

GLOBAL TEA HUT

國際茶亭

TEA & TAO MAGAZINE

February 2019

ZEN & TEA

Part III





TEMPLE GATE

This is the third in our now annual series of Zen & Tea, where we can discuss the important relationship between these two traditions, report on our retreats around the world and invite all of you to include some more meditation into your lives and tea practice for the benefit of both, all while drinking a great shou puerh!

*Love is
changing the world
bowl by bowl*

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Admar de Bruin, the Netherlands



寺廟山門



recycled & recyclable



Soy ink

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From the editor

In February, we take trips to the hot springs and drink lots of shou, aged sheng and the occasional blend of dian hong and shou. Have you tried that yet on a cold winter morning? Try mixing in a 60/40 split, with shou puerh as the majority in most cases. The Phoenix Mountain dian hong and shou are perfect, since they are both from the same region and work perfectly together. This blend works best if the two teas are similar in age and flavor, but play with the blending; it is great fun. (On rare occasions, with the right teas, we flip the split to 60/40 dian hong.)

On Tuesday, February 5th, Chinese New Year celebrations begin. Chinese New Year is the beginning of spring in the traditional Chinese lunar calendar. For us, this time means lots of fireworks exploding all over the island, lion dances and drumming, big feasts to attend with friends and family and a deep cleaning of the Center itself, which is a tradition for this time of year. At this time of year, companies have large dinners and offer red envelopes full of bonuses to their employees. Global Tea Hut is mostly created and run by volunteers, but we do have a few employees who help pack your envelopes every month and deal with all the Light Meets Life tea and teaware we send around the world. We also have a full-time accountant named Sundi who has been an angel. She keeps all our books in tip-top shape, with everything accounted for down to the penny! Last month, we took them all out to eat and shared our thanks. The manager of our printing company also showed up with his young family, as did the manager of the local Miao Li post office who has been so kind and patient with us (the largest international customer in the small mountain town). We wanted you all to know that we expressed our gratitude to all of them on your behalf, and maybe at some point during this month, you can raise a bowl for these beautiful people and all the work they do to make sure this magazine arrives around the world.

This year is the Year of the Pig. Each year of the Chinese zodiac is also associated with one of the Five Elements. This year is an Earth Pig year. The pig is the last of the twelve animals in the Chinese zodiac, and thus completes a cycle through the stars. If you are interested in what the year of the Earth Pig holds for your zodiac sign, there are plenty of websites where you can see what astrologers have to say.

This month marks the third year in a row in which we have devoted the February issue to Zen & Tea. This seems to us a great way to start another lunar year of Global Tea Hut. Tradition and returning inward are parts of the Dao, as they are in the life of a Chajin, who pays attention to the weather, the harvest and is sensitive to the seasons in the choices of which teas to brew on any given day. We love having the traditional and seasonal issues of Global Tea Hut to help mark the calendar, like the food issue in January, the Elevation issue and these Zen & Tea issues!

Zen and Tea have been “one flavor” for more than a millennium. Zen monks and nuns were the first humans to domesticate tea. Every tea mountain in China has had a monastery nearby, and the monks either moved there because wild tea was nearby or because it was a good place to grow the tea that they brought with them. It was through the monastery that the mainstream of China was introduced to tea—primarily in the Tang Dynasty (618–907). In the Song Dynasty (960–1279), when Japanese monks traveled to the mainland to bring Buddhist scriptures and teachings back with them, they also brought tea seeds, bushes, teaware and brewing methods, because they knew that if Zen was to proliferate in Japan, tea must also.

Zen was founded on four pillars: 1) no doctrine, no dogma, no scripture; 2) direct, nonverbal transmission between teacher and student; 3) must lead to the heart of a person; and 4) must reveal the truth of Nature as it is. Zen masters of old understood Zen as a state of mind, not a religion. And while the religion, philosophy and lifestyle of temple life can be a basket that carries the mind that is true Zen, it can also get in the way—“religion prevents the religious experience,” as they say. As a result, Zen masters used all kinds of other ways of transmitting this mind to students, helping invent or further martial arts, calligraphy, poetry, painting—and, above all else, using tea to pass on wisdom nonverbally. To understand Tea’s lineage and spread to the four corners of the Earth, one must spend some time learning about Zen. They share the same ancestry.

Join us as we explore Zen and Tea, drinking a deep and meditative shou puerh as we travel through this issue. We will also highlight the various tea and meditation retreats we have shared in this year, hopefully inspiring you to join us in the coming year, or perhaps have a self-retreat at home!



—Further Reading—

This month, we recommend re-reading the first two Zen and Tea issues from February 2017 and 2018, where you will find other great articles on Zen. You may also want to read the Tea of the Month articles from both of these issues to learn more about shou puerh. We also have a whole issue devoted to shou: November 2017.

TEA OF THE MONTH



Over the course of this month, we are going to be drinking a loose-leaf version of our Light Meets Life fundraiser cake called “Temple Gate.” Temple Gate is a solid, classic daily shou puerh. It has some old-growth raw material from the old forest in Jingmai mixed with some tea from younger trees to make it more affordable. But all the trees are completely chemical-free and grown sustainably. It is very rare these days to get intentionally-produced shou, in the sense that most shou puerh teas are made from the factory leftovers that are then piled and pressed. Smaller producers like ourselves want to make shou for shou’s sake. Also, most shou puerh teas are not piled with the skill they once were, usually just artificially fermented to a very high degree over forty-five to sixty days. Temple Gate was carefully piled to a much lesser extent, which means it will grow and change as it ages.

One of the reasons that shou puerh has fallen in quality over the last three decades is the instability of the market and climate. Back in the day when *maocha* was not so pricey, factories had access to a much higher degree of consistency. In most regions to which we travel, farmers complain to us about the variability in the seasons and weather (rains, for example) and the challenges this brings to the production of fine tea with annual consistency. This means that even the same tea from the same trees has less consistency in quality, flavors and aromas than it once had when factories received similar *maocha* back in the 1980s (there was never absolute consistency, just a higher degree). Variations in the market are also influential, as prices can fluctuate greatly from year to year and this means that factories cannot use the same tea they did the previous year as demand has taken it from them or driven the price beyond what they can spend.

The consistency in the golden age of shou, throughout the 1970s and ‘80s, meant that the factories could create blends and then have the years they needed to perfect the fermentation process through trial and error—fermenting different blends to different degrees depending on what raw material was in them. It also meant that they could continue the batch of microbes from year to year, batch to batch—using slur, water or even leaves to pass on the microbial colo-

ny from one batch to the next. Inconsistency in raw material means that most shou is created from random leaves blended together, that the fermentation process goes on to completion and that batches are rarely passed on from year to year the way they once were. Since this method requires less skill, the knowledge and acumen needed to create fine shou puerh are also dying.

The unique thing about our Tea of the Month is that it is piled at the source in Jingmai, and that the locals involved are interested in developing long-term techniques towards crafting the best shou possible, using blends that they are increasingly familiar with. Over time, such trial and error should result in blends and fermentation methods tailored to produce the best shou possible. We hope that this happens more with sheng tea as well, as we think that tea finished at its source is always better than transporting *maocha* to factories for completion.

It is rare to find a shou these days that was intentionally-produced, meaning that a maker set out to create a nice shou puerh, as opposed to making shou as a by-product of leftover and/or lower quality sheng. The tribal people of Jingmai certainly aren’t the only ones in Yunnan doing so, but intentionally-produced shou does represent a very small minority of the total amount of shou puerh produced. It is mostly made by so-called “boutique producers,” which are small labels that create small amounts of puerh—usually companies started by puerh lovers looking to share their passion with others.

This shou is smooth and clean, with a powerful and grounding energy. It’s an amazing tea filled with earthy love and light that is great for drinking and aging. The old-growth material inside makes the Qi wonderful. This is the perfect tea for a cold afternoon or evening spent with some loved ones. It brews up thick and rich, with a creamy, frothy goodness. The “piling flavor” is not quite gone yet, as that will take some years, but it is not too strong to enjoy the tea now. We are proud to promote clean tea in Jingmai, and their efforts to create their own shou tea as well. You can get a small or large cake of this tea on our website if you enjoy drinking it and want some more!



Temple Gate (寺廟山門)



Jingmai, Yunnan, China



2018 Shou Puerh



Bulang



~1500 Meters



A DEEPER SESSION

Further Exploration into Our Tea of the Month



ver the course of this month, we will be exploring the rich and ancient relationship between Zen and Tea, which is to say tea and meditation. Since it is winter for most of us, a good, rich, smooth, clean and meditative shou will warm us, center us and help us explore the meditative mind that is at the core of the relationship between Zen and Tea. Temple Gate is amongst the best shou puerh teas we have ever created.

In Zen, the Sanskrit word for wisdom (*prajna*) is often translated as “beginner’s mind.” We always start over, learning topics again and again, each time with a renewed mind, ready to read and explore deeper levels. In this issue, we are going to review some of the key aspects of shou puerh, from an introduction to the genre through history, processing and tasting. Then, we will conclude with a small section on why shou puerh is an excellent choice for meditative ceremonies, and therefore for Zen, which, along with the cold weather that affects most of us in Global Tea Hut (those down under are in summer now), is the reason we chose to share this tea in February.

So let’s start with the basics of puerh. To begin with, we have to start by dividing puerh into “sheng (生)” and “shou (熟).” Sheng means “raw” puerh; it’s the greener, more astringent kind of puerh, which can be enjoyed when it is young and fresh or aged to ferment naturally over time. On the

other hand, shou, which means “ripe,” is artificially fermented by humans, so it is darker to begin with. The words “sheng” and “shou” are used in Chinese to discuss food as well, referring to “raw/uncooked” versus “cooked” meals. The terms also describe the ripening of fruit. Understanding this distinction is important for exploring puerh, and more specifically shou puerh, more deeply.

In order to better understand tea processing, we also have to return to a review of oxidation and fermentation. Oxidation is an enzymatic process: basically cellular breakdown due, of course, to exposure to oxygen, like when a banana or apple turns brown on the counter. Fermentation is similar, but it is metabolic and involves the presence of bacteria and other microorganisms, like the changes in yogurt, cheese or alcohol. Sugar is converted into acids, gasses and alcohol. This distinction is important in understanding tea, and especially shou puerh, because many kinds of tea are withered (oxidized) to change the chemistry of the tea and remove moisture from the brittle leaves before processing. But puerh is also fermented post-production, which means it has a strong relationship to microorganisms—whether it is naturally fermented (aging) or artificially fermented in the factory, as with shou. Over time, puerh oxidizes and ferments both. These natural changes are more pronounced in sheng than

shou. But we’ll get to the aging of shou in a bit.

Like many genres of tea, puerh starts with “*maocha* (毛茶),” which means “rough” or “unfinished” tea. You’ll hear this term discussed most often with regards to the genres of oolong and puerh, as they traditionally have “finishing” steps that occur later and possibly at a different location from where the tea is initially processed. In puerh, the tea is processed fully (dried) and then sent to a factory to be blended, compressed or made into shou. And even back in the day when the final steps were done at the farm, they were still done at a later date (sometimes months later), so the term “*maocha*” was still relevant. In oolong, it is the roasting, which is done later, or traditionally at the shop rather than the farm. The reason the finishing steps in these teas are completed later is because the farmers have to focus on finishing the harvested tea on the day it is plucked or the quality will suffer. And since there is freshly-picked tea coming in every morning during the harvest season, they have little time to sleep, let alone finish the tea, which can be done later. These days, with regards to puerh, almost all *maocha* is sent to be finished at factories that want control over the finishing steps, like blending, choosing sheng or shou and also deciding what size or shape to compress the tea into. But before we get to the factory, let’s understand what *maocha* is.



Puerh *maocha* is harvested, withered out and indoors depending on the place/tradition and the weather, fired (*sha qing*, 殺青) to arrest the oxidation of the withering and de-enzyme the tea, rolled (*rou nian*, 揉捻) to shape the tea and further break down the cells and then sun-dried. The two defining steps that make puerh unique are the firing and drying. The de-enzyming of tea is done to stop the withering and also to remove green enzymes that make the tea bitter and astringent. Like most teas, puerh is fired in a wok (often wood-fired), but it is done at a lower temperature and for a shorter duration than most kinds of tea. This, along with the varietal of puerh, is why young sheng is so bitter and astringent. Puerh is fired in this way to allow the heat-resistant spores to survive the processing, since they will be paramount in the post-production fermentation process. The sun-drying is what also separates puerh from most kinds of tea, and it is done for the same reason, since sunlight and heat are just what the spores need to start colonizing the tea again.

After the *maocha* is dried, it leaves the farm for the factory. However, it is ideal to finish the tea at source, since the water and micro-ecology will be unique for each place, but that rarely happens nowadays. The tea is then blended or left single-region and compressed into various shapes of cakes as sheng puerh, which can then be en-

joyed young or aged for later. The tea is steamed, compressed and dried on racks (often with fans, but traditionally in the sun) before being wrapped individually in natural paper and then often in stacks made of bamboo skin called a “*tong* (筒).” But if the tea is to be shou, it has a whole other journey to travel.

Shou puerh is artificially fermented by piling in a process called “*wo dui* (渥堆),” which is essentially composting: the tea is piled to about a meter, sprayed with water and usually covered with a thermal blanket. The heat inside is why shou is sometimes called “cooked” puerh. The pile is then stirred regularly until the desired degree of artificial fermentation is reached. To fully ferment the tea takes between forty-five and sixty days.

Shou piling actually happens in two phases, wet and dry. The first, wet piling is more a fermentation of bacteria, breaking down the cells of the puerh. This piling is much deeper, usually a meter. During the second, drier piling, the thermal blanket is removed (if one was used), and the piles are thinned out (usually to around 20 cm). This is where the yeasts and molds become more active in the tea. If the tea is destined to be loose-leaf shou, then the tea will be stirred and dried like this thoroughly. If the shou is to be compressed, the second stage of piling will be cut short while the tea is still slightly damp.

Shou tea has to be compressed before it dries—right after the piling. Some factories do compress aged loose-leaf shou later, but doing so always damages the quality of the tea. Once shou tea dries, the leaves are tight and twisted from the heavy fermentation, so getting them to stick in a cake at a later date requires a much heavier, hotter and deeper steaming than with other puerh, which affects the quality of the tea, lending it boiled-tea flavors. It is therefore always better to compress shou right after piling. If one wanted to use aged tea, it would be better to age the *maocha* as sheng and then pile/compress it later, when it has matured to the desired age.

History of Shou Puerh

Deciding when to begin the history of shou puerh depends on how we define shou. If shou is any artificially fermented puerh, then it is actually quite old, since aboriginals have been artificially fermenting puerh tea in many different ways for centuries: roasting it, burying it, stuffing it in bamboo, etc. Different tribes had different ways of consuming puerh, but it was rare to drink it young and green, as young sheng puerh is astringent and considered “cold” in Traditional Chinese Medicine, and therefore not so healthy for most Chinese people that have “cold” constitutions.

THE PROCESSING OF MAOCHA

採摘
Plucking

萎凋
Withering

殺青
De-enzyming

揉捻
Rolling

曬干
Sun-drying



THE PROCESSING OF SHOU

分級
Sorting

堆積
Piling
Artificial Fermentation

乾燥
Drying

蒸氣
Steaming

壓制成型
Compression

裝箱包裝
Packaging

Consequently, most tribes developed their own way of artificially fermenting, roasting or boiling puerh to make it more palatable. For the sake of this discussion, however, we are going to restrict the term “shou” to its modern sense of piled puerh that has gone through *wo dui*.

Piled shou puerh is a modern sub-genre, beginning in the 1960s. In most books and articles you will find either the dates 1972, 1973 or 1974 listed as the official beginning of shou puerh. There was some confusion, but recent research into historical records has verified that 1973 is the correct date. 1973 is the year the government licensed the first commercial production of shou puerh tea for sale, starting with the Kunming Factory. (Actually, it was first Xiaguan, then the Kunming factory that produced shou. Most authors attribute Kunming as first, because of the fact that Xiaguan succeeded first but did not start production until after Kunming. Xiaguan created shou first, but Kunming sold it first, in other words.) However, research and under-the-table batches were being produced as early as 1965 (perhaps even earlier). It took the factories a number

of years to demonstrate a consistency, safety and quality that the government would license (all factories were state-run during the early communist era). We actually have a ‘60s shou brick here at the Center. More of the batches from that time were done for research, though it is likely that the factories tried to mitigate costs by selling some of this tea illegally as well.

Sheng puerh takes seventy years to reach full maturity. That number is not arbitrary. As sheng puerh ages further and further, the aging process itself begins to slow down. The cells crumble onto one another and the fermentation therefore relaxes. Even a beginner can tell the difference between a one- and three-year-old puerh, just as the difference between five and ten years is obvious. But the differences between ten, fifteen and twenty years becomes harder to distinguish, requiring more experience with aged and aging puerh. After that, even the experts have to start gauging the tea in terms of decades. At seventy years the physical appearance of the liquor will not change anymore: black in the center, moving out into browns, then auburn and maroon with a golden ring at the edge. The tea will

change beyond that, adding depth in Qi and flavor, but those changes will be for the next generation. Of course, puerh can be enjoyed long before full maturity—even thirty-year-old puerh is marvelous. Nonetheless, it is easy to understand why producers, distributors and consumers would look for ways to speed up a process that is measured in decades or even generations.

The process of speeding up fermentation began long ago with wet storage. Puerh lovers, especially in Hong Kong, would carefully store their tea for a few years in warehouses near the sea or in basements with very high humidity, rotating it to higher, drier warehouses occasionally. This “traditional storage” would greatly speed up the fermentation process, decreasing the quality of the tea but allowing people to enjoy it much sooner. In those days, the raw material used to make puerh was very, very inexpensive (especially compared to these days), so they didn’t mind such compromises. Factories wanted to speed this up even more, inspired by the artificial fermentation that was already very established in the black tea industry of next door Guangxi, producing Liu Bao.



Liu Bao and Yunnan had already been exchanging raw material and ideas for decades, so it came as no surprise that researchers from factories in Yunnan would one day show up in Liu Bao to study the artificial fermentation there. Of course, they had to adapt the process because the varieties, trees and leaves of Yunnan are different from Liu Bao and other black teas, and also, perhaps more importantly, the microbial ecology is very different. The “microbial terroir” is why various kinds of beer in Germany, wines in France or even Mao Tai alcohol in China were not reproducible elsewhere, despite many attempts to forge famous examples. The same is true of cheeses, which will be very different when fermented in different places, even if the milk and cultures are the same.

The main difference between the piling of shou and other black teas is that the piles are deeper, wetter and hotter. The thicker, bigger leaves of large-leaf Yunnanese puerh require a deeper pile, and the wetness perhaps was inspired by the “traditional” wet storage—shou puerh is, in fact, the wettest of the wet storage. Wetter piles also work faster. Finally, the factories

in Yunnan added the thermal blanket to increase the speed and degree of fermentation.

It may go without saying that the puerh factories were not successful in reproducing in a month what Nature makes in seventy years. Like “traditional” wet storage, the shou process of artificially fermenting (piling/composting) the tea reduces its quality in terms of flavor, and even more so in Qi, sacrificing much of the energy of the mountain and tree. What they were successful in achieving was adding complexity to puerh by creating a sub-genre that needs to be understood and evaluated on its own terms. You really cannot compare shou to sheng in any meaningful way, whether the sheng is young or aged.

A Dying Art

In recent years, much of the skill and craft that goes into making fine shou puerh has been lost. Overall, the puerh market has gone through many changes in the last decade to fifteen years. Sheng puerh has also changed a lot, which has affected shou puerh

as well. As more and more tea lovers have started consuming young, green sheng puerh, the criteria for evaluating sheng puerh has changed. Back in the day, all sheng puerh was evaluated based on its candidacy for aging—its “age-ability,” in other words. But nowadays, more sheng is consumed young, which means tea lovers now evaluate it on its “drink-ability,” which for us is to say the Ten Qualities of a Fine Tea. And the two sets of criteria don’t always line up, meaning that a tea that is great for long-term aging is not necessarily great for drinking young and vice versa. Many famous vintages of puerh, like Red Mark (紅印), were notoriously bitter when young. Usually if a tea is to be aged long-term, it must be bitter and astringent, strong and vibrant. If a runner is already weakening five kilometers into a twenty-eight kilometer marathon, he probably won’t go the distance. This has all resulted in great changes to puerh production. They have begun to process their puerh more like green tea (or sometimes even oolong, which we call “poolong”). Such tea may taste nice now, as it is fresh, but isn’t worth taking up valuable storage space.

The second influencing factor that has had a tremendous impact on sheng and shou production over the last decade is that the cost of quality *maocha* from nice trees has skyrocketed. Old-growth raw material is extremely rare and expensive, so the overall cost of cakes has gone through the roof, making it hard for tea lovers to age their own sheng. This change has also indirectly affected the production of shou, which is the main topic of our discussion.

As we discussed earlier, shou puerh is never as good as sheng. All things equal—same raw material—the piling of the tea leaves takes away some of the essence. Sheng will always be stronger, cleaner and more vibrant—filled with the energy of the mountain and forest from which the tea came. Also, the natural fermentation and oxidation that happen slowly over time break the cells down in a much more gentle, smooth and clean way, as opposed to piling and covering with a wet blanket, which creates heat and moisture, forcefully composting the tea in a short

period of time. Shou and sheng are apples and oranges: you cannot use the same criteria to evaluate them, as they are very distinct categories of puerh tea. But, once again, all things equal, sheng is better, which is why it is much more expensive than shou. The difference in quality is reflected in the market price, in other words. And that is as it should be. Sheng cakes are much more expensive than shou, especially if the tea is from good trees.

The quality of puerh tea is measured differently from other genres of tea. Most tea is qualified by some ratio between the *terroir*/garden and the processing skills of the producer. Puerh, on the other hand, is evaluated by the mountain and its reputation (sometimes warranted, other times partly hype), the kind of garden and the age of the trees. Since the cost of good *maocha* from nice mountains, gardens and older trees is so high, if a producer tried to create a shou tea from this material, she would have to sell it for the same price as the sheng cake, which very few customers would pay.

In fact, she may have to sell it for more, since, as we discussed with regards to shou processing, shou has an extra piling step in post-production and can, therefore, be even more expensive as a result of the extra labor costs. Also, there is a genuine loss of quality that happens through the piling, which is hard to justify when the raw material is so rare and expensive.

The end result of all these changes is that there is very little intentionally produced shou puerh made these days. Most shou is just a blend of plantation tea grown and produced cheaply. Even if it does come from slightly better gardens, it is still often just the leftovers of whatever sheng puerh didn't sell that year, or from the previous year. These trends have further widened the gap between the quality of sheng and shou. Very few producers start out with a desire to create a shou cake, let alone the skills to execute, though there are exceptions, like our Tea of the Month. (Temple Gate was made to be a shou from conception to plucking and from piling to compression.)





How to Taste Shou Puerh

Flavor (*wei dao*, 味道/*xiang qi*, 香氣): Shou puerh should be earthy, loamy and yet clean. It often tastes of mushrooms, wild forests, leather or tobacco, and Chinese herbs or sandalwood if it is aged. The liquor should be clean, without any murkiness. The flavors should be pleasantly complex, full-bodied and long-lasting. Shou should be dark, rich and remind you of long hikes through an autumn forest, the leaves fermenting along the paths you tread. This is the most subjective of the criteria we use to evaluate shou, as flavor is often based on our memories and personal preferences.

Thickness (*hou du*, 厚度): Fine shou is thick. The best shou teas are creamy, milky and oily—coating the mouth and throat. In the first few steepings, you should be able to see the thickness just by appearance alone. If you pass the liquor between two porcelain cups, you can really see the thickness, as the tea clings to the sides of the cup and spreads like milk. “Viscosity” would be another way of saying this.

Smoothness (*hua du*, 滑度): Smoothness is the most important characteristic for evaluating any tea. Fine tea should be smooth in your mouth, comfortable and clean. It should roll back smoothly and go down smoothly, without any pinch in the throat. The tea shouldn’t bite anywhere, or leave an impression of roughness on the palate, tongue or throat. Try rolling the tea around your mouth to see if it stays together or comes apart.

Mellowness (*chun du*, 醇度): This criteria has everything to do with the “piling flavor (*dui wei*, 堆味).” “Mellowness” is the opposite of this pindy, ammonia kind of flavor. Mellowness also means the shou is free of any off-putting flavors or sensations due to improper piling—musty, funky or fermentation flavors. A mellow shou is clean and billowy, like clouds in the mouth. It should be soft and subtle without any unnecessary or outlying flavors.

Hui Gan (回甘): This tea term is often misunderstood—even by Chinese people. It is a very specific term, so it should come as no surprise that people without experience in tea are often confused about it, the way a layman may use scientific jargon inappropriately. Some people think this has to do with sweetness, but that is actually another term (*hui tian*, 回甜). “Gan” refers to a minty, cool sensation in the mouth, like after sucking a peppermint, brushing your teeth or breathing outdoors on a cold winter day. Chinese people traditionally found this sensation quite pleasant. “Hui” literally means, “to remember.” It refers to when the sensation of *gan* lingers on the breath after swallowing the tea. If you haven’t yet sensitized yourself to *gan*, try blowing out an O-shaped mouth after swallowing the tea to see if a nice, wintery mintiness is lingering on your breath, and then ask yourself if you find this sensation pleasant.

Qi (氣): Qi can also be tricky, as talking about the Qi of a tea gives you the impression that you are in some kind of solid state and the tea is traveling through you. Actually, once you swallow the tea, it is you that moves—your body is moving. Also, some people mistake gross sensations like heat or a caffeine rush for Qi. When we speak about Qi, we are talking about where and how the tea enters the subtle body, and the movement of that energy. In general, a shou tea should enter the subtle body through the chest and cause gross sensations like warmth and an overall sense of ease, relaxation and comfort, like slipping into a nice bath.

Gongfu Shou Production

There are three main skills that go into the production of a fine shou puerh, which are unfortunately becoming rarer, as they aren't passed down within factories anymore because cost and increased productivity have become the aims of the larger factories, while smaller boutiques have more and more focused their energies on sheng puerh production. To make a nice shou puerh, the producer has to start with that aim: evaluating shou on its own terms, with heart and soul bent on creating the best possible tea within those parameters. This means that rather than seeing shou puerh as a second-class citizen, one needs to stop comparing it to sheng puerh altogether. We know that we have said over and over that with all things equal, sheng is better tea, but in terms of trying to create a beautiful shou, a comparison to sheng has no bearing. The producer should instead be focused on what makes a great shou tea, and on honing the skills needed to create one, which we will explore in this section.

The first and most important skill needed to make any fine puerh tea is selecting the leaves, which means sourcing good quality, clean, chemical-free tea from a nice mountain, good garden and as old of trees as possible. Finding organic shou puerh has also become more difficult, as factories resort to using more plantation tea and/or blending lots of tea together in the piling. Back in the day, *maocha* was very cheap, so the factories could really focus on creating fine shou tea as a separate endeavor from sheng, following its own criteria. They knew a lot more about which kinds of leaves, blended or not, resulting in nice, creamy, rich and delicious shou puerh. Sourcing good raw material forms the basis of all fine tea.

The second skill needed to create fine shou puerh is to add starters from previous batches to the piling. This creates long-term bacteria strains, much like sourdough cultures, which can potentially be passed down for centuries. In the '70s and '80s, factories had strains for certain blends/kinds of raw material, which were passed from batch to batch, creating the ideal fermentation for each kind of tea. The microbes can be added as a starter in

three ways: Producers can add "slur," which is the dark water that runs off the piles after they are sprayed, covered and fermented. This thick liquid is full of microbes. Second, they can also add the microbe-dense balls, called "*cha tou* (茶頭)" that form at the bottom of piles due to the heat and pressure. Traditionally, there were fewer *cha tou* due to more skillful stirring of the piles, but it is impossible to prevent them from forming at all, and they make a great starter for future batches. Finally, microbes can be added as a starter by simply saving some of the wet leaves from one batch and adding them to the next. The preservation of certain colonies of microbes for certain types/blends of raw material (*maocha*), improving over time, creates the best fermentation. After all, it is the microbes that are doing all the work in making shou tea, and so a healthy colony will, of course, result in a better tea. If the microbial colonies are off in any way, the tea will also have off flavors, as with any fermented product in the world.

The third skill needed to create fine shou is the skillful management of the piling process itself. This starts with knowing how much water to add, when to stir the leaves and how often, as well as when to add or remove the thermal blanket depending on the ambient temperature. More importantly, skillful piling is about understanding the desired degree of fermentation relative to the leaves being piled. Different blends/types of leaves need to be piled to different degrees. Nowadays, as fewer producers focus on shou puerh, these skills are being lost (except the skill of recognizing when shou is completely fermented, and some factories have lost even that, going beyond the time the tea is as fermented as it can be). It is much easier to fully ferment the tea for forty-five to sixty days, no matter what kind of leaves are used. However, this is not ideal for fine shou. The best shou teas are fermented more lightly than this and are stopped intentionally and at a precise degree of fermentation that is ideal for the type of tea being piled. As we discussed earlier (more than once), shou is lower quality than sheng (again, all things equal) because the piling process alters the tea, and some of the natural purity of the old trees and the mountain forest where the tea grew is lost as a result

of this processing. Obviously, if the fermentation is done to a lesser degree, these changes are also less aggressive, preserving more of the natural essence of the tea. Knowing when and how to stop the piling is a skill that requires a deep understanding of different types of leaves as well as knowledge and experience with fermentation.

Aged & Aging Shou Puerh

Many shou puerh teas from the '70s and '80s would taste like an aged sheng to the inexperienced puerh drinker because producers knew that many of their customers would age the shou tea. Since the blends were intentionally produced, using fine quality raw material, and then artificially fermented to a much lesser degree, the newly-produced shou tea was still "green," especially compared to all the fully-fermented shou puerh teas sold these days. This means that the tea still had room to naturally ferment. It was worth storing these teas long-term, in other words, as they would grow and change over time—fermenting and oxidizing like a sheng, only to a lesser degree. And this is the main factor in storing shou puerh even today.

To properly store shou puerh, a tea lover should learn to recognize the degree of fermentation used. Ideally, one would have access to fine shou puerh, produced using the three skills we discussed earlier (like our Tea of the Month, Temple Gate, for example), but that may not always be possible. Tea artificially fermented to the right degree will change over time, becoming more complex and richer just like sheng puerh. It is worth devoting shelf space to such tea.

Fully-fermented puerh is often "pondy," tasting of ammonia or pond water due to the aggressive and long piling process, which results in the production of many gases as the tea is forcefully composted over forty-five to sixty days. Such tea is not suitable for long-term storage. Since it was already artificially fermented to a high degree, there isn't much room for it to change over the long haul. There is little left in the leaves for natural fermentation and oxidation slowly over time, in other words. But that doesn't mean we shouldn't age fully-fermented shou.

The best option for most of the fully-fermented shou teas is to mellow them out. “Mellowing” is so relevant in today’s puerh world, full of such shou, that it is even a criterion of all the shou tea reviews we conduct for various tea magazines. Of course, one should start with organic, clean shou, even if it was piled unskillfully. Then, you age it for around ten to fifteen years. There is no point in going beyond this. Ten or fifteen years is enough to mellow the tea out, which means that it loses the pindy, “piling flavor (*dui wei*, 堆味)” it had when it was young. It will become smoother, thicker, more creamy and gentle as well. The aggressive piling of most shou puerh teas makes them rough, so mellowing them out will result in a much more enjoyable tea liquor.

If you find intentionally-produced shou puerh that was artificially fermented to a proper degree, then you will have found a candidate for long-term storage. Such tea will grow finer and finer over time—the older, the better, in fact. Our Tea of the Month fits into this category. (It would be great if everyone shared some more ex-

amples of such shou on the Global Tea Hut app this month!)

Whichever kind of shou you are storing, it should be stored like all other teas: in a cool, dark place that is clean and free of aromas. For that reason, the kitchen is always the worst place to store any tea, as the air is full of oils, spices and other smells. Find a nice, quiet place that is consistent in temperature and dark. Puerh needs some humidity and airflow, which most other teas do not. A fluctuating humidity that rises and drops seasonally is ideal, with a minimum of sixty percent humidity, which is the low end for puerh (this means indoor humidity, not based on an outdoor hygrometer).

It is important to keep shou puerh away from all other kinds of tea. The strong piling aromas of shou puerh are notoriously detrimental to all other kinds of tea, especially delicate teas like green, white, yellow or young sheng puerh. Shou should have a cabinet all to itself, kept clean and apart from all other teas, though you can store both kinds of shou together—those you are storing long-term and those you are mellowing out.

The more puerh stored together, the better—a warehouse will produce far better tea than a few cakes in a cabinet. Traditionally, we store all puerh as at least a *tong*, which is seven cakes wrapped in bamboo skin and an extra cake left loose (eight cakes in total). The bamboo skin protects the seven cakes in the *tong*. The extra cake is for tasting over time. Tea aged in a whole, unbroken cake is far better for the long run, as it ages at the right pace, and when it is time to drink a tea, breaking the cake up completely and storing the pieces in a jar for at least a month will result in a much better liquor. This is important, since after a long period of storage, the center of the cake has not been exposed to any oxygen throughout that time. Breaking a cake up makes more even, smoother tea. This is why we need the “tester” cake: to determine when it is time to dig into a tea (when it has aged to the desired degree of fermentation/change). Then we can break a whole cake up and store it in a jar for consumption, carefully closing up the *tong* to protect the six remaining cakes, and so on until the tea is gone...



SHOU PUERH & MEDITATION

All three of our Zen & Tea issues have included a shou puerh. Of course, they have all been in February, and shou is the one of the best teas for cold weather. But they were also chosen because of the relationship this tea has to meditation. Aged sheng and shou are perhaps the most meditative genres of tea, though a nice aged oolong is also at the top of the list.

The first reason that shou is nice for meditation and ceremonial tea is, of course, the Qi. “Qi” literally means “breath;” it means energy, flow and movement. Qi is the movement of all things in this world. In our bodies, it is the beating of our hearts, inflation of the lungs, movements of blood and hormones on the gross level and the vibration of subatomic particles on the subtle level. The subtle movement of energy through our beings is what we refer to as the “subtle body.” Sometimes people talk about the Qi of tea (cha Qi), but this can be slightly misleading. When we say that the tea has a “lot of Qi,” which means it has a strong influence on the subtle body, this can create the misunderstanding that we are like a solid tube through which the energy of the tea moves. However, the truth is that as soon as we consume a sip of tea, it becomes us. The tea is not moving through us; it is we ourselves that are moving. The tea is more of a catalyst, in other words. Furthermore, the energy of the tea got into the plant through the water, minerals and sunlight the plant photosynthesized, so there is, ultimately, no “cha Qi,” but just Qi—the generative flow of energy through the substance of the world.

Sometimes people mistake the gross effects of Qi for cha Qi, which are actually chemical effects (usually caffeine). They feel that the strong awakening effect of a tea or rush of energy is Qi, but this is the effect of the Qi moving, not the Qi. The movement of Qi is felt in the subtle body: the subtle sensations on the surface and within the body that we can learn to experience physically through meditative practice. This may feel like a tingling or similar to numbness (without the dulling sensation). This movement catalyzed by fine tea can be healing, restoring calm and balance and even

break through stagnant blockages if the tea is strong enough. Like an acupuncture needle, a fine tea can cause a great rush of movement through the subtle body that results in significant psychosomatic changes.

Clean, healthy, living puerh has more Qi (or catalyzes more movement) than other genres of tea in general. The Qi of puerh is stronger, more vibrant and often flexes more of the subtle body. Oolong teas, for example, enter the subtle body through the nasal cavity with energy that moves upward, which is why they are more enjoyable in smaller cups that force smaller sips. Puerh, on the other hand, is best drunk in large gulps from larger cups. It enters the subtle body through the stomach and chest, covering a large area with more vigor and spread. This sensation can bring about a stronger calmness, groundedness and general ease than oolong or other teas, which are often uplifting and soft, resulting in mental activity, vision and often movement away from the body (not literally, but in the mind).

Shou puerh embodies us; it brings us down into our roots and fills our bodies with strong energy that is rooting and grounding—perfect for meditation. Even on a grosser level, shou puerh is warming. It creates a soft warmth in the chest and stomach that is good for digestion and perfect for colder months like this (for most of us). This warmth is a gross effect of what is happening on the level of the subtle body: strong foundational and grounding movement that is vigorous and downward. Grounded and more in our bodies means more Yin energy, which is conducive to a meditative space. This groundedness, coupled with the warmth that shou provides, is like sitting under a blanket in the meditation hall on a long day of retreat, many hours in after the consciousness has settled into the posture and thoughts have been dropped.

We recommend drinking this month's tea in a quiet place with an hour or two to spare—enough time that you can let go of time. Drink a few strong, creamy and dark bowls of Temple Gate and relax. Breathe deeply and close your eyes as you inhale.

Notice the flavors and aromas first and then the warmth in the stomach and chest. Feel the subtle body if you can, recognizing the vigorous pulse of the Qi catalyzing your body through this magical tea. Then, find the calm comfort, like a trip to the hot springs, and settle your mind in that comfortable stillness. Open your mind and stop actively thinking, letting thoughts arise and pass away like clouds. Nestle deeper into the warmth and release the mind, transcending the rational concepts, language, habits and other cultural or personal fabrications...

Normally, we practice seated meditation or tea ceremony separately, though tea ceremonies are a kind of meditation in motion. However, sometimes it is nice to enter the Zendo with a bowl and spend a long thirty-minute period drinking a single bowl very, very slowly while practicing Zazen at the same time. This slows the tea drinking process way down and adds a dimension of sensual stimulus and very occasional movement to the act of seated meditation. This can help to bridge the cushion and the tea table in some profound ways. It also brings a degree of breadth to Zazen, though we don't think it is a replacement for formal Zazen.



Brewing Tips

冲泡技巧 完成好茶

This month we are drinking a beautiful, rich and complex shou puerh. Overall, shou is a very forgiving tea, which means it is exceptionally easy to brew—it is difficult to put too much in the pot and the steeping time is also very flexible. However, the one key element to brewing a good shou puerh versus an excellent, life-changing shou puerh is heat: shou puerh requires a deep, strong heat, especially in the winter. A deeper, more penetrating heat will take this month's tea to the next level. If you have been thinking of starting a charcoal practice, or adding charcoal to your tea life, this is the perfect month to do so.

In order to begin using charcoal in tea, you will first need the right room. Carbon monoxide is incredibly dangerous—so much so that it is measured in “parts per million (PPM).” Make sure that you have proper ventilation in your tea space if you want to use charcoal. You can get a carbon monoxide detector and measure levels if you are unsure. If you do not have great ventilation, a solution is to boil your water on a windowsill, in the chimney or outside on the patio, and then use an alcohol burner inside to maintain the temperature.

Next, you will need a brazier to put the charcoal in. There are essentially two types of braziers: closed and open. Open braziers offer more freedom and control of your charcoal arrangements and the temperature but are much more difficult to use. Since the charcoal starter smokes, this requires lighting the charcoal outdoors and then bringing it in and rearranging it in the open brazier with tongs or special charcoal chopsticks. We always recommend starting with a closed brazier. This is easier to start, and you can arrange the charcoal and get it going outdoors and then bring the whole brazier indoors. The confined inner basket of a closed brazier is easy to fill with charcoal and get going: one simply places some bits at the bottom and charcoal all around the sides, leaving a shaft down the middle for air and heat flow.

After getting a brazier, finding charcoal is the next step. Not all charcoal is created equal: some is more toxic, and others just don't burn as well. If you are using your brazier outdoors and then bringing the kettle in to an alcohol burner, the carbon monoxide levels of the particular charcoal you use are maybe not as important, but if you plan to use it indoors, you will want an odor-free, smoke-free, non-toxic charcoal with less carbon monoxide. We recommend well-fired, hardwood charcoal over the compressed types. Olive pit charcoal can also be great. Try to find a Japanese importer that sells charcoal for fancy barbecue. The options, of course, depend on where in the world you are.

Once you have a brazier and charcoal, you will need a starter. Try to get the kind that is made of compressed sawdust without the addition of kerosene or other chemicals. Some also have wax around them, which melts onto the charcoal and can keep smoking for a long time. We prefer the simple ones that are just compressed wood and do not last long. If your charcoal is good quality and you arrange it well, it won't take much to get it going well in a closed brazier.



Gongfu

Sidehandle

Water: spring water or best bottled

Fire: coals, infrared or gas

Heat: hotter, fish-eye, roughly 90–95 °C

Brewing Methods: gongfu or sidehandle tea (both are great)

Steeping: longer, flash, flash; then increase (you may flash once for sidehandle)

Patience: twenty to thirty steepings

茶 Use as hot of water as you can this month. This is a great month to heat your water on charcoal. Remember that the heat in charcoal is not in any piece, but the flame created in between the pieces!





茶禪



禪

禪



禪

禪

Chinese Character for Zen

The Chinese character for Zen (禪) is composed of two radicals: “示,” which means “to manifest” and “單,” which means “simplicity.” Zen is to manifest simplicity, in the stillness of meditation and the celebration of the extraordinary ordinary in life. To manifest simplicity means to live authentically, connected to the raw and true experience of life that arises when we open our consciousness beyond rational thought, learning to live in the present moment and in tune with our connection to the universe we are a living expression of.

The pictographic symbolism of the character for Zen is more clearly seen in older versions of the character. The left side of the character represents a censure with three incense sticks burning in honor of the “Triple Gem” of Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha. In a more literal sense, “Buddha” refers to the historical Buddha, Sidhattha Gotama, but in Zen this first gem is thought of as the “awakened mind” or “higher self” in all of us. Dhamma could be thought of as the teachings of the Buddha, but a Zen understanding of the word is “truth,” “reality as it is” or even “raw life experience.” Sangha, then, is the community of Buddhist monks and nuns, as well as the Buddhist saints of history from a narrower perspective, and all the saintly people and practitioners or seekers of all traditions, as well as the saintly qualities they strive to embody, from a broader, Zen perspective. The left side of the character for Zen symbolizes these three “gems.”

The right side of the character for Zen represents two eyes poking above a shield. The two eyes are the eyes of you and me as we move through the world, protected by a shield of religion. Consequently, the overall symbolism of the character is that the Triple Gem protects us from the world. By identifying with our Buddha Nature, our highest self, striving to live in concordance with reality as it is and by working to embody the saintly quality of our role models and guides, we are protected from the vicissitudes of life. The protective quality of Zen is, therefore, inward rather than outward. By identifying with something larger than ourselves, in living by vow, we are shielded from all the chaos of the world. Our highest self is not influenced by a change in clothes, as we perhaps move from poverty to riches or vice versa. Reality and truth, in the evolution of life in this universe, are not affected by our birth or death. It is the living, generative flow of Qi through tissue, as energy moves and flows through many forms from single-cell organisms to humans—both in evolutionary terms and with regards to the exchange of energy that is the daily food chain on Earth. And when we realize that our life is the reality that we experience, the flowering of all things in our experience is our own blossoming. We therefore strive to cultivate our saintly qualities, blossoming the light of Buddha Nature in all things, people and situations we encounter.

The etymology of the word “Zen” can also help elucidate and introduce Zen to newcomers. In the West, we use the Japanese word “Zen” to discuss this practice/philosophy/religion. The word “Zen” comes from the Chinese “*Chan* (禪),” which was pronounced “*Tsan*” in the south of China where most Japanese traveled to learn about Buddhism and then translated to the Japanese word “Zen.” This etymological journey continues onward, though, because the Chinese word “*Chan*” is itself a translation of the Sanskrit word “*Dhyana*,” which was brought east with Buddhism in the early days of proselytization. “*Dhyana*” is a rich and complicated word that, in essence, refers to the “meditative mind.” It is akin to Heidegger’s “being-onto” any phenomenon by being calm, open and connected to it in the present moment. “Zen” is this state of mind.

In that way, Zen is more (or less) than a religion, and doesn’t fit neatly into most definitions of religion as such. In Zen, there is no God, nor a denial of God; no working soteriology; no dogma or doctrine to rely on—just a state of mind that is ineffable and irrational. You cannot hold Zen in your mind any more than you can hold the wind in your hand. To understand the wind, we must open our hands and arms and close our eyes, breathing deeply as we spin around with a smile of joy on our faces. Like this, Zen is drunk, hot and steaming with truth...

A BOWL OF ZEN EMPTIED

茶人: Wu De (無的)



This article by Wu De is a great way to begin this issue, by diving head first into the depths of these ancient traditions, exploring the profundity that they both try to capture and express through simplicity. Zen is no ordinary religion. It has no prevalent dogma, rites or rituals; there isn't even any coherent soteriology—Zen is an experience! And throughout the ages, masters have used a wide variety of techniques to help instigate that certain sensation in students: a recognition of the fact that the so-called “self” is an illusory construct of social programming and the nature of rational, as well as linear, linguistic thinking. This experience cannot, however, be easily described or conveyed in words, concepts or ideas; it must be lived through. And in imagining these ancient gardens, monasteries and forests where intuition was passed on from master to pupil, we invariably find steaming bowls of tea nearby. In this article, Wu De introduces some of the important ideas and practices that make up a life of Zen lived, relating them back to a tea practice. He also provides meditation instructions so we can begin or deepen our own journeys.

To talk or write about Zen means to get in the muck of ideas *about* Zen, leaving the garden path of the living, experiential practice Zen is founded upon. This is why Zen teachers paint as much as they discourse, and also why they say illogical, absurd things when they do discuss Zen... it is much better to just drink some tea in quiet! Alas, humans like slogging, so let's put on some rubber boots and wading pants with suspenders and go trudging for a while. Maybe have some tea before we do, or perhaps after the kettle boils. That gives us a few minutes...

Zen is unique in its appreciation of the distinction between our conceptual representations of reality through words and thought constructs and reality itself when the mind sets down thinking. This “distinction” is, of course, a paradox unless the experience of “reality itself” also includes the conceptual. Of course, thinking is a natural expression of life, and Zen is not opposed to rationality, but life and experience go on even without thought and are a prerequisite of thought. When we are in deep sleep, our bodies continue to breathe and our hearts beat. The life force that beats my heart also motivates the owl that awakens as I go to sleep, and it also causes the fern to grow upward towards the sun. First there is life, and then there is the mind that can define it. Experience is larger than our intellect, in other words, and includes many aspects of life that cannot be rationalized.

In the West, some of us have come to feel that our worldview over the last centuries has become more and more intellectual and we have felt suffocated by the need to live in a conceptual, abstract reality based on definitions—including a definition of what the “self” is. And when we set down our thoughts or gain distance from them, this moment here and now becomes the only reality there is—the greater field of life and experience that our life takes place within asserts itself, as it does in moments of danger or ecstasy. In that way, our experience, including the intellect and its amazing thought constructs, is a part of the world; we are an expression of the universe itself living individual lives.

Most of us live our lives defining ourselves based upon our relationship to “other,” whether that be other people, situations or our roles. We are a doctor, a father, a brother or perhaps a race or religion, diet or sexual orientation. We also use comparisons to create identity, like having “less” or “more,” a “success” or a “failure,” etc. We create an identity by relating to things and people outside of ourselves, seeing the world as “opponent” or “ally,” “friend” or “foe,” and experience is either “wanted/desirable” or “unwanted/undesirable.” This list of concepts becomes our identity, starting with ideas about race, gender and socio-economic status, and then including our political and religious views, our sexual orientation and diet, and on to our preferences and desires, opinions and even

our goals, material or otherwise. But in Zen, we are asked to look beyond all of this, understanding that this is all like clothes that we wear, and not our true, naked self underneath—the self we were when we were born and to which we shall return when we die.

It is important to note that Zen is not denying or rejecting any of these aspects of our self. Our clothes are an important part of who we are. But along with all of these ideas about who we are is the universe flowing through us, living itself in our form. This truth is this moment just as it is, without any definitions or concepts. In order to categorize and conceptualize abstractions, we must have a human body, and in order to be embodied, there must be an environment—plants, animals, an Earth and starlight. And all of that is as much or more a part and parcel of our life and experience as any of our ideas, concepts, categories or other intellectual abstractions.

Zen is not irrational; it just includes the non-rational perspective. It is trans-rational. In Zen, we learn that the concepts we use to define ourselves are second-tier experiences. There is life first, and then there is abstraction about life. There is a living being and then there is the possibility for rational abstraction and relationship to our world. And this life is an expression of water, rain, minerals, sun, all the plants and animals, and so on—these atoms were born in a star billions of years ago and have the weight and movement of the cosmos behind their movements.



We are all motivated by starlight, and that precedes our ability to create an identity based on our roles and ideas about the world. This is not a mystical “other,” but an aspect, a layer, of our direct experience moment to moment.

Setting down our thoughts does not mean blankness; it means not actively drifting in the thoughts and losing the body of the present moment and the environment. Some Zen masters compare this to driving while thinking or in a sleepy state, which is dangerous, versus driving with an awake, present awareness and attention to the car, the road and the environment around (other cars).

Zen practice is a demolition site. In order to know the self fully, we dig down through all the sedimentary layers of our beings—past the categories and language, concepts and ideologies, the habits and preferences, and even challenge the part of the mind that

divides the world into subject and object, “self” and “other.” Once we have access to the space that surrounds all this mental clutter, we recover an older type of experience and wisdom. We learn to see reality without any personal or cultural fabrications. Some Zen teachers call this “*mushin*,” which literally means “no mind,” not in the sense of confusion or zombie blankness, but rather clarity and true seeing.

This practice of self-discovery is time-consuming and never easy. Each of us comes to the meditation cushion with our own preconceptions about who we are, and these are constructed from a lifetime of experience, and even more powerfully often draw upon the collective history and experience of humanity for source material. But learning to see clearly and include presence, open awareness and the universe living through us into our experience of this world is perhaps a more authentic and

full expression of who we are. What amount of my experience is filtered through personal and cultural fabrications of the mind? How often do I resort to a completely intellectually-based approach to my interpretation of sensory data without including the intuition, instinct or other non-rational aspects of experience?

Our expectations about the way things should be often get in the way of our ability to be fully in the world, present and awake. We argue with reality, and we always lose. Our beliefs about the “way it is supposed to be” prevent the universe and its starlight from shining through us, and make life more difficult than it needs to be. Intuition is drowned out by the cacophony of thoughts, which are often amplified by our over-dependence on technology and social media that stir the pot constantly. Without the intuition’s role, navigation becomes a



purely intellectual system, using pros and cons or other conceptual frameworks to make choices in a very convoluted and complicated world (made such by the mind). This doesn't mean that the mind shouldn't play a role in our decision-making processes, but that the intuition and a deep listening to the situation and environment with a mind free of personal or cultural fabrications also play a role in the navigation of a healthy system.

Good for Nothing Zen & Tea

Many Zen teachers discuss “good for nothing Zen.” This is an attempt to make goallessness a goal, which seems absurd when you discuss it (and is logically thus), but makes sense in practice. This marks a distinction from a

goal-oriented practice, in which a person practices Zen to improve her life. In “good for nothing Zen,” the practice is done for its own sake. It is not to improve our lives or to achieve any other goal than being goallessly open to the present moment.

This illogical work is meant to sabotage the mind's constant move away from the present moment. That mind could be called the “not now but later” mind. In the “not now but later” mind, this moment is never enough, never full, rich or alive enough. It is only after we get something, achieve something, meditate more, be or do more that we will be complete. The first issue, of course, is that even if we do reach that goal, we will have brought the “not now but later” mind with us and that moment will also be interpreted as lacking in some way. The second, more cosmic issue is that reality itself is always in the present moment. There

is no past or future, save that which we see through the present moment. We are always here and now—always present. The body never time travels; only the mind can project itself away from the present, though not really. The “not now but later” mind makes the present dull and foggy, like driving down a dark, misty country road. And so if your illogical Zen-goal is to be fully present and goalless, obviously starting with a goal like “satori” or “enlightenment” is counterproductive, as it just changes the focus of the “not now but later” mind to Zen. We need to deconstruct the whole of the “not now but later” system of living and navigating and construct a “goallessly now” mind. This is the goal of “good for nothing Zen.” When you read that one should make goallessness a goal it sounds foolish and absurd, but when you sit Zazen it makes sense. It is applicable, in other words.

Sometimes we construct stories of an enlightened future where life has no more challenges or envision a more spiritual and greater version of ourselves, which is not us. But this is akin to wishing for death, as life is and will always be filled with challenges. Life is never flat and even, but full of peaks and valleys. Surrendering our goals allows us to rest in practice—to *be* practice. This is an understanding that the goal of exercising is to live a healthy life, not to exercise until one doesn't need to exercise anymore. In other words, the goal of exercising is to be a healthy human that exercises. In the same way, we practice “good for nothing Zen” as its own goal. The goal of such practice is to live a life of practice. All that I encounter is my life—my ownmost being from birth to death. *All experience is essential.*

“As our dependence on technology increases, so does the amount of stimulation and distraction in our lives. Nowadays, it is very easy to slip down a rabbit hole on the Internet and come to an hour later, feeling like we’ve wasted our time. We have become accustomed to filling every waking moment of every day. Whenever there is a pause, like a red light, people grab their phones and start looking at apps, messages or other sites or programs. We move from distraction to distraction and don’t take the time to step outside of time.”

Earlier we talked about how our abstract ideas about “the way things should be” often prevent us from really being-onto the way things *are*. Another word for “the way things should be” is “expectations.” It is often our expectations of a situation that prevent us from being present onto our life as it is and learning the lessons we *need* to learn, as opposed to the lessons we were looking for. Failed expectations cause us to reject experience that is vital, present and real. “Good for nothing Zen” helps us be rid of the mind that expects things to be a certain way, and then complains that they “should” be that way when they aren’t. In “good for nothing Zen,” we learn to be present onto whatever is, and then respond to reality by working with what it is, rather than trying to work with a fantasy of what we think reality should be on our mind’s stage.

Another important term in “good for nothing Zen” is “*shinkan*,” which means “doing nothing but this.” This prevents us from making goallessness itself into a compelling goal that encourages the “not now but later” mind. All that I encounter is my life. *Shinkan* means doing with complete being; it means that the mind, body and soul are all immersed completely in the activity and the environment in which it is happening. As Alan Watts said when introducing Zen: “Zen does not confuse spirituality with thinking about God while one is peeling potatoes. Zen spirituality is just to peel the potatoes.”

One simpler way of thinking of this is to say that one’s only problem is thinking that there are problems in life. The real problem is assuming that reality should be other than it is, which is not even an efficient starting place

for positive change in one’s life—much better to start with an acceptance of the way of things are, which ultimately results in a calm and clear application of energy where it will be most effective. This keeps us in harmony with the current of the Dao that flows in and through us. As opposed to fighting the river, or even swimming upstream, we learn to use the currents, applying an oar to a stone here or shoving off a bank there where our efforts will be effective and skillful. But don’t confuse this with a goal, or with the goal of Zen, as this kind of balance is better thought of in terms of “good for nothing Zen.”

Tea is also an aimless activity. Though we do practice a method, based on movements that have both practical and ceremonial significance, the tea session itself is about letting go of method of time and aim. Tea is

enjoyed for its own sake. The activity of preparing tea is as enjoyable as the tea itself. The moment is savored, as is the tea. Without any help from the Chinese, Europeans early on figured out that tea was more than an elixir or beverage, it was also a time—a time to set down one’s affairs and rest aimlessly in relaxation with loved ones.

If we get too wrapped up in any kind of aim in our tea practice, even the pursuit of a better cup of tea, we can lose the spirit of freedom, timelessness and relaxation that comes with tea enjoyment. Sometimes a tea session even has a magical way of transcending time, and before we know it, hours have passed. Sometimes after a silent ceremony, guests will ask me how many bowls we drank, and I often honestly don’t know, as the time slipped away from me and all became present. When thinking stops, there is only one reality—this moment, this bowl of tea, this sip.

Surrendering the Impulse to Do

As our dependence on technology increases, so does the amount of stimulation and distraction in our lives. Nowadays, it is very easy to slip down a rabbit hole on the Internet and come to an hour later, feeling like we’ve wasted our time. We have become accustomed to filling every waking moment of every day. Whenever there is a pause, like a red light, people grab their phones and start looking at apps, messages or other sites or programs. We move from distraction to distraction and don’t take the time to step outside of time.

There is an old Zen saying that we should meditate twenty minutes in the morning and twenty minutes in the evening, unless we don’t feel like we have enough time, in which case meditate an hour in the morning and evening. Most of us have gotten so used to the feeling of “not enough time and too much to do” that it has become a constant background drone to our lives. However, the “not enough time/too much to do” mind is not conducive to happiness and health, nor is it particularly efficient, as it causes us to rush and feel stress, which means more mistakes and inefficient planning.



This mind also makes life feel fast and unappreciated. By filling every little pause in our day with doing, this mind also fills the day with too many things to do, which means undone things build up and fill the next day. This reminds me of the old Daoist saying that “the people of the world are always doing things and therefore always have things left undone, but the master does nothing and therefore has nothing left undone.”

Of course, we all should do things. We have a lot to do, and a lot of it is important at least to us if not for the world. But we should periodically make a point of *actively, consciously, willfully and intentionally surrendering the impulse to do*. This is not the same as relaxing and watching a movie or taking a nap. This is a conscious surrendering of the impulse to do, which can be achieved through Zazen or a tea session. I think daily surrendering of the impulse to do not only improves peace and harmony within, but it also improves efficiency, as our efforts and actions then come out of a centered state of being before doing.

Try setting aside all distractions or even notions of time and just drink some tea in quiet, without any aim—there is no method or goal, no better or worse, just this bowl of tea. Rest into the moment and let time slip away. Be upright and present, though. Don't slouch into a mindless relaxation where we slip away from the moment, but rather take a step towards the moment. Feel the bowl in your hands, notice the heat and look down and enjoy the liquor. Fully smell and taste the tea, enjoying its fragrance and flavor and notice as much as you can without labeling or using similes. Do not contemplate what it “tastes like,” but rather experience it without any thought. Then notice any changes in consciousness—sounds or the way the moment looks. Let thoughts come and go like so much scenery passing by, without chasing after any of them. Make tea a practice of good for nothing, doing nothing!

By doing nothing every day, we center ourselves in present-moment being, and with the part of ourselves that is connected to the world and each other. The universe flows through us as tea, and we are passively involved in it—we surrender to the inward mov-

ing current that brings us to the place inside where we meet our connection to Nature and rest in it. Then, when we go forth into our lives, we act out of this center, as opposed to living in our thoughts, distracted from what is most important to us. Such a centered life includes the intuition, compassion and heart of an awakened being. We can more easily stay connected to the love at our center when we have taken the time to center each day, which means to do nothing. Actually, in this way, doing nothing is a bit like doing everything... Let your tea practice be good for nothing, and everything will happen effortlessly!

打坐墊是老師

全神貫注于姿勢的課程



*The altar is in the heart
Our prayers chanted in silence
The teacher is the cushion
Lessons absorbed in posture
And the Way is beyond
Altars, cushions and teachers
A path that winds far past the self
to altars, cushions and teachers*

—Wu De







Lotus



Half Lotus



Burmese



Seiza (pillow)



Seiza (bench)



Chair

佛

如何練習坐禪 HOW TO PRACTICE ZAZEN

Practicing meditation every day is a great way to improve your tea practice and life. It is yet another way of surrendering the impulse to do and identifying with the awake and present consciousness that is the foundation of all experience. A meditative mind is the most important implement or method in tea preparation that aims at stillness. Tea prepared from a still heart will guide others towards the stillness in their own hearts. But this must be practiced. We live in a world of hurricane movement, and stillness is always uphill. Distractions and entertainment, drama and all the responsibilities of a more and more complicated life, mean that habitual life for most of us is in movement, and we will have to practice identifying with stillness.

In order to practice Zazen, choose a comfortable, clean and relatively dim area in your home and arrange a meditation cushion there. It is ideal if this is the only activity that occurs in that space, so that it will get charged with the energy of Zazen, which will support us on those difficult days. Traditional cushions are a square mat called a “*zabuton*” and a round one on top of that, which is called a “*zafu*,” but you can make do with what you have or what is comfortable for you. Try to practice every morning and evening, at least for a few minutes.

It is ideal to sit in lotus posture, with each leg on top of the other, but if that is not possible, one can sit half-lotus, cross-legged or “Burmese” with the legs adjacent to one another. (You can meditate in a chair if you have had an injury, but try to not use the back of the chair, sitting with your feet firmly planted and holding your back straight.) Sit with a straight back, chin up and straight and your shoulders also up and straight. Hold yourself up strong and firm, with dignity. The bum should be rooted deep in the ground, as if our bodies are the peak of a vast mountain, and the head should be strong and upright, as if heaven held our heads from a taut string. Gently close the mouth and put the tongue on the roof of the mouth, breathing through the nose naturally. The eyes should be open and softened,

either staring at a point on the wall or the ground in a soft way. (Many meditation techniques have us close the eyes, but we cannot close the other five senses and closed eyes can lead to more wanderings of the mind and/or sleepiness. Try sitting with open eyes.) The hands should be in the “cosmic *mudra*,” which means the right palm is in the left held flat and upright, with the thumbs gently touching one another. Hold your *mudra* up, as if it is a flag planted as an expression of our enlightened mind.

Posture is nothing but meditation, and meditation is nothing but posture. It all begins and ends with this posture. You may want to start with a deep breath and a sway back and forth to settle yourself upright. Do not fall into this posture and then release it—hold this posture! We maintain the posture, actively and consciously. We are to “do” the stillness, intentionally holding this posture with the mind. This keeps us upright and present. We then practice the present moment with our “flesh and bones.” The body in this posture is awake and present, connected to the world and open to a bigger, universal mind. All the nerves that move our body, centralized up and down the spine, are now still and held strong. We identify actively, intentionally and consciously with the stillness by identifying with the posture. Zazen is not lounging; we do not adopt this posture and then let go. Instead, we should maintain the posture, like a racer crouched and waiting for the gun to start the race—neither too tense nor too loose, just surrendered and ready.

There is no goal in Zazen. A goal-orientated mind is motivated away from the present mind towards the future. Zazen is an identification with this moment; it is a conscious, active identification with stillness through the flesh and bones. There is no need to stop the mind. Stopping the activity of the mind is death. As long as we are alive, our minds will flow and function. But neither should we participate in any of our thoughts. In Zazen, we do not actively or consciously think, abstaining from engaging in any of our thoughts. In this way,

the thoughts arise and pass away naturally, like the in-coming and out-going breaths. When we notice that we have started actively thinking, engaging our minds, becoming tense as we do (instead of doing non-doing = Zazen), we should just return to posture, focusing on our legs, straightening the back, shoulders and neck, returning the tongue to the roof of the mouth, opening the eyes if they have closed and checking the *mudra* of our hands, which should be held up and strong. Actively engage the stillness of the posture and let the thoughts arise and pass away naturally without thinking. Similarly, if we become sleepy, we lose our posture and it loosens to sloppiness. If we realize we have drifted into a sleepy, dazed state, we should return to posture just as we did when we recognized that we were actively thinking. This return to the posture from active thinking or a sleepy dazed state is Zazen.

It is not “good” Zazen without thinking or dozing, and “bad” Zazen when these things happen. Please do not evaluate Zazen. One’s practice will flow through these three states throughout a life of meditation—from posture to dozing and back to posture, and from posture to thinking and back to posture. This movement is Zazen, neither good nor bad, but just as it is: a practice! Make Zazen itself the goal. Make goallessness a goal, as we discussed, which means actively surrendering the impulse to do and just identifying with being over and over. Each moment of this is powerful and restructures the way with think, live and, of course, make tea.

It is helpful to sit with others periodically, often weekly, to strengthen our practice and to take a deeper dive once a year and attend a retreat with more hours of Zazen in each day, like our amazing Zen and Tea retreat we hold every year in Spain, which we will discuss on pp. 47-60 of this issue! Through a daily meditation practice, you can find the Zen in your Tea and the Tea in your Zen...





The Foundations of Zen

They say that the Buddha ascended the dais at Vulture's Peak to give an evening discourse, as he did every night throughout the retreat season, only to sit through the whole hour in silence. At some point in the middle of this hour of silent discourse—teaching through wordless transmission—the Buddha held up a lotus as a symbol of the climax of his unsaid teaching. One of his brightest students, Mahakasyapa, understood this teaching and something passed between the two: a bright, clear and radiant mind of awakened truth that transcends language and rational thought. The exchange of that mind was the birth of Zen.

From teacher to student to teacher, the unborn and unsaid mind of Zen, or *Dhyana*, was transmitted from Mahakasyapa to Ananda and so forth to the twenty-eighth teacher, Bodhidharma, who brought the Zen mind, along with the robe and begging bowl of the Buddha, to China where the soil was fertile. Buddhism was being absorbed into Hindu philosophy and dying in its homeland of India, though it was thriving in Nepal and Tibet. Bodhidharma established Zen on four pillars or foundations:

- *No doctrine, no dogma, no scripture*
- *Direct nonverbal transmission between teacher and student*
- *Must lead to the heart of a person*
- *Must reveal the truth of Nature as it is*

Obviously, the first two can be tricky if and when we start discussing Zen as a religion. The fact that Zen can have no doctrine, dogma or scripture and must be transmitted nonverbally means that it is difficult to pin Zen down. Zen is a mind, a way of being and living in the world. This mind cannot be described; it must be experienced.

Zen masters have known for more than a millennium that while all the robes, chants, sutras, rites and rituals, philosophy and ethics of “Zen Buddhism” can indeed be a basket that can transmit the Zen mind, these things can also get in the way. “Religion can prevent the religious experience,” as they say. For that reason, teachers sought other ways to convey the Zen mind along with or as opposed to the religious aspects of Zen Buddhism, inventing many martial arts, types of poetry and calligraphy, meditations and, perhaps above all else, tea ceremony.

Zen monks were most likely the first, or amongst the first tea farmers to domesticate tea trees. It was through the Zen monastery that the mainstream of China was introduced to tea—mostly in the Tang Dynasty (618–907). The monks used tea ceremony as a way of expressing the Zen mind, cultivating meditation in motion and sharing this mind with each other and laypeople. It was also a social lubricant between them and their lay-followers, especially since Buddhist precepts forbid the use of intoxicants like alcoholic beverages.

Though a lot of our understanding of the origins of Zen is legendary, a more academic approach can also lead to some understanding about how many of the great insights of Zen arose, including the use of tea as a medium for nonverbal communication between the practitioner and Nature, the heart and her fellow humans. In India, Buddhists followed a long-standing tradition of begging for food once a day, gathering enough for two meals in one trek through the village, town or city. In this way, they could devote their entire day to religious pursuits. This benefited the laypeople, who then felt that they were contributing to, and even participating in, the monk or nun's spiritual work. They felt that this brought them good merits, leading to a better reincarnation. Also, it was understood that the monk or nun would then share his or her insights with the laypeople, teaching and guiding them as they developed their own wisdom. But this system couldn't work in China.

In China there wasn't an ancient system of such religious begging in place. And while many monks and nuns did live off of charity, often through wealthy patronage as opposed to daily begging, many others chose to be self-sufficient instead. Zen monks built monasteries that functioned in some ways like the Christian monasteries of Europe, wherein monks were mostly self-sufficient, growing their own food, making clothes, building mills to grind flour, etc. This meant that the monks and nuns could no longer meditate all day, as they had much work to do. They had to learn to work and practice at once, bringing the meditative mind into the daily life—learning to harness the insights of seated cultivation with the everyday and balancing periods of work with periods of deep retreat.

This new dynamic resulted in many new and exciting insights and helped form the philosophy of Zen and its basis in the arts like tea. When we say that “Zen and Tea are one flavor,” we mean the growing, processing and preparation of tea, which were all central to the lives of early Zen monks and nuns. It was a meditation, ceremonialized in and of itself, an aid to meditation, helping them to stay awake for long vigils, and an act of kindness and hospitality for communicating nonverbally amongst themselves and for heart connection with laypeople.

A COMMUNITY TEA RETREAT

茶人: Ci Ting (慈聽, Steve Kokker)

We hope that this inspiring account of a recent gathering of the Estonian tea community will inspire more of you to do the same locally. Gather together with some tea lovers in your area and camp out, sleep on the floor or wherever, drink tea and make a schedule of meditation. You may want to look at the issues from February 2017 and 2018 for some ideas in terms of guidelines and schedules. Don't think that such an event has to be led or super formal, though. Everyone will be happy you decided to get together. It can be co-created, and all you really need is Tea and love!

Many times over the years, I have felt overwhelmed with the privilege of having had such deep and direct access to the wisdom and accumulated knowledge at and through the Hut.

As with every precious gift one is offered and actually has the clear sight to recognize, there comes the concomitant sense of responsibility: shall one hoard it and keep it under lock and key as a private possession, use it as needed food for gradual growth, or share it skillfully?

When I returned from Wu De's lovingly crafted Old Student Course in August 2018, however, this feeling of responsibility to unite and share some space, time and wisdom was stronger than ever. I returned, head and heart exploding, with a full-bodied desire to inspire in even a small way the kinds of feelings about and approach to tea that I was lucky enough to receive in Taiwan, to provoke discussion and reflection in a space where shared values reign as a unifying, empowering force.

More than fifteen of us headed to the woods just outside of Tallinn to a home on the grounds of the Botanical Garden, a perfect place to hold a retreat in honor of one of the greatest herbs on the planet! We spent two nights, sleeping dorm-style on the floor of one

room, and the rest of the time totally engaged in the moment, held by our group focus as well as in the larger embrace of Tea Herself.

A tiny echo of a sampling of what life at the Hut can be like.

It wasn't my intention to play Wu Jr., nor unskillfully teach what I have not fully absorbed yet. I hope the spirit in which it was led reflected that humility and acknowledgment of where I'm at and where I'm not.

Setting Up

A weekend retreat like this requires a lot of preparation, but it need not be overwhelmingly complicated. For this one, I did most of the preparations but outsourced part of a big aspect people tend to get very concerned about: *food!* Especially when some of those people are males! I posted an online Excel sheet with people's names and asked everyone to bring a little something, including some already prepared dishes to save time, as well as raw materials so there could be bonding in the form of making food together. I communicated what was more or less important to bring, and then on the last day bought the rest of what was missing myself. Cooking together was great!

On the first eve, we had as brief a meeting as possible to show everyone what we had, separated a snack area open anytime to one and all, and divided the other food groups more or less into breakfasts and lunches. We determined who would volunteer for breakfast/lunch duties. As in the Tea Sage Hut, dinner was not scheduled—not the most popular decision, especially among those aforementioned males, for whom the concept of “intermittent fasting” does not ring sonorously in their ears. But it frees up resources, and in theory thoughts of attachment to food, to do away with dinner. Snacks were available, though in practice snacking turned into mini meal making anyway. In the future, a later, larger lunch and no dinner at all would be the way to go for a more focused atmosphere.

Regarding discussion material, for weeks before the retreat I made as many notes as I could about the topics to be discussed so that I could lead talks but encourage the free flow of ideas and comments as well. This way, the weekend could have a feel of co-creation to it. I brought all the tea and teaware, and details like cushions, candles, incense, extra sleeping bags, etc. My little car had never been packed so tightly as on that day.



I put-putted proudly out of town and into the forests. After a few-hour introductory talk with tea to iron out logistics, we adopted noble silence and went to sleep earlier than most were used to. Keeping noble silence the next morning, we awoke at a luxuriously late 6:30 am for meditation, had breakfast in silence followed by a walk around the lovely premises, returned for tea and broke the silence with the first of several thematic sessions, each lasting several hours. The evening ended with a meditation listening to a translation of the Diamond Sutra.

Themes discussed included details of gongfu tea, bowl tea, how to be a guest and *cha tong*, the evaluation process of fine tea, gross vs. subtle sensations in tea drinking, Zen and the personal cultivation of the path of a Chajin, as well as the eightfold path. In addition, we discussed our adherence to the tradition of the Hut (as well as reaffirming what this tradition is and its origins, something that was confusing and obscure to most everyone).

Noble silence was blessed! It seems like everyone appreciated the opportunity to remain silent and peaceful, particularly in the company of others. The second morning when silence was not imposed during breakfast, attention was easily and quickly scattered,

and it took almost half an hour to refocus. Yet once we did, we were in high gear again for several more hours before final sharing and expressions of gratitude and solidarity. The silence also changed the communication, allowing us to listen better and speak more from the heart. Of course, Tea helps a lot with that as well.

Postscript

Many of the attendees had made personal sacrifices to attend the retreat and given up precious family or alone time. No doubt thoughts of not wanting to go had crept into many minds, including mine. The joys of possessing a human brain! Yet the commitment shown not only to Tea by everyone, but to self-development (and to the space where the two meet) was palpable, and touched me profoundly.

We all left feeling as if our hearts had sat in an Estonian sauna for two days and melted into a communal mush. All the while, our consciousness and resolve to up our games were sharpened, mirroring Tea's triple effect of sharpening focus, silencing the restless mind and calming the body. This made everything calmer, warmer and more serene.

I can only hope we as a tea serving group continued to pour from this connected source into the teas we serve henceforth. As for me, I fell in love all over again with this golden group of people, seeing and feeling their dedication to spreading good in whatever way they know how. Seeing and feeling their struggles, just as I have also struggled and still struggle with.

Beautifully, our meeting led immediately to a commitment to meet again soon, to keep up momentum, yet predictably, as always happens, momentum decreases once we return to usual life patterns. It's just what happens. It's why meetings and retreats need to happen regularly, because we will forget; we will not want to return the next time even though the last time was so nourishing; we will fall off with practice. It's why *sangha* is one of the most treasured aspects of Zen Buddhist practice. We just need it, simple.

Let's now hear from others. Possibly their voices might be inspiration for some of you to call your own get-togethers with the people in your community. I thank all who chose to contribute, as their voices are mellifluous and authentic in their own unique ways, together forming a chorus of enthusiasm simmered in Tea spirit and community!

It was an autumnal chilly and rainy evening when we all met. Our beloved Ci Ting invited all of the Estonian Chajin together for a weekend to tenderly go through some important aspects of serving tea. It's rather rare that most of us found the time to make it happen.

The structure of this retreat was carefully arranged, but simple: morning and evening meditations and tea sessions with lectures and seminars. As the time was limited, we shared a lot of information and understanding for such a short period of time. We realized that more work has to be done afterwards while experimenting with these new observations.

As most of us had known each other already for years, it was also a place to dig out and soothe some older or more existential feelings among us. We are a flow, not a rock.

What is actually the tradition from which we obtain our knowledge? We brought out some links between different brewing methods, traditions from many regions, etc. But the main point is that it is a living tradition, evolving through time. And we are the ones who have a chance and an honor to witness this beautiful process. It is important to keep brightly in the heart that the direction we are moving towards is al-

ways to serve humbly and the best cup of tea we are able to at any time to anyone with any kind of teaware.

We all know (at least on an intellectual level) that we can serve the best cup of tea not by perfecting our brewing skills, but rather by perfecting ourselves and then serving naturally. Tea in the Center, and its teachings, is not actually Tea as a plant but Life itself. We hold Tea as a remedy in our hands to remember the universal connection. In our retreat, the noble silence containing group meditation sessions in the mornings and evenings, and also being offline for the whole time, helped us notice that. Breathing and inner rhythm play the key role in this.

While sharing our experiences through Tea, we came to a consensus that it is very human to cling to gross sensations like the intensive taste or aroma, mind-blowing energy or even memories that relate to specific tea. But with a light smile, we realized that Chajin have to learn to appreciate also the later steepings when the tranquility has already risen up. We all have an inner longing for subtlety. As much as in the early bowls, the last bowls of carefully served tea are filled with the subtle sensations, patience, honor and gratitude that we all seek in our Tea practice.

In our busy everyday lives, it all comes together in the determination of one's discipline. It comes out in our willingness to change, to make better relationships with ourselves and the close ones who mirror back everything that is in us. In discipline there is room for flexibility to let go of the aspects in the parts of our characters that don't resonate with the universal nature. If we are lucky enough, we can wake up each day more aware than the previous one—receiving our lives as they are and being grateful for that.

It brings joy to be able to share this experience of Cha Dao in Estonia, where there are so many devoted tea servers. In Tallinn, one can choose between at least three or four weekly sessions plus the ones held in the smaller towns. Though we hadn't met all together before that memorable weekend, we have already scheduled our next meeting where we are going to focus on a more practical level by doing some gongfu experiments together.

🍵🍵: Hanno Padar & Jekaterina Bossenko



The retreat opened me up a bit more than I expected. It was a place to be held by others, by oneself and by Tea. Sometimes I have the feeling of being very small, and of knowing nothing about Tea. This makes me want to crawl into my blankets and hide (of course with a bowl of tea). During the retreat, however, it was amazing to feel free to discover and ask about things I secretly wondered about on my own. It was also great to learn and understand that I am small and do know very little, but that this feeling is so okay and wonderful.

I don't need to have the knowledge of the Universe to enjoy tea, or to be a part of this community. I can just

trust my feelings and the voice of Tea, whispering beautiful silences. And after listening to Tea, I find myself hearing answers to questions I didn't know I had. I went home full of bliss in my heart and with an enormous sense of gratitude towards the tea community of Estonia. I even slept with a smile on my face.

🍵🍵: Kristel Pärsik



以茶會友

茶生活

One of the hardest known challenges in life is to walk around with no sculptures of other people in our heads. Life has its unpredictability and many reasons why people act in certain ways we really can't understand thoroughly. Still, we tend to fix a form of someone into our heads even if we really do not know the reasons behind his or her doings. A sculpture that talks to us is a repeating pattern and avers an illusion that this sculpture is a real person, when the truth is anything but.

This retreat reminded me in a way of family constellation therapy, where the knots and pressures of past experiences and problems are let out and also

healed. Any community has its tight spots and unsaid words. I learned how important it is to open up this Pandora's box from time to time and let people express themselves. And if we are doing this in the company of the best tea and kindest human beings, what else is there to become of it then if not the best time of our lives? Healed and laughed at, sculptures disappear, and our living thriving tea community of Estonia walks steadily forward. Thank you!

茶人: *Herkko Labi*

Living the Way of Tea is a lot about learning and growing. We do need time to be alone and to absorb information gathered from abroad, all the while reading books or making tea and practicing because it really is the Tea who teaches the most.

Global Tea Hut is a community, but actually I have been missing meeting real people from the community to share knowledge, stories and new insights with. I've missed listening to others' experiences. So, the fact that we finally got to spend three days together opened up another level of community for me. We all face different difficulties with tea, different issues with teaware,

ceremony routines, how to store tea in our climate, what spring water to use, how to adapt to Tea Sage Hut teachings and more—it was so refreshing to hear that even if our stories are unique and individual, they are all still universal.

But above all, it was important to share heartaches and laughter, to sleep together on the floor like teenagers at camp, to meditate and cook as a family. This all created a circle of trust, so we could all be just ourselves, nothing more or less.

茶人: *Elina Naan*

Here are a few practical suggestions for like-minded tea people or groups out there:

茶 Meet regularly and share, share, share! A group of people always feel good when they can tell stories, share experiences and make jokes. This is the place where lots of learning takes place. But balance it always with silence.

茶 Know your community members, make connections at the human level, be loving, helping and caring. This makes your group stronger.

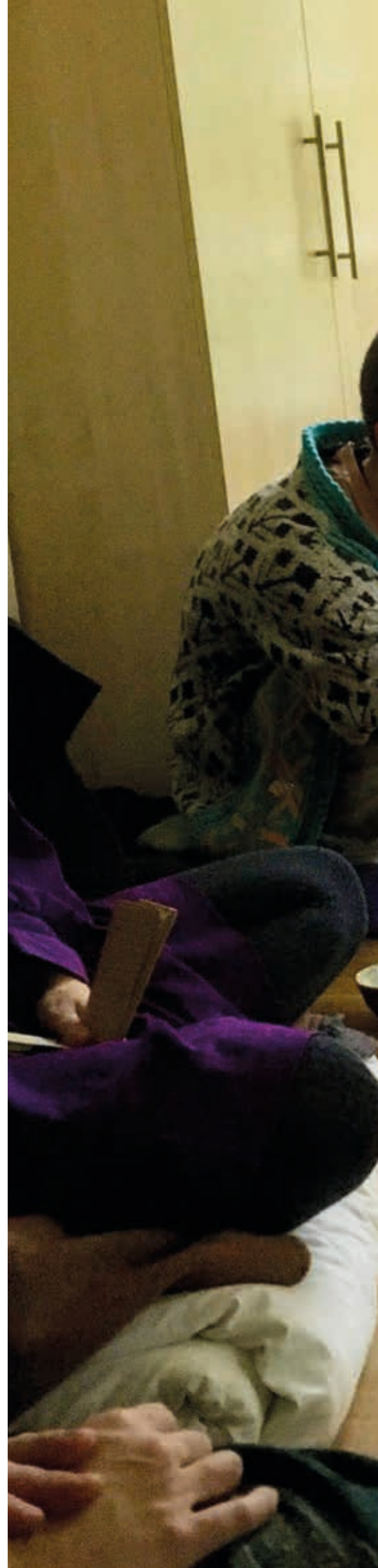
茶 Keep the content of get-togethers/meetings/retreats educational, yet entertaining.

茶 Remember that the community engagement starts with adding value. Your hands-on role is immensely important, because it is so easy to fade into someone-else-is-doing-that inside a bigger group.

茶 Accept expectations and obligations. But also try to be understanding and forgiving towards group members who wish to be inactive for a period of time.

茶 Having a tea community is about serving others! With this in mind, it is easy to focus and be above many small problems and human dramas that in one way or another will pass your group's way.

茶人: *Triin Labi*





It's a rainy and gray Friday evening in the beginning of October. The wind is trying to grow into a storm to make the leaves leave the trees before autumn takes a deeper turn. Standing in the parking lot of the Tallinn Botanical Garden makes me think that it's kind of funny that Steve (Ci Ting) picked this very place to gather the Estonian Global Tea Hut community for a mini-retreat.

After all, it's this magical and powerful plant of Tea (they even have a couple of them in the botanical garden as well) that connects us as a community. Fifteen to twenty people keen to have life lessons with the help of Her by learning, serving and experiencing. Some of us gather as a group called "Teeline."

This word "Teeline" packs several meanings in Estonian, as the word "Tee" can mean "Tea," "the way," "to take action" and also "a path." So, we are a gang of tea people, someone who is on the way to somewhere (as Wu De often reminds us, we are creatures of journey, not destination), someone who has selected a certain path or someone who can accompany you on the way. I'm going to meet all of them soon.

The cold and dampness of outside are soon forgotten as we gather in the room, which marks the official start of 1.5 days of half-silent Tea and Zen retreat. Steve has invited us to share the knowledge and experience he has accumulated over the years with everyone—about Global Tea Hut, tea, meditation and also about the situation and plan of Teeline. Soon we realize it's not going to be him lecturing, as we are all keen to participate in sharing

our experience and discussing what we know. The community is vibrant, alive and evolving.

We meditate, serve (Tea, meals and also each other with our attention), talk about practicalities (like the importance of certain movements and the order of doing things in the ceremony) and subtle sensations (using the Heart space in the ceremony), discuss the tradition of the Hut, laugh a lot and just bond.

Having this bunch of like-minded people and being a part of it is something I've grown to value a lot in recent years. I've talked to Chajin all around the world, from countries that surpass Estonia in population many times (in Estonia it's 1.4 million) to mega-cities and realized that even though the call of the Tea can be strong, it's not very common that people work as an organized group for the same goal.

As Erika Houle explained on one of the recent Life of Tea podcasts (episode "Building a Tea Community"), it has been time- and energy-consuming to grow a healthy and strong community even in one of the capitals of the world, New York City.

As I've been a member of Teeline for a couple of years, I've seen that there are several benefits of community—for the so-called outer world, for the community and also for every single member. Some benefits are practical, others more spiritual.

For instance, Teeline is an open community for people interested in serving Tea. The regular (we try for weekly in the capital, Tallinn) tea ceremonies we organize are the most visible part of the community. Having communal teaware and a tea tent for

summer events helps a lot to introduce quiet space to whoever wants it.

All that is guided by a tradition, which is something we discussed a lot in the weekend, like what is changing and what is constant. Besides offering a guideline for the servers and new members, it also helps people attending the public ceremonies—you know what to expect when you see events organized by Teeline. It's a chance to meet with Tea (and oneself). Simple, honest and deeply rooted. No bells or whistles needed.

The group also helps people just starting with public ceremonies. At first you practice as *cha tong* for someone to learn and get a sense. Then you take the step. It helps a lot when someone is there for you to guide you or who can give feedback. It makes the first time definitely smoother and nicer for the host and guests as well.

The spiritual side unfolds a day and a half later. I'm back in the parking lot. It's still raining and damp, but this is overtaken by the smiles of everyone who attended the retreat. I feel tired because of the intensity of the course but filled with deep joy for having been there (and for Steve inviting us together).

The talks and discussions we had helped us to grow as individuals and also as a group. Knowledge becomes really valuable only when shared. It lifts us. As the African proverb puts it, if you want to go quickly, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.

We arrange a next meeting to share and learn about gongfu tea, and some of us also started a reading club to discuss new issues of the Global Tea Hut magazine and conduct experiments.

🍵🍵: *Rivo Sarapik*

For me, Tea is meditation. I was in the middle of one of the most challenging periods of my life so far as balancing work, family and myself when the idea of this beautiful retreat came to life. It brought me confirmation and reminders, inspiration and courage. I love to drink tea and meditate on my own or with my family and loved ones, but this lovely retreat that brought together this tea community was a source of insight I did not expect or even hope for. Once again reminding me of why it is important to share. Tea. And thoughts. Now, for me, Tea is connection.

🍵🍵: *Gea Grigorjev*

It is said that being surrounded with good people is among the greatest merits. Community upholds people, helps them to stay on track and to progress, to grow. This weekend I was reminded once again how the sharing of food, sleeping on the same floor, adhering to the same schedule, sharing rituals, serving tea and being served tea is what builds a very tangible sense of community.

Space, time and attention—these are the gifts that we have to give to one another. Mutual understanding between people is challenging, and the question of what it means to live a life of tea goes to the very root of how to live as a human being—the latter is an intimate topic on which it is easy to hold strong opinions and beliefs, ones we are aware of and ones we are not. Retreats offer an opportunity to tread these tracks together lightly and patiently, offering viewpoints outside of the ordinary.

茶人: *Timo Einpaul*

Sometimes I have felt that I can't keep up with the information flow in the tea community, but now I feel more motivated than before to check different Global Tea Hut social media platforms because I heard that our two new Teeline members have learned how to hold the bowl from YouTube and heard them quoting Wu De's podcasts. This is a modern tool and way to connect with our teacher—a monk who uses modern media. I love the twenty-first century!

I live in a tiny country where we have built up a loving community. It's such a privilege to receive this knowledge and get access to such rare teas, and to be surrounded with so many kindhearted, flexible, dedicated and lovely people. People from all kinds of fields and backgrounds who are deeply interested in tea. So simple, but also deeply important for me. This retreat was pure joy for me.

茶人: *Sille Paas*

友誼的碗
分享整日

團體的鍛煉

茶道



BUILDING TEA COMMUNITY

茶人: Erika Houle

This is a practical extension of the Life of Tea podcast episode titled “Building A Tea Community.” We suggest you listen to that as well as reading this issue. Consider why we are drawn to build a community. What is missing and what can be done differently? What is already strong in your area and how can you build off of that? We also need to set aside our own desires so we can listen to other people’s needs.



Communication

Getting the word out

- 茶 Start with gathering your friends and family.
- 茶 Hop on the Global Tea Hut app to find members or contact Global Tea Hut to connect to people not yet on the app.
- 茶 Use social media to reach new people. We created a dedicated Global Tea Hut New York Face book page, but use the platform most used by people in your area.
- 茶 Make flyers or postcards to post in community spaces like community cork boards or at local cafes, bookstores, etc.
- 茶 Create a Global Tea Hut group for members for your area. This is also helpful for Chajin to find each other when traveling.

Planning Events

Pre-visualizing the logistics

- 茶 Choose a location. You can start in your own home, but a public space like a tea shop or other friendly location often allows for newcomers to join in more easily. Consider outdoor areas like a nearby forest, public park, or urban farm.
- 茶 List all of the things you'll need. Certainly kettles, water, a heat source, bowls and tea. Consider things your location may not have, such as seats/cushions.
- 茶 Open invitations are wonderful, but if you collect RSVPs, then you can prepare for the number of people more skillfully. A small gathering of three to six people is a great way to begin.

What to Do

What to actually do once you are together

- 茶 Share at least the first three bowls in silence. This quietude sets the tone for the rest of your time together sharing tea.
- 茶 Drink the Tea of the Month. If your gatherings get large enough, you can contact the Center to see if you can get an extra tin of tea each month.
- 茶 Try an experiment. Several ideas for experiments are in previous issues of this magazine. A great experiment to start with is comparing different types of water or heat sources.
- 茶 Serve tea to passersby in a park. Use a sign that says "free tea" or simply invite people nearby to join you.
- 茶 Plan field trips and explore new places. See if you can find a clean spring for gathering water. Visit museum exhibits that overlap with tea culture. Take a group pottery class together. What else is going on that intersects with and is harmonious with a life of Tea?

Plugging In

Building sustainability into the structure

- 茶 Share opportunities to serve. It is not possible for one person to do all of the planning all of the time. By offering ways to plug in to other people, you spread the opportunity to show love through action.
- 茶 Everyone shows up in their own way according to their current capacity. Avoid getting frustrated if people don't show up the way you do. One of the most beautiful experiences is to witness people stepping into new roles when they are ready.
- 茶 In the beginning events may fluctuate in attendance. Do not be discouraged by this because slow growth is healthy. Even in my home city of eight million people, it took a year before we were ready for even something as simple as a monthly weeknight gathering.

Practical Matters

Gathering donations and sharing resources

- 茶 While tea is best shared free and from the heart, you may want to leave a basket or box for collecting donations. This allows for the community to sustain the small needs such as supporting the location or buying fuel for the stoves/burners.
- 茶 Keep a shareable spreadsheet of donations to keep track of how they are spent. This keeps everything open and easy for someone else to step in to serve the community in this way.
- 茶 Consider if a community teaware set is appropriate. Not everyone can afford or might be ready to own certain teaware right away. In New York the schlep is real, meaning traveling with teaware on public transportation is quite a hurdle. So, we have a kettle, an alcohol burner, and both left- and right-handled teapots for our free/donation-based gatherings and for people to practice with.

Following Up

Staying in Touch

- 茶 Leave a pad of paper and pen for people to leave their contact information. You may want to create another way to communicate among yourselves through platforms like WhatsApp or a Google Group.
- 茶 After the first few gatherings/events, you may want to set a monthly date, like the first Friday or second Tuesday of each month. Be mindful of what is already going on in your community and what your new Tea friends need.
- 茶 Be flexible to the needs of the community. As you meet new people, you may need to adjust the larger monthly gatherings to be accessible to as many people as possible. A new location or meeting time may be necessary.



CASA CUADRAU

A Refuge of Peace in the Heart of the Pyrenees

✎: *Daniel Benito*



This is the story of a ruin in the mountains, a man and a woman. Daniel Benito, as a child, hiked a lot through the Pyrenees. These mountains saw him grow. In them he found a way to find himself and the essence of life. His dream was to share with other beings that ability to merge with Mother Nature. Daniel's partner, Katya Ríos Chávez, found in yoga an art of living, a way to cultivate more harmony in her day-to-day life. Her dream was to share that art of living with people who were open to exploring their path of personal growth, of giving themselves a space for transformation—a more authentic and full life. Casa Cuadrau is an amazing retreat center, founded and run by the most loving people: Daniel and Katya. The mountains are stunning, the food glorious and Wu De says that the collaboration with Daniel is so profound he sometimes has difficulty facilitating the retreat, since he himself goes so deep into tea and meditation. This year, we wanted to introduce this amazing retreat center, sister to our Tea Sage Hut. The story of its creation is as inspiring as the retreats that happen there.

In the spring of 2004, Daniel arrived for the first time at Vio, a tiny village located in a majestic valley by the south of the Ordesa y Monte Perdido National Park. As he walked through the place, he began to feel his heart beating faster. At the end of the village, on a small hill, he found a house in ruins and a beautiful oak tree. Sitting in the crown of that tree, an immense sense of harmony and happiness invaded his entire body. He burst into tears. At that precise moment, he understood that this was the place he had always dreamed to live in. That was the ruin in which he could carry out his dream.

Throughout those years of solitude and in a search for vision, stone by stone, that house in ruins was resurrected from rubble. While Katya was traveling as a volunteer and training as a yoga teacher in Argentina, Brazil and Canada, Daniel was shaping that life project in the hidden paradise, surrounded by beautiful mountains.

An Eco House

The construction of the house lasted more than ten years, and volunteers from all over the world participated in it. They all put their hearts, their

hands and their determination to carry out the project. The construction work has been entirely done using bio-construction techniques, achieving a high coefficient of thermal insulation and using natural materials from the local environment: stone, wood, sheep wool, recycled cotton, lime mortar, mud, etc. An ecological house, designed to produce more energy than it consumes, offering a unique refuge in a privileged place.

In the winter of 2012, these two souls destined to make their projects one met in India, in a temple dedicated to the Divine Mother. Katya had a whole project to open a yoga center, with a teaching plan, a website and, above all, a lot of enthusiasm to make it happen. It was only missing one ingredient: the place where she could make her dream come true.

Together, step by step, with patience, perseverance and lots of love, Katya and Danny started the project—a way of life based on simplicity, respect and kindness as the main principles. Casa Cuadrau is today a home where love is breathed. It is a retreat center made by hand, from the heart, so you can give yourself the space to explore and dive within.

Our dream is to offer a place where you can live an experience of transfor-

mation. You can reconnect with yourself and follow the rhythms of Nature, in a majestic corner of the Ordesa and Monte Perdido national parks, in the Spanish Pyrenees.

The Experience

We share the practice of Yoga as an art of living. That practice helps us to generate a transformation in ourselves, and nourishes us every day. Therefore, in our retreats, we always include yoga, meditation, hiking and periods of silence, as essential pillars in the experience that each person will have. This makes retreats here holistic.

The experience combines:

- 道 Guided meditation sessions
- 道 Yoga and movement classes
- 道 Meditative walks and longer hikes through our mountains
- 道 Mindful eating with healthy and delicious vegetarian food
- 道 Tea ceremonies
- 道 Periods of joyful silence, a precious personal time
- 道 Spaces to share our deepest insights of the day

Yoga Practice

Our retreats offer the opportunity to practice what we understand by Yoga: union or integration of oneself and inclusion with all his/her environment. A philosophy and a practice that cultivates harmony in our own being and around us. It includes yoga exercises and movement, breathing exercises (*pranayama*) and cultivating awareness while we eat, rest, clean, etc. It's to bring the practice of the essence of Yoga into everything we do in our daily lives.

Meditative Hiking

For us, Nature is our great teacher and provider of inspiration and wisdom. That is why we do meditative walks every day. This practice is a way we give ourselves a space and time in the day to stop the mind, and to feel the present moment with each pore. We listen to our rhythm, penetrating the shelter of Mother Nature. It is a discipline as simple as profound, which makes us grounded and helps us enjoy simplicity. Be pleased by the simple fact of being and walking on the earth.

Joyful Silence

During the first half of the day, we practice the noble silence. All the proposed activities invite us to listen to ourselves, to give us a space in our hectic lives, to stop and observe. In joyful silence and in good company, we will have the opportunity to open up, receive, feel and live the direct experience of our present moment. Thus, we have the opportunity to savor silence during at least one meal—breakfast.

Electronic Detox

In order to have a real retreat of rest and connection with ourselves and with Nature, we invite all our visitors to do an electronic detox. Stop using the mobile phone and other electronic devices during your stay at Casa Cuadrau.

Mindful Eating

At Casa Cuadrau, food is very important, and we love doing it with awareness. All the meals are vegetarian, based as much as possible on fresh, local and seasonal products produced ecologically.

Mindful eating is an invitation for everyone to develop deep listening to our real needs and to stop eating compulsively. Eating is a moment in which we nourish ourselves with all the senses with what Nature offers us. We cultivate gratitude towards food, towards those who cultivated it, towards those who cooked it and towards those with whom we share it. We invite everyone to take the time they need to eat, with great attention, chewing and savoring each mouthful, and make from this quotidian action a meditative practice.

Casa Cuadrau is a place to pause from busy lives and retreat in Nature. It is a place of inclusion, where everybody is welcome, from children—during our Family Holiday Week—to the elderly. From beginners to more advanced practitioners in any of the activities we offer. The most important thing is to come with a desire to cultivate peace in the heart, connect with Nature and learn more about Her and about you.





Welcome

to the Fourth Annual

Zen & Tea Retreat

Join us for ten days of deep silence, meditation, profound walks through some of the most stunning landscapes on earth, great food, teachings and, of course, many bowls of tea...

September 30 to October 9, 2019

This is a wonderful opportunity to deepen your practice and cultivate some insights towards a more healthy and inspired lifestyle in one of the best retreat centers on earth and surrounded by some of the most powerful mountains, rivers and waterfalls.

To learn more or sign up now, visit: www.casacuadrau.org

THIRD ANNUAL ZEN & TEA RETREAT

The Zen & Tea Retreat is one of the highlights of our year. It is a beautiful and powerful chance to deepen our tea and meditation practice and to meet Global Tea Hut members from around the world, and in one of the most stunning locations in the world. Casa Cuadrau is our sister center in Spain, and we hope to continue these annual retreats as long as possible. We hope that the accounts of participants, which we publish every year, will inspire more of you to come and join us at some point in the future for some Zen tea in the Pyrenees.

🍵👤: Antonio Moreno, Spain

In past years, I've written about this retreat, reflecting on the lessons I learned, the changes in my life that I was invoking and striving to put in motion (*devotion in motion*), the greater realms of practical application and their all-too-frequent absence as manifested in daily life.

I could now easily begin by expounding my failures. You might intuit the type I'm alluding to. We sign up for a retreat, we eagerly await the retreat, we experience the retreat, we strive to integrate many, many lessons and then...

What happens to my determination? What happens to my steadfastness? My willpower is vast, raw and untamed... and eventually, ultimately, it gets side-tracked, detoured, lost in traffic, applied elsewhere as I oscillate between, across and amongst the parallel tracks of my purpose, never feeling lost, blessings-guided by a relentless, voiceless, blind inner wisdom, an unconscious dimension leads me onwards, steers me clear. At times you might even say astray except there really is no such thing. I'm where I'm at. Everything is perfect as it is. Right here, right now. This is my own self-cultivation.

And yet, year after year, these Zen and Tea Retreats with Wu De are certainly deepening my relationship with myself and forcing me to dig deeper, accept more fully and break habits. My mold cracks a little more each time and the implications of these discoveries are garnering increasing force in the decisions I'm consciously making and (just as importantly) those I'm consciously not making, restructuring my approach to the relationships I'm nurturing, trusting and slowly transforming, albeit slowly... and that's that. This past year has brought such giant steps that often I feel clumsy just following them.

That said, I feel I should write from a different angle this year, from the perspective of service, what this means to me and how I may share my experience. You may or may not know that each year I invite Wu De to come to Barcelona and organize this retreat with him, as well as numerous events and tea ceremonies we host before and after the retreat. It's a lot of responsibility and requires a good deal of attention and personal compromise. I welcome it... After all, I am literally the one inviting him, right? This is good for me; I know.

I mean... there's a part of me that (at times) would selfishly like to experience the retreat just as everyone else does. The fact that I serve is challenging, and like any challenge, you're not always entirely up for it. However, Tea is my Dao, Tea is my life, I serve the leaf, I'm indebted to her and I honor my teacher, brother and friend Wu. I demand a lot of myself and make sure I rise to the occasion each time, although sometimes I might have to cajole myself. I don't shirk the responsibility; ultimately, I put my head down and dive in.

What does this mean? Well, for one, paradoxically... I won't even delve into the menial specifics of the preparatory planning prior the retreat nor the intrinsic logistics, nor the navigation of interpersonal situations that I must attend. Those are actually chores of enchantment. The struggle, the complexity, the challenge and lessons are governing the inner-outer relationship. The introvert/extrovert. The I and other. Where is the separation between self and other? I and Nature? Me and you? Me and this leaf? Where does one end and another begin? Where is *my* time, and how can I gift it to others and be more useful to them?



How could “my time” be separate from any other theoretical time? There is but one time, and it’s occurring simultaneously *all the time*. As they say in the Japanese Tea Ceremony: *Ichigo-ichi-e*. There is but one time, one opportunity, one chance. It is this present, this unrepeatable moment in time and space. This *present* is actually a non-temporal *gift*. Never again. Not like this. This is once in a lifetime. This is our shot. And it’s echoing eternally, rippling through the valley of Anisclo, reverberating in each bowl of tea. Every teapot steepes: “Now you are leaf, now I am tea.” Every person a vessel: “Now you are tea, now tea is me.” An outer movement inwards and the cycle returns. We are one, eternal stream rippling in still water.

*Reach out your hand if your cup be empty
If your cup is full may it be again
Let it be known there is a fountain
That was not made by the hands of men*

—Robert Hunter

That fountain is gushing pre-knowledge. It’s the space within the teapot that makes it useful for brewing tea. To receive knowledge, one must be

empty so there’s space for it to come in and make itself at home. You open the door. You welcome in. You give in. You bow. You surrender. It’s the place we go when we discover, uncover and air out our cluttered minds brimming with ideas, notions, delusions, doubts, fears, calcification patterns and our myriad manias, obsessions, desires, cravings and passions that tinge the underlying, deep-rooted, long-standing base of *understandings* we mistakenly learned and must now de-program, uninstall and give ourselves a fresh restart!

Yeah, so... this year’s retreat involved a tech-fast! I switched off my phone along with everybody else. Ironically, that meant I was going be serving without service... *No phone service!* Joking aside, it meant I temporarily wasn’t able to attend to the planning, promoting of the worldly affairs, not even the spiritual ones just a short way ahead on my dewy path... such as the tea activities we’d be doing after the retreat at our Barcelona teahouse, the urban *Roji* of sorts... just to continue with this interesting analogy.

This was hard for me because it’s my responsibility to promote the events we do so as to make the most of Wu’s visit. I wanted all the events to be

full. I wanted, I *wanted*. I just had to let go and trust.

And that’s what Zen is all about... Accept reality as it is, not as you’d like it to be. When you argue with reality, you always lose. Besides, as you like it is fine when we’re talking about pleasure and gratification, but it’s not going to be a *Dao* or life-practice... for there isn’t depth to *how you like it*. In fact, it’s limited by the boundary, delimited by your “taste,” your expectations, prejudice, misconceptions, generalizations... it’s limited by your limitations!

And our expectations are causes for suffering as you’re not living in the moment of reality where things are as they are. Once you’re aware, with real eyes, you realize the real lies you tell yourself and find you are actually up against your greater mental construct containing this polarizing *how you like it*... Because it’s not about how *I* like it; service is about the *other*!

And yet a lot rides on me. I’m concerned for everybody participating, and I must cater to them, show up for them, listen to their problems, check up with those who need it, mediate with Wu. Ultimately, I’m always the last one to bed and I’m tired like everybody else, and my body hurts as everybody else’s.

And “blah, blah, blah...” By no means is this a complaint; it’s only an acknowledgement. It’s a sharing of what service means to me. I am writing this because serving is about being there for others. You have your needs and you put others’ before yours and ultimately deeply appreciate the fact that you are actually very lucky to have this purpose with so many additional opportunities for growth and self-improvement. Gratitude... ceaseless gratitude for the opportunity to serve!

It’s a silent retreat for everybody. Not for me. Not only because I meditate and tend to the retreatants, but also because I teach tea class in the afternoons, which is scheduled right after our afternoon meditation.

That was trying at times, because depending on my meditation and what I’d been working on or going through, I was resting in a certain intimate frequency and moments later had to step outside myself and perform as teacher/mentor/big brother. I remember one day completing a deep meditation hour in tears. I was resting in a vast, empty space. Introverted. Quiet. Slow to get up and arrange the hall for Tea Class.

Still moist-eyed, class began and my voice didn’t want to come out. And then I stopped paying attention to myself. I looked at the beautiful group of eager-to-learn brothers and sisters and dove in and gave them all I had to offer with all my presence. I soon forgot about me. It’s not about me. This world is clearly not about me, and it never was nor will be. I am honored just to be here; this succession of this present moment is all there is. You show up and give your gift.

Being of service is being of presence, and presence is what I’m cultivating. Right here, right now. This is it. I hold the *Chintamani*, the wish-fulfilling jewel, and when you wish for this moment, right now, your wish comes instantly true. This is the miracle. Life is the miracle. Look no further than this moment, these people, this space on earth. I reflect on this and keep going back, again and again. My life has greater meaning when I live it for others. It’s a lesson that I live intensely in service and returns to me with increasing frequency once I step back into the post-retreat daily life. I remind myself... I wouldn’t want it any other

way. This is it. As I walk the map of my life, I’m prepared to get lost. There is nothing to lose. Nothing to hold on to. Nothing I own. So, I must stay onto the now.

In meditation, I catch myself desiring something else. Fantasizing. Inner dialogue fabricating parallel world storylines, day-dreaming, occupying my mind and avoiding the here and now, but not while I’m serving. Service is utmost presence. I am here for you. I see you. What do you need?

Throughout Wu De’s tea ceremonies, I’m preparing the water for the session, gauging the rhythm of the ceremony, adjusting, ever-present. Mindful of the water, the kettles, the temperature, the positioning and timing exchange, onto the dance, onto the beat; inside the music, there are no storylines in my head. And I say all this from a state of reflection of what goes on in that space and not because I’m self-aware while in the moment. That’s the Wu Wei, the effortless effort. It’s all quite simple after all! Occasionally I gaze over at the semi-circle of retreatants sipping from their steaming bowls and fall in love with the beauty of these people, this moment, this chance, this opportunity, this gift, this leaf, this community, this here and now that will never be again. Occasionally I admire the service of Petr, Admar and Tanya who are also showing up in a big way, serving, and thus the bar is set, and we all support each other.

Serving this retreat, I juxtapose personal work meditating and then coming inside and outside myself to share with others and be present onto these contrasting energies. You breathe and flow on.

Ultimately, service is the *love* I invoke in my life. I love you. I serve you. I love you. I serve you. When I serve, I don’t think of myself. When I truly *love*, those I love are more important than me... they come before me, ahead of me. Their happiness brings me happiness. Love is selfless. Love is Service. In service, I’m cultivating my capacity to truly Love. In meditation, I’m mirroring my inadequacies in this realm. In service, I make amends with purpose, with life, with the flow of unpredictability, circumstance, reality, and the seed of my determination shoots up and supports me straight. I walk the line. Because you’re mine, I walk

the line. Because I’m *yours* I walk the Line! A good time to revisit this gem by Johnny Cash:

*I keep a close watch on this heart of mine
I keep my eyes wide open all the time
I keep the ends out for the tie that binds
Because you’re mine, I walk the line*

*I find it very, very easy to be true
I find myself alone when each day’s through
Yes, I’ll admit that I’m a fool for you
Because you’re mine, I walk the line*

*As sure as night is dark and day is light
I keep you on my mind both day and night
And happiness I’ve known proves that it’s right
Because you’re mine, I walk the line*

*You’ve got a way to keep me on your side
You give me cause for love that I can’t hide
For you I know I’d even try to turn the tide
Because you’re mine, I walk the line*

*I keep a close watch on this heart of mine
I keep my eyes wide open all the time
I keep the ends out for the tie that binds
Because you’re mine, I walk the line*



河之歌
河邊茶



🌿: Leigh Fanady, USA

Casa Cuadrau is a house built of love. Every board, plank and tile, every stone wall, every opening in a stone wall where a window sits, is an expression of Nature revealing herself. Outside, a sickle moon hangs next to a pointed mountain before dawn, and a faint light in the East starts to hide the stars. Ringing bells lead the way to the Zendo, which is already warm and smelling of incense. Here you enter the perfect, ideal world, where all you must do is make your bows, sit on your cushion, and let the silence take hold. Later, wholesome, simple, delicious food is offered, and its very flavors tell you that love is a key ingredient. After breakfast, we are led to the mountain trails to feel the stones under our feet, to breathe the crisp air, and take in the sparkling views. Here I find myself struggling. “Even now?” I ask. “In this most serene of all worlds, you bring a

mind full of strife, argument and bad memories?” What will it take to empty it? The plants and trees say, “We’ve heard all these stories a million times.” The wind says, “Whoosh!” Then a bird sitting on a high cliff flaps its wings, and the smile, the innocence, returns. “What will it take” is partly answered by the next scheduled activity: More Tea! Every day we return to Tea, and this is always an easy answer. Talk about Tea, lessons in Tea, bowls of Tea. In the beauty of watching Her brew, in the gestures of those helping serve, in picking up the bowl and drinking, we learn how to brighten our eyes, wash off our hearts, and get ready to return to the world filled with love. Love even, or maybe especially, for the monkey that has been bugging me all week. After all, sometimes the little guy is pretty cute, his favorite activities being to shimmy and dance, or tell the occasional joke. As the silence

deepens, he drifts off to sleep for a while. Several days go by and he is a pretty good boy. Then the silence gets so deep it starts to sound like cacophony. The monkey wakes up, pulls on a pair of silver spandex pants, cavorts and convulses across the stage of my mind and howls, “This little monkey wants to rock and roll!” A cataclysm of electric guitars shatters the space, and the reply is a stadium-sized drum beat, “*Da-dum.*” (There might even be fog and an embarrassing light show.) Again and again and again we return, and the silence is still willing to take us in. “Go to sleep little monkey,” I say, and he does. “The misty mountains are on next...”



茶人: Tatyana Leonova, Russia

I want to share my experience of the ten-day Zen & Tea Retreat, which took place in the mountains of Spain in October 2018. I wrote my story day by day following the notes I took during the retreat. While writing this article, I tried to connect my experience during the retreat to the lessons that I brought back home, to my ordinary, everyday life.

Day 1

We came to the retreat with three people from the Netherlands by car. The journey was quite long, 1400 km, and took us two days. But all the effort was worth it, since the last part was truly beautiful. I tried to finish all my “important tasks” on my phone in these last hours, because I knew that the next nine days would be “technology-free.” While my unconscious mind was afraid of it, my conscious mind was looking forward to it. We arrived, we met Wu De, Antonio, Petr, Daniel. I was so happy to come back to this place. It was a real dream come true—a peaceful, silent retreat center in the mountains. The retreat started in the evening. This time we were each given a notebook, which was guiding us every day, and I’m grateful for that. Now I have something to look back on to remind me of that time in detail, and I had place to write anything that came to my mind and to take notes on the wisdom offered in discourse.

This was not my first retreat, so I perceived the schedule to be very kind. Eight hours of sleep, three hours of meditation, two hours of gorgeous mountain walks every day and five hours of tea classes. I was grateful for the schedule, for enough sleep, for silence and for the time in the mountains. This retreat combined three of my favorite things in life: tea, meditation and mountains.

Day 2

We started to practice “*Osoji*,” which means “deep cleaning,” by way of taking everything out of the house: opinions, views, preferences, getting rid of evaluatory part of the mind and welcoming all experiences. Starting to live the life of monks and nuns, at least for this period. Practicing “good for

nothing Zen,” which is for me being able to rest in here and now, without goal. We run for achieving goals sixteen hours a day every day, and lost our ability to just be, without doing. A retreat like that is a good opportunity to let go of all of the “goal-oriented” aspects of life and practice another one, the one closer to Nature—just be. Human being instead of human doing.

I really liked that there was a lot of tea on this retreat. Tea somehow helps me to bring the Zen wisdom back into my life, my real life. It is a very ordinary activity, and every day we were learning to relate to it more and more with reverence, respect and honor.

Day 3

There is no begging, no end, there is a flow. And in that constant flow of change there is no satisfaction. Transcendence of satisfaction, acceptance of things. Now in this moment, while I write this article, I have to accept that even though I learned so much during the retreat, I still didn’t master discipline, I didn’t manage to meditate and drink tea every day (only every other day) and I’m still not a perfect human being, and sometimes, or even every day, I have my moments when I’m not at peace. But it doesn’t mean that the retreat didn’t change me or influence me. It definitely did. I became more conscious, mindful and aware, and I think my moments of “unconscious emotional reactions” became shorter in time and lesser in strength.

Lesson from meditation: “it doesn’t matter how many times your mind wonders away, it matters how many times it comes back.” Now, sitting here, remembering the retreat and writing—I come back. I have another chance to reconnect with the wisdom I got from the retreat, another chance to bring it to practice in my daily life. If I cannot sit, I can at least bike to work mindfully, and brush my teeth mindfully, not skip weekly meditations at work and remember to feel the bodily sensations before falling asleep.

Day 4

I have to find that empty space inside of me, where there is no beginning, no end. The wish-fulfilling jewel

is here for me, right in this moment. I wish for now, for here. I wish I am in the Pyrenees drinking tea with lovely people, with time to meditate. I wish to breathe fresh air and see clear skies with the Milky Way again. And now writing this Global Tea Hut article in the middle of the night, I wish I’m here: sitting at home in silence, drinking old puerh and knowing that somebody is sharing this home with me.

Day 5

On this day we had a meditative walk in Nature for the whole day. We went to a very gorgeous river canyon with a lot of small streams, waterfalls, vibrant green rocks full of trees and bushes and rare eagles flying over it. In that place we sat in silence for an hour and a half and drank tea. I was very fortunate to help serve tea that day, and I was twice fortunate—the tea we drank was one of my favorites, though, surprisingly, I’d never drank it leaves in a bowl before. When I was pouring water over leaves from bowl to bowl, serving people, I felt very grateful. Grateful to be there in that gorgeous place, grateful to be able to serve tea, grateful to enjoy the moment and give my full attention.

Beauty filled the Zen & Tea retreat in the Spanish mountains 24 hours a day: Stars in the sky in the early morning and late afternoon, tea ceremonies with Wu De—tea, teaware, tea techniques, the way Wu De serves tea with a full heart, attention and kindness in every movement. Daily hikes to gorgeous places. Every day our group of twenty people was hiking foot to foot in silence.

When you are silent, you free up so much attention, exact attention that can go to noticing details around you: leaves, flowers, bushes, trees, rocks, mountains, berries. And not only visual beauty becomes more pronounced, but also the sounds. When you don’t speak a word, and your internal monologue shuts down, the ability to hear escalates. You start to notice birds singing, rivers flowing and wind sighing. I’m very grateful that I had an opportunity to have this peaceful experience that was for me truly pleasurable and truly meaningful.

I realized how much a moment can transform, if I take the time and effort to make it a mindful moment. And how much more beautiful the walk can be if it is a mindful walk. Even here and now in my “normal” life, when I sometimes remember to stop and take a breath, I manage to connect to my ability to see beauty even in very simple things: colorful autumn leaves, blue sky, sun shine, the smile of a friend...

Day 6

One teaching from the retreat resonated deeply with me. It is related to the five “No-No’s” from Wu De’s tradition of Zen: “No negative limiting story lines.” I realized that for me it is really important to cultivate faith inside. Faith in my own abilities and the abilities of people around me. To have faith that we are changing, growing, and able to transcend who we are.

That we are free and boundless. I was lying on the grass at night, watching thousands of stars in the sky and feeling the connection to this boundless universe.

Day 7

The longer the retreat, the deeper the silence within. Actualizing the wisdom that Wu De shared during one of the evening dhamma talks: the mind becomes better when you learn to shut it down.

Day 8

“If nothing changes, nothing changes.” Remembering that we go back soon, we were focused on how to change, so that life at home will not be the same. I decided to mark my space at home—to remind me about the retreat and to make my own altar to pray.

Day 9

Silence is powerful, but it has to end. We have to go home and bring the lessons from the retreat to practice. In the morning of the last day we practiced *metta*—meditation of loving kindness. It was powerful experience for me. We took the time. One hour was long enough to break the ice even from the coldest heart and open a stream of pure love from within. All silent days before were the preparation. And personally, I think one of the most powerful things I brought back home from the retreat was the loving hugs I gave to the people. May all of you be happy, peaceful and liberated.



✪: Nick Hudis, Great Britain

Here are some reflections of moments of struggle and joy, surrendering and learning from this amazing retreat. There were powerful lessons, resulting in insights and even poetry.

Thirty-two minutes into the first Zazen session of the Zen and Tea retreat, I realize I am the patriarch of a new Zen lineage. It's called "Thirty Minute Zen" (catchy title for a best seller?) At home, each morning and evening I sit for just thirty minutes, not a minute more. Here on the retreat we sit for an hour. At thirty-two minutes I am in trouble. Pain, boredom and drowsiness are my constant companions until the welcome relief of the bell. Wu De's encouragement to "strong determination" and "no thought of fidgeting" are to no avail. I try every possible sitting position, every arrangement of cushions.... but thirty-two minutes in—hello pain, boredom, drowsiness. I begin to see how Zazen is no different than life. How much time and energy do I spend fidgeting, zoning out and trying to make life more comfortable? Anything rather than being present to life as it is. And how much energy am I spending navigating this retreat to ensure my own comfort? What would happen if I simply surrendered? I draw strength from Bodhidharma. If the old "red bearded barbarian" was driven by drowsiness to tear off his own eyelids, then I can find courage. I need warrior courage. I need "today might be a good day to die" courage. And where does that courage come from? The Samurai warriors who went into battle "already dead" knew... *Ultimately, the only thing to do is to surrender.*

My palms are sweaty, my heart is racing. The ten tea bowls in front of me look like a hundred. The kettle is growling menacingly at my side. The circle of faces in front of me look kind, but is there judgement hidden in those eyes? It's tea ceremony practice class and I'm nervous. I like to think of myself as an old hand, a seasoned Chajin, but put on the spot, man, I'm nervous! What if the kettle is too hot? Will I just spill the tea and make a mess? Don't forget to turn the bowls this time like you did last time. Whose bowl is whose? I breathe, feel Mother Earth beneath me, Tea touches a deeper part of me. I set hand to kettle... *Ultimately, there is nothing to do but surrender.*

We stand before the great mountain. The first snow has fallen on his summit. The morning sun is gilding his slopes. Every rock, tree and bush is bathed in crisp light. The vast space of the gorge itself reverberates in silence. Wu De offers humble prayers, "Father Mountain, you know our hearts even though you do not know our words...." Tears well up. John Fire Lane Deer, a Lakota shaman, said there are tears of grief and tears of melting. Sure, there is melting here. Who wouldn't melt in the beauty of this place. But there is grief too, deep ancient grief that goes beyond me and my life. So many mountains despoiled, so many trees felled, so many eagles poisoned. I am the prodigal son, bowing before his father and asking for forgiveness. The mountain medicine is strong and in this moment of sweet grief I hear Father Mountain's message in my heart... *Ultimately, there is nothing to do but surrender.*

I cradle my bowl in both hands, gaze at the rich dark nectar, feel her aroma on my breath. Can I take Her in? Is my heart empty enough to receive her medicine? She has no words, but words come anyway. "Listen," She says, "You are nearly sixty. You've been steeping in Tao and Dharma for half a century. It's time. Pour yourself out before the liquor turns cold." *Ultimately, there is nothing to do but surrender.*



After a long drive, an overnight stay in a French hotel and another long drive, we were among the first guests to arrive at Casa Cuadrau. Here I was quickly pulled aside by Wu De and asked if I wanted to help with serving the tea. Of course, I happily said “yes.” This meant I got to work together with Petr Novak to set up the room, clean up, hand out bowls and pour tea. It also meant my breaks were shorter and I had to do 50+ knee bends every day. Especially the first day hiking my legs were sore from this workout but they quickly adjusted, and it wasn’t a problem by the third day.

Meditations

As I mentioned before, my meditation practice could use improvement. During the course, we were taught the “Five-Point Star Technique.” In a nutshell this means meditating with your eyes open and keeping your hands raised a bit above your lap instead of resting them in your lap. By the morning meditation of the fourth day my shoulders were super tense and aching so much that I could not hold the posture for more than two minutes. I had trouble staying positive during this experience and kept thinking how I was going to cope the next five days. After the tea ceremony that day Wu De suggested a practice of introducing yourself to the tea while drinking it. This means saying in your mind to the tea what your name is and where you are from. Just like you would introduce yourself to another person. It felt a bit awkward, but I did it anyway. I got a relaxed feeling and some images flashed through my mind. The next tea class we drank Elevation and I introduced myself again to the tea. The first thing that popped into mind was “I will help you with the meditation.” I thought nothing of it and happily kept drinking my tea. Ten minutes into the next meditation session I suddenly realized I was holding the posture without much trouble. My shoulders did feel a bit tense, but they felt locked in. Like I could not move them even if I wanted to. My mind felt clear and focused. This kept on going for about thirty more minutes until I got another

thought: “And now you are on your own.” The feeling of being locked in slowly went away and about five minutes later I had to let go of the posture.

Now, one could say I talked to tea and the tea helped me. Or that I’m crazy, had an inner dialogue and that it was just a coincidence. I thought about this for some time and realized it doesn’t matter what label I stick to it. What I choose it to be is that I had a good experience meditating. I got a glimpse of why I should meditate and how it feels to be in a clear state.

The locked in feeling never returned in the next couple of days or after.

The Big Hike

There was one big hike planned in the middle of the course. Early in the morning, we would go to a mystery location, have a tea ceremony and return to the center in time for dinner. The hike was pretty long and after a few hours we arrived at a beautiful spot by a mountain stream with a lot of big stones in it. Normally I’m the type of guy who will find a safe quiet spot and sit there while other people climb around and do the “dangerous stuff.” This time I felt like exploring and soon I was jumping over stones and having a really good time. I felt like a little kid again. After the tea ceremony and watching some eagles fly by, I did not want to leave. Apparently, this feeling of not wanting to move stuck in my

system. Every day I slept with earplugs and I had camouflaged my bunk bed with a large towel. I had done this to keep out the hallway lights. The next morning, I did not hear the morning bells, did not hear people coming into the dormitory calling my name and no one saw me because I was behind a blanket. I slept through morning meditation and most of breakfast!

The Results

After the course ended, I was filled with new ideas and resolutions. I did a lot of cleaning and threw away lots of unneeded stuff. I realized that the couch in my living room is the number one reason I do little when I get home from work. I moved it into storage and now I have tatami mats in my living room. In the extra space this created I have a nice old cupboard that holds most of my teaware. Now I can easily set up a tea ceremony and invite more people over.

I started meditating every day for at least twenty minutes. The results are enormous. I’m a software developer and meditation helps me to focus. What I planned to do in two weeks before the retreat, I did in two days. While serving tea my mind is much clearer and the tea classes of the retreat improved how I serve tea. Time and money permitting, I’ll definitely go again. Let’s meet up there next time!



🍵👤: *Catrina Armendariz, Spain*

I didn't know what to expect, I just knew I needed to be there, that I needed silence and stillness, and that I love tea ceremony and wanted to deepen my practice with tea; so I booked the trip. It was by far one of the most transformational, heart-opening experiences I've had, and one I'm deeply grateful for. From the meditation instructions, meditation sessions, tea ceremonies, tea practice sessions, love-filled food, *Dokusan* (invitation to sit with the teacher one-on-one) and hikes in the mountains, there was a lot to do, and yet so much freedom and space to be, to see more clearly, and to experience deeper levels of connection and love that I had not touched yet in my personal silent retreats (that I take alone). Wu De is an incredible teacher and guide, whom I'm super grateful to meet and receive in this lifetime, as well as the diverse community of brothers and sisters that joined. I would, and will, do it again! Thank you!

🍵👤: *Emma Fountain, Great Britain*

Up until the day of the Zen and Tea retreat, I was convincing myself that I didn't have enough time, couldn't be disconnected from the Internet and had too much work to do to be able to sit in noble silence for nine days. Looking back on this now, it's obvious that this was all proof that I needed an experience like this much more than I knew at the time.

The structure and intensity of the retreat is not easy but the moments of bliss and simple joy of watching steam rise from the tea bowls as the morning sun streams in the window of the tea space are life-altering. The retreat was a constant invitation to slow down, turn inwards, be kinder to myself and those around me, find the uncommon in the common and to experience my senses in a whole new way while diving deep into Zen as a moving meditation.

I have never learned so much in a nine-day period and felt the real life shift in perception and outlook as well as gaining tools to implement in my everyday living!

🍵👤: *Miriam Adler, Italy*

This summer I fell in love with Tea, with sitting in silence, completely surrendering to the wisdom of the Leaf. The experience of drinking tea in ceremony as a simple but deep devotional act moved my spirit. When a dear friend of mine suggested I join the Zen & Tea retreat with Wu De in the Pyrenees, learning all about this tradition of the Way of Tea and being in silence, it immediately resonated with me. Now, thinking back, I hear the soft sound of little angel bells ringing. "This could be the most freedom-filled nine days of your life," Wu De tells us the first night with a smirk on his face. "You hear a bell... you wake up. You hear a bell... you sit and meditate. You follow the sound of a bell to a beautiful meal, a tea ceremony, a walk in Nature; and finally, follow a bell to sleep... It's simple—no thinking, no fussing..." The simple sounding revolution of putting my mind and tongue to sleep and simply following an angel bell sounded like Heaven to me.

The following nine days were a vast ocean filled with blessings. I sailed through a couple of storms, being confronted with my own thunder. All my desires, needing to be something special, competition, selfishness, simply the "Miriam-Big-Deal Me" smiled right into my eyes. A painful meeting to say the least. Wu De's words kept me sane: "Remember to let it burn, be in the fire, there is no transformation without pain." I lost all feeling of time and space, days seemed like years and slowly I started to let go of all my fears and negativity.

The daily Nature walks were like a balm for my soul. Feeling, smelling, seeing the subtle layers of beauty. Well, and then there was the Tea... During my first conversation I had with the Leaf, I asked Her to gently open my heart and to melt these heavy layers of protection. Her warm spirit took me by the hand and softly showed me that to love means to listen. To give somebody the opportunity to be heard without judgment.

I will never forget the day when we were sharing tea for hours at a sacred river, completely submerging myself into the sound of the river and tearing from the Divinity of existence. Wu De, Casa Cadrau, and Tea changed the way I look at Nature, the way I listen, the way I touch food and the way I love. I'm deeply grateful.

茶是清
空整座山

山崖是一面無我的鏡子

我們帶著空碗回家

茶人: Dhyana Arroyo, Spain

My first experience with the Leaf was in October 2017 at the Zen & Tea Retreat at Casa Cuadrau, in the Pyrenees, Spain. I had already seen Wu De through online media and all my being said: "Yes! I want to meet this human being!" That was in 2016, and at that time I had quit my job and closed my company of twenty years. I lived in a total distrust about what it meant to live on this earthly plane. Then, in June of 2017, I became a member of Global Tea Hut. All I can say is "Wow!" This community brings an immense joy to my heart!

The following October, Wu De was coming to Spain to guide a silent retreat again. I have always been interested in silence. As a child, I looked from one side to another and watched the language of silent things, always with a question inside me: "Where does beauty come from?" So, I returned to the retreat.

On the third day of drinking tea in ceremony and meditating throughout the day, I began to vomit. I knew that the Leaf was acting in my body, and my attitude to it, on the contrary, was total openness and confidence. She was making room for the new to be absorbed. This first experience of total confidence in the Leaf brought me a detached vision of myself and of deep respect for my body at the same time. It made me conscious of the importance of what I put in my mouth, in my ears, what air I breathe, what thoughts I have, how I nurture my cells, and so on... in all directions and senses. I had the realization that all areas of my life are related. At that time, I was able to examine myself with greater sensitivity and realize the familiar belief of survival with which I had grown up.

After that episode I felt cleansed and not nauseous at all. My meditation improved a lot: my posture felt harmonized with my breathing, and I experienced a total presence and emptiness. Something deep and very heavy inside me was lifted; the Leaf had transformed my body, with such detail that the physiognomy has since changed and has transformed my vision too towards becoming a more creative being.

The Leaf, in Her deep silence, told me: "STOP" (with all capital letters); it made me understand what I have already survived! "Simplify everything!" She said. And then She planted me again on Earth, watering the roots of trust in myself, in other human beings and in Nature. Trust comes to me when Listening. Deeply grateful, my heart was filled with joy, and emptied at the same time...

Since the retreat, I have stayed dedicated to a daily practice of meditation and then tea ceremony with myself. At that time, I read the monthly Global Tea Hut magazines and I am also reading Wu De's books *Tea Medicine* and *Zen & Tea, One Flavor*. I have a perpetual smile on my face while reading these books and I am in wonder at the astounding capacity Wu De has for putting bliss into words. He is in love. He is in love with everyone and everything. And it is contagious.

I have created physical, intimate and personal space with the Leaf and each encounter is a unique opportunity to be lived in the present moment! As Wu De often told us in the retreat, there is no "good" or "bad" meditation. I am learning to just be. I breathe with whatever I have at that moment... This teaches me to let myself fall into the heart. It teaches me the art of slow living. It teaches me compassion for myself, self-discipline, health, devotion, well-being, mental clarity, joy, presence and harmony with Nature, with myself and with others.

This past October, I had my second experience at a silent retreat at Casa Cuadrau, and this time it was pure celebration to be alive, meditation, gratitude for having the opportunity to be so well-taken care of, letting me walk, enjoy good food, meditate, drink great tea and just breathe... I have so much gratitude for Wu De, Casa Cuadrau and this beautiful global community for changing my life!



🍵👤: *Veiko Luhaste, Estonia*

I loved the format of this retreat very much. Tea and Zen in silence: Meditations, hikes in the mountains and learning from pure elements and feeling their time scale, Tea ceremonies and teachings, evening teachings after meditation. I liked how it all evolved topic by topic every day, teachings continued and intertwined into more of a whole—little glimpse of alchemy itself, and the alchemy of Tea. I felt a strong increasing of life force (especially in the middle of the chest, radiating out from there) and increased clarity day by day. It was powerful for me and changed many things in my life and gave new ways of seeing/viewpoints and shifts in consciousness.

There were a few things I continued back home and can write about. The “*Osoji*” practice of “deep cleaning” really touched me. I am continuing this in material ways and in my being (habits, views, thoughts ...) and keep practicing it and being in motion/flexible.

I am also visiting a spring nearby and gathering water for tea. I have continued to drink tea, meditate and learn in silence. I understand the importance of being in contact with pure elements through different ways. I continue to listen and learn from those elements. I am feeling the rhythms of Nature and different time scales: the big-scale, long time of mountains, water cycles, etc.

Old Bones, Zen Bones

Today the rain came
And the first snow
Is on the mountain
Another wheel turns
Near sixty times
I've seen the trees gild
Heard the geese flock south
Smelt mushroom breath in the forest
Near sixty turns
And what do I have to show?
A sage's grey beard?
Don't kid yourself!
Just old bones
Not zen bones
Knees that creak and groan
On the Zafu
Eyes that long for slumber
Not awaking
A mind so constipated with dharma
I forget to bow to Buddha
Old bones indeed
But a heart still crisp
As untrodden snow

Zazen

In the Zendo again
I sit between Heaven and Earth
Clinging
Clinging to the mouse-chewed thread
That is me
Above, roars with hungry fangs
Below, snarls with slathering jaws
But Tea is here too
A lucid bowl offered
“Take it” She says
Take it with both hands

—Poems by Nick Hudis

🍵👤: *Triinu Taul, Estonia*

I am really thankful for Nature and for the people who remember Nature inside their hearts. I feel very grateful to all the workers and participants who were at the Casa Cuadrau for this retreat.

The mountains were like a really familiar night-time dream that I had forgotten somehow. This retreat restored a lot of hope and faith based on a connection that I have with Nature, reminding me that it is not delusion and it can be shared.

I'm amazed at how effective simplicity can be. Just silence, Nature and Tea and the heart is fulfilled. (And of course, the discipline, which the monkeys in the mind really dislike.) Practicing together in group was really supportive and lifted me up, too. It is much more difficult to practice alone.

This trip confirmed for me that if there is something right, important and supportive for my growth in my life, then the road to find it will be smooth, calm and kept. But, of course, there is a lot of movement and change on such a road. The challenge now is to maintain the discipline. Drinking tea every day is good practice for me, reminding me to start again and to keep working.



✿ A: Petr Novak, Czech Republic

Sitting down to write and share my personal reflections on the Zen and Tea retreat in the Pyrenees, I had to step back. “Am I ready?” I had an outline and some points I would like to share in my head already, having thought about it here and there for the last weeks. Now it was about creating space and time to just sit and let it flow, to think and organize my memories and feelings and separate the wheat from the chaff, giving it form. And yet, I felt some block. The space and time were there, so what was holding me back? I was not really sure, but I couldn’t seem to get started. I turned off the blank screen and looked around. I started to clean the room—a few piles of laundry, arranging some storage boxes and tidying up my work table. Then, I lit a candle in front of the water storage jar and put a kettle on... A few minutes of breathing later and the leaves in the bowl were swirling. I bowed... Now, I am ready...

I am going back in my memories, digging out my feelings and images starting from our arrival at Casa Cuadrau. How was it? The mountains were, of course, as beautiful as last year, but I was different for sure. And all the old friends had new experiences and layers in their eyes as well. I wondered: “How it will be this year? What people are going to come? What will be the schedule?” Wu De asked me to help serve again. What an honor that is.

There was excitement about the unknown aspects of the retreat, but already I was starting with a sense of joy due to the opportunity to serve, to let go, leave my life and worries behind for a while, step aside and just be. I like the word “retreat” translated into my native language of Czech, as the sound of “stepping aside” or “to withdraw” gives you the feeling of a temporary chance to look at everything from a new perspective. All the participants at this retreat made the decision and put our energy into such a stepping aside. This was more than just an exciting experience; it was a chance to grow. The big backpacks of our personal lives and stories could stay in the hallway and we could all sit in meditation, drink tea and kiss the mountain paths with our feet. This is our chance! What an opportunity, indeed!

Rhythm

As I mentioned, this was my second time attending the Zen and Tea retreat. Of course, my mind wanted to compare the two years: Which was better and what about it was better or worse? Which group of people did I like more? Was Wu De better as a teacher than last year? But even personally, if I rewrite the question as “Which experience was better or more valuable for me?” it still does not make much sense to compare. I was a different person back then. And also, better for what? But there were definitely marks that framed my experiences, helped me to stay focused on the practice and enjoy the practice as a result of it being my second time around. The most memorable of these markers for this year would be the rhythm that was built in the schedule, which was well-supported by Wu De and the house. I can still hear it: *Gong*—wake up... *Gong*—meditation... *Gong*—end of the meditation... *Gong*—food... *Gong*—walking meditation... *Gong*—tea class... and so on.... Wake up, meditate, eat, walk, learn, eat, meditate, learn, eat, meditate, learn, sleep. Breathe in, breathe out... breathe in, breathe out. Day in, day out...

Was it many different activities or just one? I would say both, like cloth made of many threads, creating one pattern—one does not make sense without the others, and a single thread is weak apart from the pattern. Here are my reflections on the three threads of this retreat: meditation, hikes and Tea.

Thread One: Meditation

“Zazen is good for nothing.” With this orientation we were sitting—posture and breath, breath and posture—several hours a day. Even though I have a meditation practice at home, it usually stands as an extra activity, among other daily routines. A meditation retreat offers one an assigned time to make meditation the focus of the day. Also the group energy is built up hour by hour, day by day. This is hardly the place to share my personal, inner expe-

riences of calming down and observing. We all have more moods inside than we are usually willing to admit. And the process is for sure not always pleasant and joyful, though always rewarding in the end—giving meaning to life itself. There were moments of focused and deep contemplation and moments when the simple act of just maintaining the posture was hard and painful—from physical pain to experiences of lightness full of joy, you can have it all in front of you during long hours of Zazen. Movies of memories and dreams followed by calmness and clear observation. What is your orientation to this carnival of sensation? Is it real? This year, the retreat had two more days than last year and I appreciated those two extra days, especially as a chance to deepen the meditation, to see more clearly and digest. As Wu De put it: “We are all perfect as we are but we could also use some work.”

Thread Two: Mountain Hikes

Every direction you turn from the door of Casa Cuadrau, there is beauty. You can’t escape it. But we were not there just to look around; we also hiked. As one’s body moves on steep mountain trails, it is easy to be present and aware. Every mountaineer can talk about the connection to a mountain, river or a stone. After morning meditation, a silent mountain walk is like an expression of joy—light and easy. The body is so happy for the movement itself, sensations are new and sharp, and the calm mind is open to hear voices of Nature. Wu De and our dear guide Danny are inviting us to communicate and be unlocked—to hear what the Mountains are sharing with us. And it goes easy and it goes deep. You are also getting to know your fellow travelers. Every day, even without talking, and with the main focus on your own body and mind, you are more and more in tune with each and every one of your two dozen silent friends. The sense of familiarity and closeness naturally arises. After the retreat, when we could speak, I could not believe that I was meeting most of these people for the first time. Is this what *sangha* is about?

Thread Three: Tea

The tea classes were divided into two parts. During the morning classes, Wu De was giving lectures on tea as a practice, focusing on form and service, explaining relationships between outer and inner, form and content. The afternoons were then dedicated to practice, from holding the bowl on day one to serving leaves in a bowl and then sidehandle ceremonies during the last days. As I was luckily invited to help serve during the morning sessions and also to give a bit of guidance to the smaller groups during the afternoons, my personal experiences were probably a bit different from the rest of the group.

Helping with the morning service brought some challenges, but mostly joy from the service and the opportunity to grow and learn from the practice of being a “*cha tong*.” If I could share a lesson I learned while being assigned this position, it would probably be what I call the “right state of readiness.” To be fully ready all the time and, at the same time, be relaxed, loose, follow the flow and listen to your intuition. This is an active state, like holding your posture in Zazen or holding the bowl with two hands. It is

to be firm and yet open to anything, to be soft and perceptive. In the moments when I could combine those two, my job was easy: Just another piece of teaware—an instrument of tea—preparing seats, filling the bowls, counting the guests, collecting and cleaning teaware for the next session to come and so on...

The afternoon sessions posed other challenges. As it was the only space during the day when students had a chance to talk to someone other than Wu De, it could change to a joyful, social energy, which we wanted to avoid. The energy, which was building up during hours of meditation and silent mountain walks, would be disturbed or even lost if the talking got out of hand. I think that the students handled that challenge gracefully, wisely using the given time to learn and practice while being relaxed and joyful at the same time. It wasn't as difficult as I thought it would be to keep everyone reigned in.

By doing in groups what sometimes seems to be a trivial task, like passing out bowls, washing the bowls or placing the tea leaves in, we could see and experience the same task many times as a group. Seeing all the nuances, refinement, details and tiny differ-

ences performed by different students left me with a deep appreciation for the form and method of this tradition. I think it was Bruce Lee who said: “I am not afraid of the man who practiced 10,000 kicks once each, but I fear the man who has practiced one kick 10,000 times!” And I think we all can relate to this when it comes to tea. How many times have you with full attention handed over a bowl? Can you still experience it as a bright new experience?

It is interesting to realize how many impressions, experiences, thoughts and emotions only nine days can leave you with. I could probably talk for a whole day about each day. And, while the meditation instructions, mountains and the tea practice are somehow given to all of us up there, the same for all of us, we all brought our own lives with us, which shaped the experience into our own unique version, which we then carry back home. When giving the final hugs to all those new friends, I wished that the story of their retreats may be light, filled with awareness and growing wisdom.



TeaWayfarer

Each month, we introduce one of the Global Tea Hut members to you in order to help you get to know more people in this growing international community. It's also to pay homage to the many manifestations that all this wonderful spirit and Tea are becoming as the Tea is drunk and becomes human. The energy of Tea fuels some great work in this world, and we are so honored to share glimpses of such beautiful people and their Tea. This month, we would like to introduce Admar de Bruin.

I started my tea journey several years back when reading an article about belly fat reduction as a result of drinking puerh tea. At that time, I was trying (once again) to get a six pack, so I was interested. I went to the local tea store and after some raised eyebrows, trying to say “puerh” in Dutch, I went home with some shou puerh. I thought it tasted like a horse stable, but decided to regard it as yet another strange tasting medicine. I began mindlessly drinking loads of it at work. Then, one day, when I forgot to bring the tea with me, I really missed it and that was strange because I still didn't know if I liked it or not.

I started researching puerh tea on the Internet and found out there was a vast world I didn't know anything about. Giving in to my curiosity, I started ordering everything I could get my hands on. At the time, I had a job that was demanding a lot of me and I didn't know how to deal with the stress. Buying a lot of tea and teaware soon became a coping mechanism for me. With each new order, I could envision getting and unwrapping it. When I finally got the order, I needed to buy something else to keep myself satisfied. Of course, this didn't work in the long run. (Alas, this is how our world of consumerism works.) A year later I fainted at my desk at work and banged my head on a concrete floor. I got a concussion and was forced to take some time off.

In an attempt to improve myself, I canceled (almost) all tea subscriptions and stopped ordering tea. Some time after that, a Dutch community member posted online that one could go to the Center for free and experience tea. I had never attended a tea ceremony. I never went to one of the Dutch events. I had read only a handful of Global Tea Hut articles. But I decided to jump. I needed change in my life, and needed it right then, so two weeks later I was in Taiwan drinking tea.

After that visit, I started attending the local Dutch community events. Before I knew it, I had made wonderful tea friends and was hosting a tea ceremony every Thursday at my home as well. And on top of that, I went back to Taiwan within nine months and went on the latest Global Tea Hut trip in China as well, which was incredible and epic.



茶人: Admar de Bruin, the Netherlands

Tea has helped me open up my heart and home. Before Her presence in my life, I would rarely invite people over out of fear of rejection. Now tea is served regularly at my house. Tea has also helped me calm down. I enjoy diving deep into a topic and then diving into the next topic, often with a short attention span for each thing I get into. This doesn't work with tea. Tea makes me contemplative about all areas of my life. For example, I was eating stuff that was produced horribly, buying stuff I didn't need, not caring about the environment, etc. Now I eat healthy, listen more to my body and wait some time before I buy anything, understanding that shopping won't ever satisfy me. I raise my bowl to stress, brain injuries and friends—as this community has changed my life forever!

I hope to see you all soon and share some tea. If you are in Holland, look me up on the app and let's share some tea together!

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We need your help to get to a place where we can build your permanent center, Light Meets Life. (And we do hope that you feel that our Center is yours, not ours.) If everyone in this community helped us find just one friend or a loved one to join Global Tea Hut, we would be looking for land and be breaking ground soon! We really are that close! Please help us spread the word about Global Tea Hut, sharing tea and love with your community in person and through social media. Also, let us know if you need any help in that!



Wu De will be in New York this coming June. We hope to see some East Coast friends at these events. The events will be in the second half of the month. Stay tuned to our website for details!



Check out our live broadcasts on Facebook, Instagram and soon YouTube, which we do every month. Also, check out our "Life of Tea" podcast on Soundcloud and "Brewing Tea" video series on YouTube!



The annual trip is open for applications. If you were a member throughout the entirety of 2018, join us for another epic voyage to China, this time walking in the footsteps of the "Tea Saint," Lu Yu, with Master Tsai. Find out more on the website!



We are looking for a PR person with experience who can help us spread the word about Global Tea Hut. The job entails contacting blogs, magazines and other periodicals to send sample issues to review, and trying to facilitate interviews for articles, radio, television, podcasts, YouTube channels, etc. Also, if you know anyone with a podcast or video channel who would fit us and would be interested in interviewing Wu De or another student, please let us know. Help us get the word out and grow this amazing community!

Center News



Before you visit, check out the Center's website (www.teasagehut.org) to read about the schedule, food, what you should bring, etc. Make sure you apply early for courses as they fill up fast. This is why we need a bigger, more awesome Center.



The schedule for the first half of the year is full. However, you can put yourself on a waiting list, and there is still a chance you will be selected if there is a cancellation. Also, if you have taken a ten-day course before, you can apply to serve a course, which is also a wonderful experience.



We have been contemplating a big decision for the last year, finally coming to a conclusion: Starting this year, all ten-day courses at the Hut will be 100% tech-free, meaning no computers, cell phones or other devices for the duration of your stay!



We are saving up to buy or lease a van to drive you around during service periods and to take you to the tea farm and mountain to fetch water during courses.

February Affirmation

I am meditative

Every day, I must make time to care for my own well-being. This is not selfish, for the more I gather and become, the more I can serve others. I consciously and actively surrender the impulse to do, cultivating stillness in my life!



www.globalteahut.org

The most meditative Tea magazine in the world! Sharing rare organic teas, a magazine full of tea history, lore, translations, processing techniques and heritage, as well as the spiritual aspects of Cha Dao. And through it all, we make friends with fellow tea lovers from around the world.

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