

HOW TO BE A GUEST

Article by Dan Smith

Leave your ego at the door, Wu De reminds us. Take your shoes off outside and leave your ego with them. You will be much more comfortable at the tea table without them. But do you know how? It's easier said than done, and maybe this guide can help you practice.

The great majority of Asian people leave their shoes at the door as a custom. Practically, spiritually and metaphorically speaking this act leaves the excess dirt outside. Some in the West do as well, but most don't. If you've yet to adopt this custom, I implore you to adopt it and see how it changes your life. You will feel a newfound respect for your home and frequently be reminded to shed the 'dirt'.

The mind is silly and a 'small self' ego often clouds vision. It seeks opposition to distinguish its *small* self. When drinking tea someone made for you, have you ever found yourself thinking: "This tea is dirty and full of chemicals" or "Should have used a particular piece of teaware or material instead of *that*" or "Ah! My host is making tea like this; their skill isn't as great as mine." Well, yes, it's natural for the human mind to discriminate and distinguish, but try to keep it in check. These thoughts may be somewhat valid: we *do* want to drink clean teas and be good to Mother Earth; we *do* want to improve our tea ware and skills. But do we really want to be encumbered by these thoughts, or worse vocalize criticism while being served tea? The Japanese tea master Takeno Joo said, "Criticizing others' tea says more about your own tea than theirs." Just enjoy the tea.

In this tradition, one way that we describe our path is that we are learning how to serve tea; not make, discuss trivia or 'get into' it. We can also extend this focus on serving tea to being served tea as well, how to drink tea. In our effort to do our best in serving teas to others, we know that the tea session is an extraordinary opportunity. See yourself, see this tradition and the higher self in the person serving tea to you as well. The tea session is special for them too. Be a good guest and leave your ego at the door. Receive the tea; never reject it with your thoughts or words. Your words will probably very obviously influence your host, and I think your thoughts will too. Even if you don't vocalize any of these sorts of thoughts, they will get in the way of the tea session and disrupt the potential for a harmonious interaction between host and guest. If, in fact, the tea is full of pesticides, slow down and think of another

way to drink less or cut the time short. There is a time to talk about responsible teas and beneficial teaware or brewing methods and you can use your own judgment. Maybe wait for the server to initiate these topics. If their mind is straying far from the moment and the tea, you might gently try to bring it back, the same as you'd try to bring your own back when you are brewing tea. "This tea is wonderful. Thank you, now I can breathe," for example.

Don't bring your own tea! Admittedly this took me a long time to learn (despite warnings from my teacher) and I've learned from some mistakes. What are you really trying to do by bringing your own tea anyhow? Innocently yet naively share a special tea you've discovered or rather just blatantly show off? You may think the former, after all you're both tea lovers, but there's a real danger of the latter being felt. This is their time to shine, to have pride in their tea, and practice their hospitality by sharing it with you. Lastly, but not least, don't bring your own tea to a tea shop to share with the proprietor, either. Some of our own Global Tea Hut members who are also tea vendors may be more enlightened and there might be times when it can work, but generally speaking tea shop people have their egos very tightly wrapped up in *their* tea and see any teas coming in from the outside as a threat and chance for opposition, even competition. Oh yes, I learned this the hard way... not again.

Wu De also reminds us "Never turn down an invitation to tea." If you really can't make it, maybe the timing doesn't work out due to responsibilities, then reschedule. By accepting and saying yes you're also affirming life and your respect for tea. Remember that every tea session, every meeting is unique and precious, it's a chance to 'show up' and be present.

一茶一會

yi cha yi hui (Chinese)

ichi go ichi (Japanese)



