




A VISION OF LIGHT MEETS LIFE

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In an ongoing effort to define and materialize our new center, Light Meets Light, I would like to share a vision of what certain aspects of life around the center might be like. It may be self evident, but the more real our center becomes, the more real our center becomes! It is my hope that the potential of this vision will excite all our readers. That excitement, combined with the way in which each individual comprehends this story, is all part of the culmination of energy that will eventually get this center built. Just as the existing Tea Sage Hut is a product of great, swelling energy, let my visions and dreams be a spark that helps ignite the fire of connection between us all, blazing the trail towards the greatest tea center the world has ever seen! I also hope that you find yourself in the "I" in this first person story as much as I did when writing...

I love life at this tea center. It's brisk at this time of the morning, when the only sound is that of the clouds retreating into the mountains. A time when most of the animal kingdom still languor and the silence of the rising sun gradually dominates the valley. That early morning scene when all stands still for a moment in time and feels everlasting, but agonizingly gives way to the dawn of the day.

Stepping out onto the center grounds at Light Meets Life, what awaits but to meander through the surrounding tea garden. It's a privilege to walk among Living Tea. Though the well-manicured and wave-like undulations of plantation tea gardens that splash across mountainsides appeal to the senses, this garden appeals to the heart of Nature. Her beauty stems from a harmony with the natural surroundings. Where the tea garden begins and where it ends is defined only by the wind, water, gravity and any other seed-carrier. Tea knows not the arbitrary lines we so often use to bind Her. And who is to say where you begin and the tea ends?

I observe the new growth on each living tea plant, having not yet reached treehood, but many moons beyond their initial seed stage. I feel a sense of stewardship knowing these tea plants were seed-propagated, sown years ago with ample room for root and crown. Accompanied by a blanket of verdant ground cover, things feel natural and perennial. There is an air of connection between the plants, the people, and this Earth. The ground beneath my feet is damp. Twigs, leaves and dewy moss snap, crunch and compress with each wandering step. Yet,

each depression sponges back to life and no path leads to where I am.

Traversing the irregular, boundless garden, I take note of the unique characteristics that each tea plant exhibits, acquired from the biological diversity found within the heart of each seed. Some leaves grow larger, others more serrated at the edge; some crowns grow denser, while others bolt towards the Heavens. Green moss and orange or white lichens take up residence on the main trunks of these tea plants. Some have gone to flower, attracting pollinators and tiny ants. Others have gone to seed and many others are flushing with rich green, pointed buds. The patchwork of life cycles found within this garden is testament to the freedom of plant expression also found in Nature. Though some plants appear genetically stronger, possibly more resistant to certain natural elements, even some with far greater flush output, we make space for them all. Each has a place in the grand scheme of things. Because these plants were seed-propagated and given ample room to flourish, because they maintain strong human relations and exist in a biodiverse environment, and because they are sustainably harvested, most will likely bear strong roots and grow into royal trees. They, like this center itself and the tradition it represents, will long outlive us all.

While the harvest today might be accomplished on foot, perhaps students and guests in the distant future will bestride ladders and harvest tea from the canopies of this to-be old-growth tea forest!

One of the students leads our guests into the Living Tea garden for the day's harvest. They are all mentally, physically and spiritually prepared after group meditation, a simple breakfast and morning tea. We suggest spontaneous periods of laughter, dance, song and silence in celebration of this sacred harvest as it happens only once or twice a year. Small in quantity but strong in Qi, the plucked leaves and buds will be loosely piled indoors for a withering period dependent on the weather. In any event, they will be hand rolled and processed into a simple Red Tea the following morning, guided by a local Taiwanese tea farmer. In the tea processing space at our center, the farmer will graciously share his method of hand rolling tea, which has been so reverently passed down through his family for generations. After the tea has been withered, rolled, dried and let to rest, guests are of course excited to share all they learned with family and friends back home by brewing the very tea they made by hand.

Harvesting and processing tea at Light Meets Life, while a rare experience, is but one of many tea-spe-



cific opportunities made available throughout the year. The entire tea spectrum is covered here, from organic growing, propagating, harvesting, processing, grinding, blending, drinking, preparing, and serving tea, to lessons in gongfu, Cha Dao, tea virtue, *chaxi* layout, scouring teaware, history and medicine, even courses in crafting, designing, or sewing your own tea accoutrements. All of this, aided by meditation, communal living, prayer and vegetarian meals.

Tea is not the only crop to be harvested on this day. Lunch is always celebrated with an abundant assortment of garden greens. Gardeners and eager guests sprightly move from raised bed to bed, filling baskets with leafy greens, brassicas and seasonal root crops that supplement our daily meals. In this way we strive towards sustainability and self-sufficiency. Nearby landscapers busy themselves repairing bamboo boundaries or installing lattices for climbing vegetable vines. Other workers gracefully scurry about gathering river water and har-

vested rainwater. The kitchen hums with life and help is always needed to prepare the vegetarian feast that fuels us along the Perennial Path.

Afternoon tea sessions, discourses and meditation will often conclude a day such as this at Light Meets Life. Every day inspires. Though a lot of activity is always apparent at the center, it stems from a stillness found in daily meditation and tea. In this way, the tradition is kept alive, grounded, authentic and always growing. As the tea withers in the night and fills the room with an aromatic perfume, life at the center slows to a slumber. All teaware from the day is cleaned and cared for; the lights are out. The last remaining traces of incense barely linger and only the altars keep watch in the night. I love life at this tea center.

