

AUGUST GONG FU TEA-BREWING TIPS

This month we thought we would share three of the basics of all tea brewing, gongfu or otherwise. These are useful tools to incorporate into your tea practice. If you find you have been doing otherwise, it would be a good idea to right yourself so you don't form habits that will later be more difficult to break. Sometimes we may not understand why the masters suggest a particular methodology, only to realize the important role it plays when we've developed further. Give these principals a try and see how they improve your tea brewing.

The first and most basic principal of tea brewing is to divide your tea space in half right down the center. Then make a commitment that you will do everything on the left side with the left hand and everything on the right side with the right hand. One reason for this is that it is impolite to turn your back on any of your guests, which you will invariably do when you reach across the left side of the table with your right hand or vice versa. Also, it is important for us to respect our teaware. If you reach across the left side of the table with your right hand, you will be blind on the return journey and your elbow or arm is likely to bump or catch on something. Furthermore, it is essential that our whole body be centered in tea brewing, so we should make a greater effort to involve our strong and off hand both. This brings grace and completeness to our brewing.

Second, all movements of the right hand are counterclockwise and all movements of the left hand are clockwise. This is to do with the way our body works, and is a principal of martial arts like Taichi as well. Try rotating your arms both correctly and contrary and see how uncomfortable it is when your elbows rotate inwards if you are going the wrong way; as well as how smooth it is to rotate your arms correctly.

Thirdly, it's best to keep our kettle on our off hand side. Most of us are right-handed, so this means using your left hand to hold the kettle and pour water. As mentioned above, this involves both sides of your body. It is important that the tea be poured into cups from the strong hand, for Qi reasons. If we also use the same hand to pour water, our tea brewing becomes stuttered and lacks a graceful smoothness. In other words, if you use only your right hand, you will have to pick up and set down the teapot lid, pick up the kettle and pour the water, set the kettle down and return the lid and pour the steeped liquor. This requires a jerky motion of pauses and starts. When the left and right hands work in conjunction, the whole process flows so much more smoothly. Rocking back and forth ambidextrously from hand to hand, side to side, the right hand grabs the lid, the left adds water, and then before the kettle is even put down the lid is back and the pot is up and pouring in the right hand.

You can try some experiments brewing in both ways and see the awkwardness of doing it contrary compared to how smooth it is when you let things flow the way they were meant to. These ancient ways weren't created, but rather discovered in harmony with the way tea brewing best flows unobstructed...





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