

# A WUDELICIOUS VISIT

Article by Steve Kokker

In a small town like Viljandi, Estonia, you're bound to meet some people with folk wisdom. With a population of 20,000 it's a town indeed (there's a mall, a strip club and a Chinese restaurant after all) but talk to the people and you know it's essentially a village with town aspirations. The old part of town is a snapshot of the 19th century—almost as if the last hundred and fifty years had not happened. This timeless aura has infused many locals with a sense of the eternal, and the predictable rhythm of the passing, distinct seasons have given many whose lives are still closely dependent on the land some inkling of natural laws. These folk have lived off the land since childhood—they may not be Tantric masters or savvy system players, but they seem to have a deeper understanding of how life (as in Nature, not the Samsara we usually call 'life') works than busy city folk. My vision may be awash with romantic illusion, but humor me, go on. It's an article!

The public sauna (or *banya* in Russian) is a place where life truths tend to be discussed. The sauna is a particularly eastern European and Russian tradition, a space where all are equal, where people go to bare all in front of nonjudgmental friends and lose themselves for a few hours in a heat that envelops, comforts and washes away all that is unnecessary. This is not the tiny, dry sauna found in the western-style gym, nor the gay bathhouse variant—in both of these one can certainly bare all in front of appreciative onlookers but little in terms of acquisition of life wisdom usually occurs.

I just returned from the public sauna in this little town of Viljandi and returned several grams lighter, ready for deep sleep—and a little wiser. I met Jaak there, a mason who built the hearth in my apartment here. A hearth is an antiquated concept for almost anyone living in cities in the developed world, at least for the last 70 years, but before that most any house had as its heart the hearth—a kind of wood-burning furnace/fireplace with extended stone or brick encasing whose job it was to heat the entire home in days before electricity or central heating. It was usually placed in the centre of the house and its walls therefore formed a part of several rooms which surrounded it, heating many parts of the household. In these parts, every older house still has one.

Jaak is over sixty, has a strong build and his grey-white beard and hair lend a friendly dignity to his still-handsome face. I see he struggles a bit with emotional issues. He seems to have been unlucky at love, despite being a charmer and a looker, and is a loner at heart. His son is an alcoholic and he has been betrayed by friends too many times to take too many new ones close to

heart. But wow, this guy is cool: dedicated to his craft, loyal and with a true respect for the world of objects as living beings. It took him about ten months to built my hearth, usually a two month job, as it simply took the time it needed to do it properly, to do it justice. It wasn't a matter of how fast he could get it done, but of how long the hearth needed to be completed.

So there we were, sitting next to each other in the oppressive, sometimes scalding yet still comforting heat, talking about the universally-shared feeling among *banya*-goers of being beyond the reach of the outside world, of having pleasantly dropped out. Outside in the shower area, surrounded by older men dousing themselves with water from metal pails or scrubbing their whatnots on the stone slab benches, I took the opportunity to ask something I'd been wondering earlier in the day: why was the heat he created out of my hearth different from the heat I created in it? I know how and when to regulate the valves and how to start a nice fire but it seems I don't get the hearth quite as piping hot as he can.

Turns out I'm too tentative and conservative with the amount of wood I use: he stuffs some 30 slabs of wood in there and gets a roaring, blazing fire going from the start. It's this intensity, later captured in the glowing coals which maintains high heat once the final valve is closed. In contrast, I tend to use 5 or 6 wood slabs and get a sweet, picture-perfect fire going which is nice to read a book in front of but which will not heat a home.

"The hearth is constructed to heat a large area, it will do its job well if it's treated well," he explained. "If you feed it well and treat it as it wants to be treated, it will give back in spades. If you don't, it will also give that back."

## Law of Attraction?

Sweet story, you're welcome, but what's it doing in a tea-related newsletter? Where's the Cha Dao in this tale of naked masochists and antiquated fireplaces? And what if anything has it to do with Wu De's recent visit? He wasn't one of the naked guys beating themselves with birch branches, after all.

Glad you asked. As I was sitting on the stone bench scrubbing my whatnots, I found that Jaak's words reminded me of a story that Wu De told when he was here in Estonia at our tea drinking sessions and workshops: about a student of his who had felt a total personal transformation after drinking tea for two years, whereas some teashop owners had been drinking tea for 20 years with no such transformation in sight.



Everyone's grandmother too has been sipping tea for 40 years but that hasn't in every case led to spiritual awakening, has it? What's the difference between the student and the grandmother or teashop owner then? Wu De liked to taunt his audience with the question. I won't spoil the plot too much, but it has mainly to do with drinking living tea (vs. the deadened, tortured commercial variety). However, it is also about intent—basically, what we offer to the tea-drinking experience. Don't treat a hearth properly and get tepid heat; don't show ample respect for tea and teaware and guests and oneself, and get half a tea experience. Empty your cup, open your heart, send your ego on vacation, drink living tea and you're well on the way towards spiritual transformation.

This was one, and only one, of the lessons brought up during Wu De's recent visit. These were life lessons, not just tea lessons. That's why they can also be learned among sweating old guys in an obscure Estonian town or in trying to make a fire or in how you prepare tea. That's the essence of Dao—it seeps into everything, not just one aspect of life. During the seven seminars, workshops and drinking sessions we hosted here in Estonia, we likely spoke about tea per se no more than 35-

40% of the time. The rest of the time was... life. "If you want to make a proper cup of tea, you must first learn to be a proper human being."

### *Wu De's Scatters Seeds in Estonia*

It's been a few weeks now since the seminars, time for some of the life lessons learned to sink into a deeper level of awareness. Time also for some of them to be lost and forgotten; some seeds thrown up graciously for all to benefit from have been ignored and let fall where they may by lack of focus, readiness or awareness. That's life. We tend to be so locked into our own habits—of thought, of doing, of being—that when introduced to new ideas or ways of being, initial insight and excitement eventually get relegated to the back, dusty shelves of blurred, inconsequential memories by very strong aspects of ourselves that resist or fear change... or simply do not know what to do with it.

Yet like with scattered seeds, some which do not immediately spring to life or die out might take root at some later point or in unexpected ways. I've seen examples of all of this following the seminars—within myself

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14 and in others. Forgetting and continuing with long-held patterns only with a new illusion of change has been in evidence; we are, after all, habit-loving humans. Yet in so many instances the people who attended these sessions have been transformed in some subtle ways forever. Wu De and the seminars come up frequently in conversations every single day. Many tell me they are continuing bowl tea every morning; or that they think about peace and space differently; or that they've been inspired to clean up their living spaces; or inspired to be better parents to their children; or that they've tried to relate to tea, objects and others as more than just bodies...

For several weeks after the workshops, my staff walked around as if in a bubble, filled with a lightness of being and grace after having received an intense dose of Wu De Wisdom (WDW I believe is the official, copyright-protected acronym). I can say without exaggeration that for a number of persons who attended the workshops and drinking sessions, life will never be quite the same. In quiet moments over sensually steaming cups, or via electronically-bleeped emails, I heard about how some shift of consciousness occurred in the peace of those tea times, or in the words spoken during them. Many have told me that their mornings would now not be complete without three quiet bowls of tea. Most meaningful and most beautiful for me personally, however, I saw the faces—the softened, opened faces of those during the seminars listening, feeling, changing.

Indeed for me the single most wonderful aspect of having gone through the almost two weeks of seminars was seeing the faces of people who mean a lot to me shift. In their eyes reflected an opening towards and budding awareness of another way to live, or approach to life, a way which holds the promise of less mind noise, more connection with oneself, Nature and others—one which brings into bloom the true self outside the realm of what Eckhart Tolle would describe as the “Little Me”. All this with a little help from *Camelia sinensis*.

I received sms texts from guys who had tears in their eyes hours after a workshop, so touched and moved were they by the themes brought up during them; I received emails from others full of thanks, thoughts, feelings; I received heartfelt handshakes and deep looks into my eyes for having done my part to materialise those sessions.

My own tea sessions have taken on a deeper dimension and I am more comfortable with encouraging and dealing with silence in my tea guests. I am working on creating an altar in my living space to encourage the dominance of my higher self and minimize Monkey Brain Interference (hitherto MBI). I learned more about what aspects of the Self and No Self to cultivate in order to cultivate a space through which higher wisdom can be channelled.

Despite my serious tone right now I must also emphasize the fun we all had too. There were so, so many moments of laughter and silliness in and outside of the seminars. Laughter is an essential part of surrendering to one's higher self. So many mind-created blocks and defences fall off when one's head is thrown back in laughter; so many loving feelings emanate outward as the face transforms into a smile. More healing than words even, the laughs we all shared were perhaps the glue which sealed in our insights. If people could only hear some of our lurid jokes—yikes!—we might get some cancellations of the GTH (or a rapid increase in subscriptions from some quarters). Seriously, though, laughter is the grounding force which helps plant the sometimes too-lofty and ethereal ideals we strive for in becoming better human beings.

In short, what an intense and transformative period it was!



*The Incomparable Triin*





*A Few Memorable Wu De Quotes*

In no particular order, no special rhyme or reason... some selected phrases from those enchanted days which jump out from memory:

*A little bit of Triin is now in the dog outside who smelled her.*

*What kind of tea do you expect to find if you drink it at the same time as watching the computer? The kind of tea that is drunk while watching a computer!*

*If you want to bring living tea into your life, you must make room for it. Then, show it respect and love and attention or it will leave...*

*Learn to relate to things and not just use them.*

*When we drink tea with one hand we have a tendency of forgetting the tea.*

*Did you know that tea is a sexual plant—not just us!*

*A lot of work from Nature went into making a tea tree.*

*What relation did the snake poop have on to this tea that we're drinking? This is a reminder of our interconnectedness.*

*When you drink tea that has destroyed the Earth, how can you have a proper relationship with that plant, or with the*

*Earth itself? You can't meditate and connect with Nature spirit while sipping tea that has destroyed the Earth.*

*The timeless sutras of tea are written by Nature and not man. There is no miscommunication here, as what has happened when human prophets' words get mistranslated.*

*How do you Facebook the Google?*

*In the morning, we are soft, we are filling up, just like Nature, so let's fill ourselves with goodness. Make our mornings the first note of our day's symphony, keeping in mind that the first note sets the tone for the entire symphony.*

*There is no separation of anything. As if one cell from your hand could suddenly revolt and say that it no longer wishes to play the hand game! Change one element in your surroundings and you change everything...*

*Gongfu tea teaches sensitivity, bowl tea equanimity.*

*Growth should come from a sense of spiritual advancement and betterment, not from a desire for convenience, expediency or pleasure.*

*The purest form of Love has no object or form.*