

# YOUR TEA OF THE MONTH, MAY 2013

*Calm Light (靜光), Spring 2013 Green Tea, Nantou, Taiwan*

In this day and age, simplicity and emptiness have become the rarest commodities. Finding the space to be free from clutter, noise or disruption is challenging indeed. In Chinese, the word for a sage, a holy man, is “mountain man (*shien ren* 仙人)”, because there was a time where the only thing one had to do in order to seek isolation and peace was to head up into the mountains. The Chinese cliffs and crags were above the clouds, and free of the dust of the city. It was assumed that the only reason someone would retire from civilization was to seek spiritual insight, and so anyone you were likely to encounter in the mountains would be holy. Also, ‘holy’ in Daoist philosophy could not be other than Nature—sagehood by definition is a harmony with Nature. And where better to find such peace and harmony than in the pristine mountains?

These days, things are different. We must seek the mountain within. Ultimately, so did the sages of old. There is an old saying that it ‘is easy to be a sage in the mountain, greater still in the city; but the highest master is at peace in the palace’. External quietude helps us to achieve inner stillness, but in the end it is much more beneficial to rest in a stillness that is not dependent upon external circumstances—a peace that can weather the storm. Otherwise, your peace is fragile, shattered by the first airplane that flies overhead.

In the Daoist way, peace is about stillness and simplicity. Turbid water is still clear in nature; it is only because it has been upset that it has become muddied. To still the water we have but to leave it for some time. Like that, it is our nature to be bright and serene, if we rest in the simple and quiet. And it is often the simplest things that bring the most joy and lasting peace: like sitting in meditation, quietly walking in Nature or drinking tea. These are also the gifts that bring us closer to each other. In the world, we compete and arm ourselves. We get busy achieving and accumulating, but in the spiritual world it is necessary to let go, step back and find the space to appreciate the simple; and the simpler the better.

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This month’s tea is as simple as it gets. It is a green tea we call “Calm Light 靜光”. This tea is an organic green tea from Nantou in Central Taiwan. It is from a pure area, where all the trees are organic. It was

contributed by our dear friend Master Tsai, who has shared so many teas with us. You can read more about him in the April 2012 newsletter, which is on our web-site.

A lot of farms in Taiwan would have difficulty achieving organic certification in the West since they cannot control what their neighbors do and Taiwan is a small island, meaning that nearby, inorganic farms will influence theirs. Still, we must support the revolution that is happening island-wide. This month’s tea, however, is from a pristine area where there are no nearby farms, making it thoroughly and completely clean.

Green tea is often made exclusively of buds, but this is a simpler tea that includes leaves. It is made with a casual air. Green tea is processed to reduce oxidation as much as possible. If it is made from only buds, it will be picked and immediately fried or steamed to arrest oxidation and de-enzyme. (This process is literally called “kill green” because it kills green enzymes that make tea bitter.) Of course, the moment the tea is picked it starts oxidizing, so completely oxidation-free tea is impossible, but green tea is as close as it gets. However, when green tea is made from bud and leaf sets or just leaves, then it is allowed to wither for a short time. This softens the leaves for processing. When green tea is made only of buds there is also no rolling—the shaping is done during the frying/steaming. Our tea was picked, withered, pan fried and rolled before being oven-dried. In the worldly sense, this tea is simple, cheap and “lower quality”; but in Zen our weeds are treasures and our treasures often weeds. Besides, fashion always seeks the flamboyant, missing the great joy to be had in the unadorned.

Calm Light is the simplest of teas. It is almost like drinking water—clear, simple and open. It doesn’t leave a strong impression. It doesn’t explode in your mouth; it moves through like a soft, cooling breeze that enters unannounced through an open window on a Spring day. It moves like the Dao itself.

We suggest you brew this tea in a bowl, perhaps outdoors. It is a tea that you should definitely enjoy in silence, and in relation to Nature. If your friends join you, you may want to set the intention to have a few bowls in silence. It may also go with some quiet, peaceful music like the CD we have included as this month’s gift. Put a few leaves in the bowl and add water. You may want to use slightly cooler water, like shrimp eye. Hotter water or conversations will overpower this sub-

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tle tea. The tea will merge with the quiet and fill the tea session with an extraordinary ordinariness—with Zen.

It is nice to end such a tea session with a bowl of water. You may also want to try using a single bowl, no matter how many guests you have. Passing a single bowl around is unifying and creates a different kind of heart space. The final sips of water remind us where the tea began and where it ends—from out of Nature and in returning, through us, to the Dao. There is an old saying that true friendship is like clear water; it leaves no trace.

Calm Light is calm and it is bright! You will find the tea cooling, with a soft Yin energy that uplifts you—Qi rushing upwards from feet to head. There is not much to speak of as far as flavor and aroma, other than to say it is simple and refreshing, clean and purifying. It washes out the mouth and palate and frees us, as

only simplicity can do. May you find in this month's bowl a simple, still mind. And may that empower you to act from that center!

*As we mentioned in previous months, we recommend letting the tea get over its jet lag. Let it sit a week or two and become acclimatized.*



