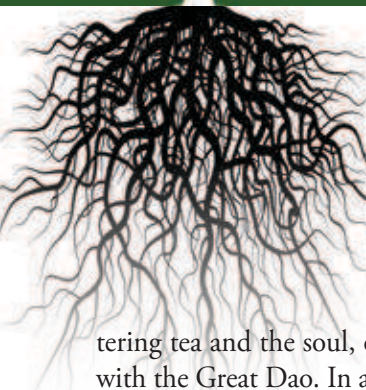




GONGFU TEA TIPS

June 2013



The second principal of gongfu tea is 'Graceful Movements'. This mastery of tea is also a mastery of ourselves, and this will require patience and practice. But through mastering tea and the soul, one can indeed achieve a harmony with the Great Dao. In ancient China, many of the highest teachings came from simple fisherman, wheel makers or other craftsmen. In completely mastering a task, they realized that true mastery was impossible without also honing the craftsman herself, and ultimately did so—letting go of personal effort and allowing the Dao to act through them in their work, and by extension their life. And so they *were* qualified to teach even a duke or a king how to live!

In Chinese the effortless work of a true master is called "Wu Wei". This is saying that they perform from the still center where they meet the universe; where they are channeling the Divine. In the West, it is often mistakenly assumed that mastery is *mastery over*—that it means control over the medium/situation/etc. True mastery isn't about control. Quite the opposite: true mastery is about letting go. The greatest athlete or dancer cannot describe how they do what they do, because they don't know. Mastery is finding that place in you that meets the universe and acting from it. If their mind is involved then they aren't performing at their peak, at the level of a master! It is only when we step out of the way, and merge with the medium, that we have attained mastery. That is as true of tea preparation as it is of life! And anything we conduct out of our still center will move others towards that place, and that inspiration will be our mastery and our purpose.

Most of us come to tea brewing without the ability to have graceful movements. This is in part because the methods and teaware are foreign to us, and therefore awkward. We will have to spend some time familiarizing ourselves with a kettle and how to place (not pour!) the water into the pot, how to hold the pot when dispensing the exalted liquor, and even how to hold the cup or bowl as we drink. Over time and repetition, these skills steep into our hands and into our spirits just as the essence of the tea steeps into the hot water.

One thing we can all work on to make our tea brewing more graceful is to try to be more ambidextrous. Part of what makes us awkward, in tea brewing and in life, is that we are off balance—favoring one hand to do most things in life. If we are right handed, the tendency is to brew a clunky tea in which everything is done with the

right hand, while the left side of the body sits idle. This will never be graceful, balanced or harmonious. We must practice involving our entire body in our tea brewing, and the two hands should work in great concert—passing teaware fluidly back and forth, and with grace and elegance, resting the truth that both hands are indeed one body!

Try switching your tea brewing around occasionally: holding the kettle with the right and teapot with the left, or vice versa. You must be able to perform any action with both hands in the end. Involve both sides of your body fluidly. As we mentioned in previous issues, it is good to divide the tea space in half and only do things on the right with the right hand, and similarly only do things on the left with the left hand. This often means passing things from one hand to another, which is a good practice for achieving greater grace and fluidity (tea is liquid, after all!). Over time you will find your tea brewing becoming more balanced, and ultimately coming out of the center. For as both hands, and both sides of the body (our Yin and Yang) are equally skilled, and cooperating completely, the whole process then begins to arise out of the center, as it should. This, then, will begin to translate to other areas of your life, and you will find that you walk, eat and sleep with greater harmony and balance as well...

*"Simplicity, patience, compassion.
These three are your greatest treasures.
Simple in actions and thoughts,
you return to the source of being.
Patient with both friends and enemies,
you accord with the way things are.
Compassionate toward yourself,
you reconcile all beings in the world."*

—*Dao De Jing*—



