



NOVEMBER 2013

In November, shades of winter begin to set in and we shift more and more to our warmest teas: aged Puerhs, roasted Oolongs, aged Oolongs and occasionally even Shou Puerh (depending where one lives). The world is setting, and this should be a time for turning inward more and more. Maybe you want to plan the retreat you have been thinking about. Morning meditation is an excellent way to invite the winter, especially when followed by some nice tea.

This month, we enter the tenth moon which is known as the “Excellent Moon”. It is a moon suited for self-cultivation of any kind. Traditionally, this month was also a time for honoring our teachers who have given so much to us, from generation to generation. Everything we are is accumulated power: our language the product of thousands of years; our genes are millions of years descended; and even our learning is all built upon the experiences of those who have come before. Wisdom flows downhill. It is in humility that we grow. Every good teacher is also a good student. If she stopped learning, her teaching would also stop. Therefore, a good teacher must also pay homage to her teachers now and again—even if those teachers happen to be her students!

Take the time this month to tell a teacher you love him/her. Paying homage to your teacher is also honoring all the teachers before them. When we remember to respect the source of our wisdom, the wisdom itself also shines all the brighter, and we open to a greater receptivity as well. In Sanskrit, the very word for wisdom, “prajna”, literally means “pre-knowledge”, often translated as “the beginner’s mind”. Being humble and open-minded, ready to receive, is the state of wisdom and learning. When we take the time to pay our respects to our teachers, we also facilitate our learning.

This month some farmers are trimming the tea trees for next year, pruning so that a final flush will help the trees through the winter. Once every decade or so, in traditional farming (like in Wuyi), the farmer will show up to prune the trees and find an autumn flush worthy of picking. In the olden days, tea harvesting only happened once a year, in spring. So these autumn teas were rare treats. Nowadays, plantation tea is often picked three to five times a year, though we know farmers in Wuyi, Yunnan, Taiwan and Korea who are still keeping

to the old ways. If you have such a rare autumn tea, take it out and light some charcoal—share it with some friends. As the weather begins to shift from autumn to winter, a few last gatherings are great.

From now on, these newsletters are each going to contain an affirmation or a question to contemplate throughout the month. We hope that these inspire you each month, and that you will work on reaching your own potential in this Excellent Moon, which is so conducive to self-cultivation.

This month you can ask yourself:

Do I have room to grow?

All living things are growing, changing and transforming. Dead things are rigid; life is flexible. In Chinese medicine, all sickness is stagnation. We live and stay healthy in our growth. And to grow, you need room to grow. You don't report the bonsai when its roots are bursting out. Instead, you change pots long before that—there is always plenty of room for future growth. Is your space fertile for spiritual insight, fertilized by tea and meditation and watered by contemplation and prayer? Do you protect your practice from weeds? Or from predators that would eat it? Similarly, a koi fish will only grow as big as the container it is kept in. If your soul was a koi, how big would your fish be? How large of a container do you keep it in? Is it well-nourished? Where do you put that new painting which inspires you when your walls are covered? Where do I pour the tea if your bowl is already full? Ask yourself where you have room for your own future growth. Which part of your life is left open to growth and which is stagnating? These issues and analogies are all a small part of what contemplating this question “Do I have room to grow?” can encourage, so it's definitely worth thinking about, even for a month!