordinary treasures in the evening sky
And the moon's white light
To gather again the spirits and their energies
Sipping the morning dew
And smelling the fresh and calm fragrances
Of the mountain wind
While a ruby red sun is rising
And Her light meets life*

*We climbed Vulture's Peak to the light
Where it meets our lives
And warmed souls and tired bodies
Sat on the burned top
We sat under the stars
And sat in communion
With the man of Leaf
Who got water from the man of the mountains
Warmed by the man of fire
The man of Leaf poured the liquid joy
From the man of the clay's praise
And all had gathered for Her*

*And I said
Soon someone will pinch me
And I will wake up from all this
And soon someone pinched me
And nothing happened*



Serve More Tea Rivo Sarapik, Estonia

The three words I chose as a title sum up the time I spent at Casa Cuadrau—not just the week of the Zen and Tea retreat, but also the five weeks I spent there previous to it, first as a karma yogi for a few weeks and then attending the event Wu De was guiding. Karma yoga means doing good for the sake of doing—serving others without any expectations, in other words. These weeks previous to the retreat played an important role in the experience of the tea retreat as well. However, the length of the stay isn't the most important part of my experience. What really matters is what I learned: all the teachings I received during these weeks, days and hours are summed up in the title of this account—serve more tea.

There are a few ways of looking at this profound, yet simple statement: The first one is to take it literally and serve more tea, which means offer more ceremonies, pour more tea into bowls and literally create and hold tea space. This means serving to myself and others. You could also look at this and see that it is also about serving Tea. This means creating time and space for the meeting as well as living in harmony with myself, others and Nature. This is a deeper and more spiritual understanding of Tea and our service to Her. Finally, another way of understanding “serve more tea” is to analyze the sentence in each part, exploring each word separately.

Serve

Service is what took me to the Spain in the first place. I arrived at Casa Cuadrau at the end of August. In a way, it was a chance to step out of my daily routine for a while (without the Internet, news or other stimulation) and replace it with more meditation, silence, tea and service to the others. But it wasn't going to be about me. I had promised to dedicate myself to the good of others.

Casa Cuadrau offers a chance to practice “karma yoga.” Attending their program means you can attend one full retreat and serve the others for the rest of your time (the minimum is five

weeks). Serving means helping out in the kitchen, doing housekeeping or carrying equipment during hikes. These simple, easy tasks become very important (and also a teaching) when you give them full attention and invest your heart. Washing dishes or chopping onions are chores I rarely take notice of when I am at home. They seemed trivial. However, in Spain, I started to ask myself why there are things that are not important enough to receive my attention. Of course, I had forgotten that there aren't any trivial tasks in our lives, as every step is needed for the next one—even on a long journey. Take washing dishes, for example. If I skip it, I won't have anything to serve my dinner on, which I might have cooked with my heart, and a well-cooked meal deserves to be on a well-cleaned plate, doesn't it? It's the same with service. Everyone who cleans the bathroom, washes the floor or rings the morning bell during a retreat frees the retreatants from that task so that they can feel held, comfortable and focused on their meditation, contemplation or tea. Every janitor who cleans the toilets at NASA helps to send the astronauts into space. Without workers like them the talented astronauts and engineers wouldn't have the time or opportunity to do what they do.

This is like tea: every part of a tea ceremony is necessary, as preparation and cleaning are equally as important as drinking the tea. In fact, there is no preparation for a ceremony, as the preparation *is* the ceremony. Wu De reminded us of this in our retreat, and you can read it on the soap that arrived with the November issue of this magazine: that 80% of Cha Dao is cleaning.

Even though I went to dedicate my time to others, I also received a lot. I had the chance to hike in the mountains, feel a connection with the Cosmos while camping one night, and have insights while meditating at the river, including that I am Life itself having a human experience. I also drank the most wonderful teas with great people, healed myself with silence and meditation and the list goes on and on. Still, I wouldn't have had these experiences without going there with the intention to serve others.

However, the real service happens when I offer because I can. Without any expectations (even for the good things that will certainly come from serving). Otherwise, it's not true service. But every servant gets something back. The skills of the task and the deep appreciation for the chance to help others at least.

There are two big lessons I took from this period of service. The first one is gratitude. I am grateful for the chance to be there and offer my time, energy and goodwill, to wake up at 4:00AM to ring the wake-up bell (and due to the early hour, see the full moon make the mountains glow), to walk the ancient paths through the forests and connect (without words) with the people attending the retreat—so much to be grateful for... The second lesson is humility, which is, of course, cultivated through service. Humility is not putting yourself down or thinking that others are better or higher; it's consciousness that enriches every experience. Putting my agenda, previous experiences, ideas and attitude aside in every moment makes life deeper, and every word and teaching glows with a special light as a result. Putting aside my preferences gives me a chance to really experience life as it comes not through the view of what I think, what I have experienced or expect to experience, but through the clear glass of being alive and focused on what is happening as opposed to what is happening *to me*. For the humble every experience is a teaching.

More

More represents one of the “Five No-No's” of Zen. *No comfort orientation*. It doesn't mean making my life miserable or looking for chances to be in discomfort or pain. It is not discomfort orientation! What I took from this is to turn my attention and intention towards learning and deepening my dedication, like meditating an hour and fifteen minutes instead of an hour, and focusing on the benefits of meditation instead of the slight discomfort of sitting. In that way, I grow and do so freely and with enjoyment.

More also includes surrendering and following the instructions, like practicing loving-kindness meditation regularly. This means dropping myself and putting all my heart into my practice will slowly but surely change the way I feel about a situation or person. This lesson has brought deep joy. I now wish everyone well. It has also helped to change my perspective from my suffering to the service of others. Love is replacing the anger and sadness in me, without the need to fight for what I don't really want. I will focus on bringing in what I do really and truly want instead. But, once again, practicing more is not about hurting myself; it's about accepting that improvement and growth requires effort. It's not the destination that matters; it's the journey. It's not the ideal, but the improvement—focus and dedication, not constant seeking.

Tea

In a way, Tea has saved my life. I first met Tea when I attended Wu De's tea ceremony in Estonia a few years ago. By the time I reached the tea event, I was in trouble. I had brought lots of anxiety and anger into my life,

and had no tools to deal with them. This meant a lot of suffering. Wu De and Tea turned my attention to meditation, silence, a harmonious life with myself and Nature and to the importance of ceremony. Things have changed a lot since then.

In Spain, my understanding of ceremony deepened. Ceremony consists of two components: attention and respect. Full attention to the time and space I'm in ceremony is paramount. When I'm serving Tea, I'm serving Tea. Choosing carefully the leaves with respect for the farmer, Nature and my guests, teaware made with love, the proper time of day, the people to invite, etc., so that a true meeting with my guests and Tea can occur. And respect for the tradition, the guests, the Tea, the water and the chance to spend this unique event together—*ichiego ichie*, one encounter one chance.

Combining these two will help to, as Wu De puts it, *remember to remember*. To notice the here and now. To notice the moments, the subtleties. Eventually this starts to steep out into the rest of life as well. Try ceremonial shoe-lacing—it definitely deserves such a mindset, as without doing it properly you might step on a loose lace and trip, hurting yourself.

There's an important component in every aspect of these three words, apart and as a whole. Even the space, or silence, between the words—in every sense, aural as well as visual. Silence can also be seen in terms of a lack of information. Casa Cuadrau is situated in the Pyrenees, far from everything. That means that when the sun sets, it's dark. When a car passes, it's silent. When you don't have Internet reception or cell-phone communication, there's no information flooding in. This silence plays an important part in your experience. This year, the Zen and Tea retreat was in full silence, which helped the participants to go deeper. When there's no talking, there's no need to spend energy on thinking what to say and when to say it, and this energy can then lead to inner discovery. It's not just meditation that becomes deeper and more profound as a result; even daily activities, like eating porridge in the morning, reach whole new levels, effecting the rest of the day.

Last year, after the retreat, I was wondering where I'd be if I followed the Way of Tea with more purpose and attention. *This* is where: an amazing time in the Pyrenees, meeting lots of wonderful beings, drinking tea in a growing silence...



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 our talented translator, Emily Foate.

If you have been reading Global Tea Hut in the last year or so, chances are you will have read some articles that I translated into English, originally penned by our Chinese-language tea experts. My journey to this page in Global Tea Hut began, fittingly enough, with a love of words. Growing up in Christchurch, New Zealand, I was always enchanted by words and language. This showed up when I was very small as a tendency to chatter away as I went about my business, making up or reciting stories, songs or poems—to myself or anyone else in earshot! I became an avid reader and discovered a love for writing and learning languages. I also grew up in a family of tea-drinkers, so any wordy pursuits would often be accompanied by a cup of tea (in those days, it was more likely to be Earl Grey than oolong!).

Later, at university, I embarked on the study of Mandarin Chinese. I was drawn by the possibility of exploring a language and writing system so different than my native English; this was certainly the most life changing-decision I've ever made. It eventually took me to Shanghai and later to Beijing, where I continued my language studies and later worked on various projects as a translator and interpreter, as well as leading groups of students from international schools across China on experiential education trips around China and Inner Mongolia. Immersing myself in daily life in Beijing also introduced me to a new world of tea and tea culture.

A vivid tea memory from this period was when I accompanied a group of thirteen- to fourteen-year-old students on a trip to Anhui province. We were lucky enough to stay at Dabeilou monastery on Mount Jiu Hua. A sense of stillness and suspended time blanketed us as soon as we arrived—something that can be rare for many of us, even those of us who are not teenagers living in Hong Kong! The residents of the monastery also produce tea—while there, the students were able to try their hand at picking buds from the bushes on the surrounding mountains, and briefly take part in traditional hand-processing of the leaves. It's a very special feeling to witness young people connecting with this process and with the locals who have passed it down. That feeling of participating in the sharing of knowledge and culture was one of the most rewarding things about those trips, and is ultimately pretty similar to the goal of the craft of translation. At its heart, translation is about sharing knowledge, and that is something I feel honored to be able to do.

While researching for the translations I work on, I tend to make use of resources in both Chinese and English—while there's a sizeable body of writings in English on many as-



🍵: Emily Foate

pects of Chinese tea, tea culture and Cha Dao, there are often times when I'll come across a concept, or a certain tea, or a production technique, for which no English material turns up at all. For me, those moments feel very rewarding—they're a reminder that I was able to transmit some small gem of knowledge to tea lovers reading in English, perhaps for the first time. Translating for Global Tea Hut, I'm delighted to collaborate with such a positive community of people, and to work with such engaging subject matter (as a translator, this is not to be taken for granted!). It has certainly broadened my knowledge of the world of tea and Cha Dao, and I also have this partnership to thank for opening my eyes to many wonderful new teas.

For the time since I began translating for Global Tea Hut in 2016, I've been based in Toronto, Canada, which has brought many new experiences, too. Some things remain the same, though I still drink tea to accompany my work, whenever I emerge from my page (well, screen) full of characters! I usually choose to drink whichever tea is the focus of the article I'm working on—I like to think that, somehow, this will help channel the essence of the tea into the words that you end up reading on these pages!

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If you serve tea regularly and would like some extra magazines or tea tins to give out to help spread the word about Global Tea Hut, please let us know. We are also looking to donate magazines to public places.



We are considering hosting two Annual Global Tea Hut Trips in 2018: our usual spring trip to a tea-growing region of Asia and a second trip within Taiwan itself. Would this second trip interest you?



We are trying to expand by connecting with podcasts, blogs, journalists and other communities. If you have a suggestion, please email our PR point person, Emily Cross at: emily.global.tea.hut@gmail.com



We have been looking at land for Light Meets Life. Help us make our new Center a reality by reading the "10kx2020" pamphlet and contacting us if you feel there is any way you can help!



We hope to revitalize our video content this year, bringing weekly videos to Instagram and YouTube, along with our live broadcasts. Help participate and let us know what you would like to see.



This year's Annual Global Tea Hut trip has been announced. It is going to be a very exciting trip to Chaozhou (the birthplace of gongfu tea), Anxi, Phoenix Mountain and Hong Kong! Apply on our website.



Our Light Meets Life fundraiser teas and teaware are selling fast (some are sold out). We have some of the best cakes we have ever produced and some glorious gongfu teaware. All the proceeds will help build our future Center, called "Light Meets Life."

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. Make sure you apply early for courses as they fill up fast (this is why we need a bigger, more awesome Center).



We have just acquired a third property, which will be our new office. The old office was getting crowded, and we also wanted some room for future growth. This means we also have more room for you to come serve courses!



We are considering offering one longer, more meditative course for older/experienced students in 2018. This course would be twenty days, cover each brewing method more in-depth and also include more meditation each day. Would you be interested? If so, what time of year would be best for you?



It is worth getting on a waiting list if the course you wish to apply for is full. We often have last-minute openings for courses if you are willing to fly last minute!

February Affirmation

I am equanimous

Do the rolling waves of life upset the balance of my mind? I remember to breathe: breathing in, I am aware of my body and mind. Breathing out, I let go of all tension and rest in the natural Stillness that is my true self, my nature.



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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