

THE CENTER OF A TEA SESSION

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One of the most important insights along the tea road is the realization that you are the tea you prepare. At that point, everything you do becomes your art. And that is the essence of gongfu. But, as we point out, you must experience this truth for yourself.

茶道

For this month's gongfu experiment, we would like you to focus on the most important aspect of any tea session: the brewer. Water is the mother of tea and an Yixing pot is the father of gongfu tea, but neither of them influences the tea as much as the brewer. You'll often hear us say that water is the easiest, cheapest and most practical way to improve your tea, and that is true to an extent—at least on the outer level. But the deepest and most profound aspect of your tea that you can change is yourself!

As we have so often written in these magazines, gongfu tea means mastery; it means skill and harmony with the medium. It is a becoming of the medium. The true potter *is* the clay, just as the best tea brewer *is* the tea. There is an oft-repeated story around here that the student asked the master how to paint the perfect scroll of calligraphy, to which the master responded, "Perfect yourself and paint naturally!" And the same can be said about tea: what you eat affects your tea, as well as how you treat people, the fluidity of Qi through your body, etc. And that is why the road to mastery of tea is also a road to mastery of the self—a Dao in other words.

Of course, most of you will by now have realized that your tea is different depending on your own

state of mind. Quieting your mind while the kettle is boiling is a very important, and ancient aspect of tea brewing. I always teach my students to never, ever pick up the kettle until the mind is still. Nothing good can follow if the mind is distracted or disjointed. (Of course, this doesn't mean you wait and wait and never serve your guests. Pacify your mind as much as possible. In making an effort, you will certainly be calmer than if you hadn't made any effort at all.) Most of you can experience this as you brew tea day in and day out—the difference a bit of peace makes in your brewing.

As your tea practice develops, you may also try paying attention to other aspects of your cultivation and how they affect your ability to brew fine tea—not just fine in the sense that it is the perfect flavor, aroma or mouthfeel, though those are important, but also in your tea's ability to transport and transform people. Experiment with diet, exercise and meditation, focusing on your tea all the while. In that way, tea is an amazing gauge of progress in all things spiritual. In fact, tea has been used to monitor the Zen of students for centuries. Unlike mind-made measures, cleverness won't help! Your state of mind is in your tea, and there is no hiding it from the sensitive. The path

from the mind to the hand is through the heart. As with mastery of any art, the heart from which the inspiration comes is more important than one's talent, even.

You may want to keep a journal, noticing different aspects of your lifestyle and how they affect your ability to brew fine tea. Aside from diet and meditation, the movements and flexibility of your body will play a role in your ability to brew fine tea or create any art. Opening up the channels in the shoulders and especially the elbows and wrists will be important if you are to master gongfu tea.

For this month's experiment, we'd like to drive this point home to you. You will need some friends for this one, preferably people you know very well. The experiment itself is very simple: get together with three or four friends who all know each other very well. Ideally, you should choose a tea you are all very familiar with and have shared many times. With the same teaware, water and tea, switch brewers every few steepings. You can start over a few times if you have the time, switching the order of brewers so that the tea is brewed at different strengths by everyone at least once (since the first few steepings are different from the middle and later steepings).

Besides these practical parameters, there is one other rule: *there are no rules other than that you must behave naturally*. You should act however you feel motivated to, chatting or sitting silently, singing or shouting... Don't feel constrained. Let yourself go. Make sure that everyone understands this before the experiment begins.

Afterwards, you can have a discussion about the ways that the different brewers affected the tea. Did the flavor, aroma and mouthfeel change? In what ways were the physical characteristics of the tea affected by the change in brewers? What about the Qi? Did you notice a difference when you switched brewers? Finally, and perhaps most importantly, what about the ambience? Did people behave differently when different brewers showed up? Did any of your thoughts change? Did

you feel motivated to do anything which you repressed? Since you all know each other very well, could you say that any of the ways in which the energy of the session changed match the character of the brewer? In other words, were people joking when the goofball (*Qing Yu*) amongst you was brewing? Did the session grow somber when the serious person stepped up? These questions may be over-simplified, and the reality more subtle, but you get the idea.

We think that this experiment helps you develop a true understanding of one of the fundamentals of tea. And through it, many doors are opened. Through them, you will realize some new and exciting ways that tea can change your life and the lives of people around you. You will also have taken a step closer to mastery...



動作輕柔

