

For future issues, submit questions to globalteahut@gmail.com

Throughout all the workshops we have conducted perhaps no question surfaces as much as people wondering where and how to go about purchasing tea amidst all the variety in the world. Tea is spiritual, it is incarnated fully—spiritual in the fullest sense, which is to say that it spans the whole spectrum from physical to Nature and beyond. There is therefore a tremendous amount of less-than-ideal tea: made out of harmony or even in destruction of Nature, or processed in a conversation of greed and personal profit, which defeats the purpose of drinking it: connection and harmony with out inner way as well as the Great Way. How then does one go about finding tea, especially as part of a healthy spiritual life? And how can tea facilitate a communion with Nature, each other and ourselves if it is made in a poisonous, destructive way?

I think that the best way to approach this issue is to move from the abstract to the specific; and since this month's tea is a Puerh, let's end our discussion there. To begin with, we must start by questioning the need to search for tea at all. Why seek communion with Nature? You *are* Nature, so why not let it come to you? In this tradition, we often say: "as the man seeks the Leaf, the Leaf seeks the man." This is powerful life wisdom indeed. Instead of asking how to seek out tea, why not ask why you are seeking at all? Let the tea find you. It speaks for Nature, and has a way of drinking us just as we think we are drinking it. Let it change you. Spirituality is all about *allowing*, not creating, forcing, making or finding. All that you are is already within you, endlessly and completely!

But we can pave the way for better, purer teas to find a way into our lives. In or-

der to do this, you might welcome the Goddess of all Herbs in two ways: First create a pure space for her. She wants to enter a place where she will be revered. Make a time in your day and a space in your life where the tea will be appreciated and respected, where true openness and communication awaits her, and she will enter such a space smilingly. Secondly, there must be a willingness to share. If you wish to enhance yourself, control or selfishly possess her, she will see walking into that space as a movement towards stagnation. Fine tea wants to be shared; it wants to be human and through us find conscious expression. It binds and deepens our relationships with each other because it is in harmony with Nature and us, and because we have the physical and spiritual receptors to receive it.

Traveling on, you can begin to discriminate tea. In this tradition, we like to start with just two categories: living and dead. A living tea is one grown in a wholesome way, in harmony with Nature. When a living tea enters you a dialogue immediately ensues. There is no doubt at all that the tea is alive. Dead teas are often more about sensual satisfaction, but leave no lasting trace; they don't bring your body to life in the same way. The details of different production methodologies is perhaps something we can discuss in further detail in later issues of these newsletters. For now, it is enough that you begin to recognize a living tea from a dead one. And the Ai Lao you have received herein is *definitely* alive!

The world of Puerh tea is very rich—a deep and vast bowl stretching so far that you can't see the other rim except on the clearest of days. There will, therefore, always be exceptions to any principles or guidelines we

give you to finding nice Puerh. Consequently, you should use these principles as rough outlines rather than firm rules. As we mentioned, there are two kinds of Puerh: sheng and shou. Get to know these terms. They are “raw” and “ripe” in English. Raw Puerh is the older variety, and more like green tea. It is fermented naturally over time through aging. Shou Puerh is “cooked”, which means it goes through artificial fermentation—basically wet-piling under thermal blankets. When purchasing young, green sheng Puerh it is almost always better to find personal, small-production, boutique tea rather than anything from the bigger factories. This is because the old-growth trees in the jungle, which have all the characteristics that make Puerh tea so spectacular, yield in too small of an amount to make the arduous trip up unpaved, poor roads worthwhile for the larger factories. They mostly use large-scale industrialized, plantation tea, which means pesticides, chemical fertilizers and weed-killers, etc. For that reason, choose tea pro-

duced by people who love tea rather than money, hiking up and selecting old-growth teas in smaller amounts. With shou tea, however, the opposite is true: choose large-factory production when you are a beginner. Shou Puerh can be a dangerous tea, due to all the bacteria in the wet-piling process. Big factories like Menghai have been doing this for decades. They have the experience and hygienic facilities to make sure it is done in a sanitary way. This outweighs the source of the tea. Very little shou tea is old-growth anyway, because such tea is too valuable as sheng to be made into shou tea.

If any of the latter principles felt too complicated to you, stick to the more general practice of letting the tea you need find you, preparing a sacred home and time for it and a willingness to share with all those you love and all those you have yet to love. In that way, you’ll see that the Leaf, in the end, has a mystical way of finding you, like old and fated friends!

Puerh is typically made in this way:

Sheng/Raw: withering > frying > rolling > sun drying

Shou/Ripe: withering > frying > rolling > *(piling) > sun drying > *(piling)

*The piling can occur before or after drying; if after, the tea is rehydrated

**Sheng and Shou Puerh can both be compressed/shaped into cakes.

***Ripe Puerh is produced in the same way as Raw, but with the additional step of wet-piling, a process similar to composting.