



Global Tea Hut

NEWSLETTER #16, MAY 2013

The seasons change round us, measuring our lives... Summer unfolds again... The Grain Rains are ending in early May and as the summer opens the rice silos fill up, as does Nature: with sounds, colors and life. We return to opening and abundance, and at first the curtains of cold rain are only briefly pulled apart to disclose warm, balmy days that make us think summer has arrived, only to be followed by another cool, rainy day that we must give thanks for as it will fill our granaries, and then our bellies. As we mentioned last month, this makes choosing tea each day exciting, as we move towards greener, lighter teas on the days that blossom like summer and return to the last farewell to darker teas on the last exhales of coolness that come with the April Grain Rains.

Tea is harvested up the mountain in spring and down in the winter. This means that lower altitude teas are harvested earlier in the spring, and the higher up you go, the later the harvest. As you receive this newsletter, thousands of pickers will be up on the slopes carefully plucking this year's tea. Raise a cup to them; honor their hard work, for their energy is in every leaf—they select which ones to pluck, and so deftly cut them so as not to bruise the leaf or lose its water too quickly. In Taiwan, tea harvesting will continue all throughout May, as so many tea farms are extremely high, even 2500 meters above the sea.

Tea farmers will be processing tea this whole month. In places like Wuyi Mountain in Fujian, farmers will hardly sleep for weeks—catching a nap of an hour here and there. The tea will have to be monitored day and night. They will sacrifice this time to share tea with the world for the rest of the year. Large quantities of tea will need to be plucked after the rains and they will have to watch carefully, as waiting even a day too long can mean the loss of a crop, and too early will reduce the quality. The first pluck is done in silence, with great reverence. The master accompanies the pickers to the trees and they give offerings to the spirits who protect the land, thanking them for whatever has been given. After the leaves come back, night and day will be devoted to their processing. Tea sheds, aboriginal

huts, factories and farmers are all bustling with tea this month!

May is the Plum Moon in the lunar calendar. It is a time for bounty, for being outdoors and for movement—in Nature and in people. We begin to eat more raw vegetables and fruits, and to stay lighter, shedding the extra fat we put on in the winter by stretching out our bones and moving more beneath the daily warming sun. It is a good time to fast, starting the shift in season with a break in our digestion before we move towards lighter food. It is also a time for harvest in rice and tea, both our staples, which means that we should exercise our gratitude with the stretching we do to bring our body out of the winter stillness. What are you grateful for this month? Do you see that the Grain Rains produce the grain that enables and encourages civilization? Do you respect the tea farmers out in the sun loving every leaf, and the master processors who won't sleep at all this month because their entire annual income is dependent upon the hard work they are doing this month? You honor the farmer by converting the rice into good energy—hard work towards improving our shared world! You honor the tea farmer and processor by thoroughly loving the tea, and by using its lessons to grow spiritually, as medicine for the heart!

In Miao Li county, the Tung flowers cover all the mountains in white and people come from all over Taiwan and beyond to look at them scattered across the hills like snow, covering the ground like sweet rain. There is a festival celebrating this glory of Nature, which the local Hakka people also regard as the beginning of summer and a time of gratitude.

May is also an important month for Buddhists around the world as it heralds the celebration of *Vesakha*, which is the Buddha's birthday. This year it falls on the fifteenth day of the Plum Moon according to the lunar calendar, which is May 24th. Use this month to study some of the Buddha's teachings, and honor him by finding them in your own heart. Maybe this month's tea will inspire you to seek a bit of meditative space, and resting in your Buddha-nature you can find your own birthday as well...