

Our Roadside Huts

Outings in Taiwan, USA, Russia, etc.

Long ago village roads wound around through mountain paths, past paddies and farms, through clusters of farmhouses and by small towns. On porches everywhere, and sometimes on stumps at the start of a trail or a chair by a field there would be a large pot full of steeping tea with an old cup slung over the spout. This “worker’s tea” was for a passerby like you or I: to drink on the way home after a hard day’s labor, or perhaps before the in-breath of a hike into the hills. And there was no need to distrust it, for it was with great care that the owner prepared the tea and carried it out to the stump each day, perhaps remembering a time when he himself was parched and happy to come across such a pot; or maybe a mountain landscape made a deep impression in the pause it took to sip a cup by some other old stump. Maybe he even noticed a crane he wouldn’t otherwise have seen if he hadn’t stopped for some tea. And so he put his own pot out on a stump everyday, in gratitude for those who had done this for him.

There is a great power in sharing the ordinary and simple gifts with another human, because it is in our most basic needs that we find a common ground—no matter how far away from home we find ourselves. Even if you don’t speak a word, you can share a meal or some tea together and smile. When we first came to Taiwan and didn’t speak so much Chinese we shared tea with masters for hours day in and day out and never had a problem. There wasn’t any need to talk, just smile and enjoy the time together. The tea always has more to say anyway. And such simple gifts as some leaves in water shared together in calm joy aren’t just for travels in distant lands. Look right nearby at the people you love and who love you. Are you ignoring your beloved sitting right next to you? Are you distracted from what’s important? And what could possibly be more important than a few moments of shared experience with the people we love? What child would rather have a toy than some presence with his or her parent? It is sad that as the pace of the modern world speeds up, people lose the ability to sit and share meals together, to enjoy quiet strolls in the woods or to sit and just share some tea. Chinese people have always valued moving, eating, drinking and traveling slowly and often still say so when parting. The old pots of tea put out on roadside stumps

sometimes had rice husks floating on the surface, forcing those who stopped to drink slowly. Such simple moments evoke a stillness in us, and through that a communion and sharing of our most essentially human qualities—the place where when you rest in yours and I rest in mine we are one.

It is with such an ancient intention that we set up our roadside huts to serve tea to passersby. With charcoal, mountain water and old-growth leaves we sit and serve tea simply and freely from bowls. There is no aim in erecting our roadside huts, other than to offer a bit of calm space and a pause for tea in a bustling world. Our work is pure and simple, unadorned and non-sectarian. We aren’t preaching any philosophy or theory, nor promoting any technique or tradition. We aren’t offering anything more than a warm smile, friendship and loving-kindness through a bowl of tea and the accompanying calm.

The Buddha said that when something is given with a pure heart it is transformed in the giving. The simplest things then become extraordinary. The heart’s light changes the way everything looks. Sharing tea with passersby in a bit of calmness, presence and stillness is older than the pyramids. In ancient China there were non-denominational monks roaming the mountains. They were sometimes called “forest monks” or “cloudwalkers” because their mountain homes were above the clouds. They wandered those ancient trails in such abundance that the very word for a sage is often “mountain person” in colloquial Chinese. And finding such a sage’s hut was good fortune. They may not have had much food or comfort to offer a traveler, but they surely had some leaves and water—and most likely amazing tea in spectacular spring water.

We seek out the hermit’s hut to find solace and peace. Our life and all our drama—all the vicissitudes of daily existence—can evaporate on the coals the old sage lays, drifting out the window with the steam from the kettle. And then on our return journey there’s a bounce in our step, that wasn’t there on the way up the mountain. Everything seems brighter and cleaner now. Peace is our true nature without our stories.

Other times we head up to the sage’s old hut to seek some guidance. Surely such a sage has cultivated some wisdom in those mountains. And



she'll share it as freely as she shares her tea. The perspective we get from looking down at our lives from such heights can help us to choose a direction, and to better see what lies ahead. In the bustle of the valley, we also often forget what is really important. Up above the clouds, things fall into place and we understand what really matters in life.

Here in Taiwan, and increasingly elsewhere as well, we set up roadside huts in the spirit of those ancient cloudwalkers and forest monks. We too offer a bit of solace from the bustle, some quiet and calm to find your bearings. We have been so kindly gifted a permanent stall in the Hope Market in Tai Chung. Every month we set up cushions on the ground at the market and serve tea to all the guests freely. People love to sit down and share a bowl in loving-kindness, and so often settle into themselves, leaving in a completely different state of mind. We also randomly set up in parks, art shows and other gatherings to share tea with people.

Sharing tea with people is a great way to connect this world and revive the hospitality and sharing so common before we started fearing each other. It is a celebration of the most ordinary mo-

ments of our lives, some leaves and water together for a few moments of loving-kindness; shared freely and without asking anything in return. We aren't asking you to hear us or to think like us, but rather listening to you and offering you a bit of calm and stillness. In many ways, this global tea hut is an extension of that same sharing, only the hut has grown much larger than it once was.

Try sharing some simplicity with the people around you. There is magic in the most mundane things when they are shared with a pure heart and in a space where people are present. A bowl of leaves and water uplifts us and allows us to let go of all the mind-made stuff and see each other as we really are. Chinese people understood this, leaving out a cup of tea for passerby to pause and look up at the sky. And when Chinese people part, they often leave each other with the words: "go slowly."