

INITIATION

Article by Lindsey Goodwin

By the time this newsletter arrives at your door, I will have been initiated in the tea tradition of which we speak of in these pages. The very thought of this makes me smile for numerous reasons. My very first memory of tea is one of presence, of complete attention. Throughout my life, tea has been a source of comfort, a means of connection and much more.

My tea journey has only just begun, though I have been around tea for some time. And so, with seriousness and humility, I receive initiation as a symbol of this beginning. But beyond that, I welcome the ceremony of initiation as an affirmation and celebration of what already is. An initiation is an opportunity to formally and deeply thank Tea and this tradition for being not just a path, but the path. It is a time to recognize that Tea calls to me as the river to Siddhartha:

He looked lovingly into the flowing water, into the transparent green, into the crystal lines of its wonderful design. He saw bright pearls rise from the depths, bubbles swimming on the mirror, sky blue reflected in them. How he loved this river, how it enchanted him, how grateful he was to it! In his heart he heard the newly awakened voice speak, and it said to him: 'Love this river, stay by it, learn from it.' Yes, he wanted to learn from it, he wanted to listen to it. It seemed to him that whoever understood this river and its secrets, would understand much more, many secrets, all secrets.

—*Hermann Hesse's Siddhartha*

Living Tea has spoken to me and I have received Her message to love, to stay, to learn, to listen. Like the river, and like so many other things, there is incredible profundity to be found within Tea when you turn your attention, love and gratitude toward Her. Once recognized as a repository of wisdom, a single point of focus becomes more, it becomes many, it becomes all... Leaving behind self, you become more, you become many, you become all... The river is Siddhartha's path to realizing Buddha-nature. Tea is, for me and for many of you, the same path to walk.

I love Tea and I love the path of Tea. I love Tea more than any other material thing and I love Her as far more than a mere physical object. To me, Tea is wisdom, She is spirit, She is Nature, She is interconnection, She is life itself. Similarly, this path is not a mere experience or kick, but a Dao, a way of living in relation to eternal truth. As such, this path is a font of calm joy, of gladly received challenges for growth, of trust in all that is... and much more that I have yet to discover as the journey unfolds! I welcome it with love.

With genuine love comes abundant gratitude; I am eternally grateful to Tea. Alongside meditation, She has helped me come away from so much misery and to find so much peace. She has helped me to heal myself in mind, body and spirit. She has worked through me to help others in ways that I could not have dreamt of prior to finding my path with Her. And She has brought me meaningful connections with people around the globe, ones who I might have never encountered had



it not been for our mutual love of the Leaf. For this, I cannot help but feel overwhelmed by thankfulness.

And more and more, I'm finding that steadfast attention is a natural extension of love and gratitude. Slowly, bit by bit, I'm beginning to listen to Tea as I would a dear friend and to learn from Her as I could a wise teacher. This practice becomes a kind of devotion, a way to recognize the holy in Tea and, through Her, in all things. The more devoted to Her I am, the easier the practice of listening to and learning from Tea grows (and, for that matter, so does listening to and learning from all things).

Like Siddhartha's river, Tea can become a powerful transmitter of intuitive wisdom. From Her, we can learn profound lessons about change, non-attachment, the oneness of all things, the illusory nature of time, and life itself. But these lessons do not come without a price, and that price is surrender. The higher we hold our heads, the less wisdom can flow down into us. And so I devote myself to Tea, submitting as much of myself as I can at each stage of growth and letting Tea do the rest.

Like Siddhartha in the story, when leaving behind the self, you, I, all of us become more, each separate being transforms into the one, elevated and expanded

into the all. This is something I am only beginning to glimpse at this stage in my journey. It appears now as a softening of the ego, a relaxing of the perceptions of self and other, of guest and host, a gradual dissolving of the self that Tea may flow through me, pure and clean and clear and direct on Her path to others, just as She wants to move.

What little of this process I've seen so far is beautiful beyond all comparison. This was a surprise to me at first. Letting go of the self and submitting to something else sounds, on the surface, like a loss. In fact, it's quite the opposite. After all, if you are not accepting of your path, how can you accept anything from it? For this reason, an essential step of the path is embracing the path, loving the path, living each moment of the path (even the difficult ones) as if you had chosen it yourself (which, on a higher level, you did!).

For me, initiation is a symbol of this embrace. It is a jubilant acceptance of Tea as my Dao. It is a dedication which I greet with a steady gaze and an open heart.

As so many rituals do, initiation provides a formal pause to mark the path; a moment of reflection, a celebration of successes passed along the way and a steadying for challenges yet unmet. This is a flow of

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energy from the tradition into me. But the opposite also occurs in this instant. Initiation is a framework for my heartfelt thanks to the tradition (including the many chajin who came before me) and to Tea for all they give me and all they give (and have yet to give) to others through me.

But all this talk of the deeper meanings of initiation leave behind the obvious truth in a ritual like this one: Initiation is a formal welcome into a community. What a gift! What a joy! (What a thing to save for the end!) I thank you all for being such integral parts of this Tea community—for being exactly who you are and for playing an enormous part in Global Tea Hut through your donations, visits, well-wishes and countless other contributions. I am honored to (officially) be your Tea sister. In the weeks leading up to you receiving this news-

letter, I'll be raising tea bowls and tea cups to all of you in thanks for your many roles in my path and in this tradition. It is my hope that your tea will be all the sweeter and your path will be all the clearer as a result of it!



