



Global Tea Hut

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April is a very important time for the tea world. It is the third lunar cycle of the calendar, called the Peach Moon, and the beginning of Spring. In ancient China, Spring officially began when the emperor sipped the first cup of the first flush of green tea. The rarest green teas flush before the Clear Bright Festival (*Qing Ming Jie*) at the beginning of the month, called “Ming Qian.” During Clear Bright the tea flushes more vigorously and is called “Qing Ming.” After the festival, from around April twentieth to May sixth, the tea flushes several more times. These flushes are called “Gu Yu.” All Spring tea after that is demarked as “Li Xia.” Generally, these four flushes are successively inferior. And it was the first, *Ming Qian* (Pre-Clear Bright), tea that marked the start of Spring.

Just before Clear Bright Festival the rarest and most premium teas were given to the emperor in tribute and he ceremonially distributed them to his supporters after having tried each one and choosing the best. His first sip was heralded throughout the Middle Kingdom—usually around the equinox—and soon followed by the Clear Bright Festival. One of the greatest of all emperors, and an enthusiastic tea lover, Qian Long said that “the country cannot go a day without its emperor, and the emperor cannot go a day without his tea,” demonstrating the reverence Chinese held for tea and its role in the very governance of the empire.

Traditionally, the Clear Bright Festival (*Qing Ming Jie*) lasted for fifteen days, but these days it is a two-day holiday (April 4-5). The name is said to come from the weather at this time, just before the rains. It is a time for paying respect to those who have passed. Chinese people are traditionally cremated and their ashes put into urns which are kept in a family tomb. Clear Bright is a time for visiting the tomb, cleaning and placing new flowers and prayers. The young and old alike visit the tombs and discuss those who have left, which is why the holiday is sometimes called “Tomb-sweeping Festival.” This is typically followed by a family meal at the gravesite and rice bowls with chopsticks balanced on them are placed before each ancestor and some families even serve them their favorite food

and drink in life. Prayers include ghost money burning, incense, tea, flowers and candy. The ghost money is to use in the afterlife and for their wellbeing. Finally, people bow three times to their ancestors in respect before departing.

People of all cultures have ways of remembering those who have passed and/or tending graves. The blood of our families still runs in us, and the memories of those who have passed live on in our hearts. We have been formed by our past, and without it we wouldn't be who or where we are. We didn't arise from nowhere, and reminiscence needn't be a reminder to grieve, but rather a celebration of our roots.

Use this month of April to reflect on all the collective experience of those who have come before us, and how we should learn from their wisdom and folly. Also, take time to honor and respect your own ancestors. In our center, we clean a lot during Clear Bright Festival: changing and wiping the altars, putting out new flowers and dusting in all the corners we've neglected in our weekly cleanings. Perhaps you could set out a bowl or cup of this month's special tea for all your ancestors who no longer walk the earth. It doesn't matter what your beliefs about the afterlife are; you can still pay respect to the memory and love that lives on in your heart.

The Peach Moon is also a great time to buy some fresh tea and clean out your tea space. You can take out all the jars and dust behind them, check on the Puerh you are aging and open a window to let in some fresh air. We scour new pots, order this year's tea and start drinking lighter teas after Clear Bright Festival, after one last sessions of amazing dark tea to say goodbye to the darker teas of autumn and winter, which is why we choose one last dark tea for you this month—before the green season sets in and the flowers bloom...

*So draw a cup from out this endless stream,
and contemplate the tall mountains
and winding rivers.*