

It is no mystery that the world of tea is vast. In the short amount of time that I have been on this path of tea it has become clear to me that there is an insurmountable amount of information to be learned about tea. So many types of tea. So many types of teaware. So many ways of processing and preparing tea. The rabbit hole is very deep. I could easily spend the rest of my life learning as much as possible about tea, and there would be still be so much left to learn. Another thing that I have noticed about this world of tea is that despite only having been on this path for a short time, I have gained so much, and what I have gained has very little to do with anything there is to know.

Being alive during this age of tremendous amounts of information and outrageous stimulation at every corner, it is easy to forget that this tea we drink comes from simple trees that have been alive for hundreds, if not thousands, of years and that they come from earth, rain, and sunlight, which are also primordial, and for all this to exist the entire universe first had to form. To know information about tea is good and I certainly have no intention of taking anything away from that, but for a moment, set down the intellect and understand that all we could possibly know about tea is a tiny drop in a vast

ocean compared to the direct relationship we create with Nature by drinking tea with a pure and clear heart.

According to Daoism and Traditional Chinese Medicine, the heart and the mind are one and the same. One of the primary functions of the heart is to house the *Shen* (Spirit). One of tea's many properties is to clear the heart and calm the *Shen*. Tea is wonderful in that it will clear your mind and heart if they are cluttered and unbalanced, and it will also take a clear and uncluttered heart and mind deeper into peace and tranquility. There is no end to the depth that tea will go, as it is like water which travels to the lowest point of its vessel to fill it up from the bottom.

The first time I drank tea in this tradition, I got the distinct sense that tea wants to experience being human. Not for the drama and stories, but to peer through our clean senses and rest in our pure hearts. The contentment I felt in simply sitting on a tree-stump stool in front of a monkey-wood table, gazing at the world around me, and hearing the simple sounds of tea being prepared was unlike anything I had experienced. (The only thing that came close was long hours of meditation while at a retreat.)





The mind, in its exalted state, purely perceives with no need to label, interpret, judge, or compartmentalize. No looking, just seeing. No listening, just hearing. No doing, just being. Pure awareness, free of the desire for this or that, free of clinging to a preferable moment. To dwell in such a state may sound simple, but it requires continual, daily cleansing of the mind. It is easy to say that we are all enlightened, and that all we have to do is realize that we are enlightened, but that is like saying that your car is perfectly clean underneath all of the dirt and all you have to do is realize that it is clean. One must put in the work of cleaning their car if they want it to actually be clean, and only then will it be so. It is no different with the mind and heart. Daily work must be performed to keep the mind and heart clean, clear, and unfettered. Despite all of the initial resistances one might encounter in daily meditation, this is the greatest gift we can give ourselves, and very soon the work becomes joy. This is also the greatest gift we can give to tea. As a tea drinker knowing that tea wants to be human, why not aim to become the best human you can be?

As the Daoists say, it is not the bowl itself, but the emptiness that allows it to function as a vessel for its contents. Similarly, it is the emptiness within us that allows for the greatest of experiences with tea. If the mind and heart are cluttered and full, tea will help to clear them, and that is a wonderful thing, but for this month I invite you to meditate and clear your mind however suits

you best *before* you drink tea and see how that transforms your experience. The more depth we bring to tea, the more depth tea will bring to us. If we can shift our stance from, “What can tea give to me?”, to “What can I give to tea?”, the transformation will be great and the ripples will reach far and wide. What better gift to give to tea than a clear and empty heart within which to rest for a time and a clean, clear mind to perceive the world?

*Aim to be like a bowl—simple, close to the earth, and empty.*