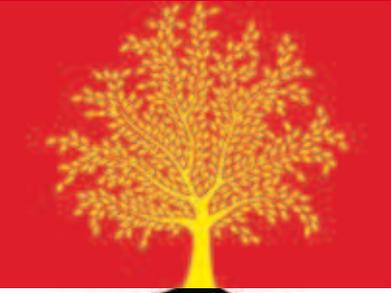


A RESOLVE TO INVOLVE

Steve Kokker



One of the most intensely satisfying aspects of being a tea brother is not only in the sharing of tea with others, but seeing how the desire to share spreads so quickly. We hear so often now how our friends and friends of friends have been very naturally inspired to go out in their lives and serve tea to *their* friends and families. They feel touched and moved by having a conscious tea session, and have a desire to provide for a loved one the same warm feeling. Every time someone tells me they served tea to their so-and-so, a bit shyly, as maybe they didn't quite know all the ins and outs of "proper" tea service, I feel like jumping up and yelping, "Wow! Way to go!" Do something kind to someone, and they then feel inspired to pass on that positive feeling.

Most of the time when people tell me about serving tea to others, they tend to reflect both excitement and nervousness. They want to serve tea, to share a meaningful experience, but find it a bit daunting also. "What of the mistakes I may make, what of the silent pauses when two pairs of eyes lock awkwardly, meaningfully—will I start laughing? What if I don't make my tea exactly as Wu De does? What if I cross the sacred left/right plane or swivel counterclockwise when a clockwise motion was called for? Will that lead to tea tainted with bad Qi which could butterfly-effect into terrible consequences for my guests' future generations? Worse, will guests look at me with criticism and judgement: 'Hmmm! He doesn't pour tea into my cup from two meters away like that Russian guru does on YouTube!' It seems too much!"

So many people in recent months have told me about starting their own tea serving sessions. Let me just share a few. There have been some teashop clients who told me about sitting their moms down for the first time in years to share tea. One of our workers, Sille, has a five-year-old child who loves to invite his friends over for tea parties after she served them once. A couple of guys have smartly found that inviting a girl they fancy over for tea is non-threatening and a good way to know if shared space and/or silence is possible with them; a litmus test of some sort. The challenge here is balancing partly sublimated intentions with serving skills.

One friend is 17 years old but often speaks as if he is pushing 1000. I feel we have met before in some other life, on some other plane. He calls me a teacher of his and yet I learn so much from him each time we meet. He sent me this email recently: "I wanted to share a very deep and interesting feeling with you. Just right now, sitting in the kitchen, enjoying my chaxi alone, I have discovered that it is not comfortable any more to drink tea just by myself. Something

from inside utterly needs to share this eighth wonder of the world with other people. As soon as I accumulate enough peace and positive energy, it wants to spread, making people happier. Maybe this truly is the Path of Tea. What do you think?"

I think it is indeed! He now regularly serves tea (on the floor, with a make-shift chaxi) for his new girlfriend and mother. The mother, needless to say, is duly impressed with this charming young man's interests in activities atypical for those his age.

Although, perhaps not so atypical. All people need is to be shown the magic of tea, the value of a tea session and they can, regardless of age, tap instantly into at least some aspect of the very human experience of sharing space. Another teen acquaintance, a bit of the rough-around-the-edges boxer-with-a-heart-of-gold type, recently upgraded his tea equipment so he can get all of his gang to sit down on the floor with him and enjoy some peace and relaxation while making tea for them: "I see they're all hooked on energy drinks and sitting behind the computer, I wanna give them a chance to just... be. Know what I mean?"

Indeed!

The next time I saw him, together with another young friend he wanted me to meet, he couldn't wait to tell me that he'd prepared tea for his grandfather and had gotten him to drink the first three cups in silence. As I was pouring the tea, he asked excitedly, "We'll be drinking the first ones in silence, right—meditating?" He was hoping to give his friend an experience. We did. After which, there was some discussion, and the friend frowned and said, "Hmm, what you said about getting to know the tea's character reminded me of a book about shamanism I've been reading, and there too it speaks about understanding the different spirits of plants and the meditative mind that requires. Is that what you were getting at?"

Yes!

How fast and enthusiastically the desire to serve others spreads! As my oft-reincarnated brother wrote in his email, once a certain degree of tranquility has been cultivated in solo tea sessions, the desire to share such bliss or help others cultivate it grows very naturally. No one needs to enforce this in others; it is a beautiful human force that arises quite on its own. We Chajin know we are lucky to witness the small miracles which unfold while offering others a tea space.

And these moments can happen in all sorts of ways. One friend holds meditative group tea sessions which I'm sure are transformative for those who attend. Yet another client, who makes a staggeringly strong brew of cheap Da Hong Pao in a thermos and sits his friends down to share it



with so that they won't be tempted to down beers or other alcohol, is also doing his bit to instill harmony. Another client, who found that tea has dimmed all desire for alcohol in him, recently bought a whole tea preparation set to help a friend who needs some similar guidance and invites him over as often as possible for no-booze drinking sessions.

As the adage goes, 'Tell me something and I will forget it. Show me something and I might remember. But get me to do something and I will never forget.' I owe so much gratitude to the Tea Sage Hut in Taiwan for being able to share this with others. I am certain that for hundreds of other people it has been the same story: while we might have been avid tea lovers before a true introduction to the tradition as taught by Wu De and others there, it was only through direct experience in that particular environment that we could gain a visceral knowledge about what sharing tea with others could mean. What's particularly beautiful about the center is, as with any vortex, the spirals extending from the Tea Sage Hut are limitless in their scope. Through the sessions at the Hut to me, through me to others, through them to others still, and on it goes. When I think of all the spirals now swirling around in over 30 countries from the Hut's vortex; it's dizzying. The reach of joy is long indeed.

There are challenges, however, in bringing this gift to others. Finding time and space and a tranquil state of

mind are significant among them. So is the usual overcoming of laziness. Other questions involving the details of service (teaware, proper gong fu movements, etc.) are on the list too, but not as high up as traditional fears of intimacy. When we invite others for tea, be it just one or several, we are exposing ourselves in a vulnerable way to a certain intimacy which is sure to follow. Often, we don't trust in ourselves enough to handle it, or feel shy or awkward about sharing a heart to heart space. We forget how much others crave this opportunity and how judgement, cynicism and the critical mind just disappear in such a space.

We forget that the best way to learn something is just to do it—not always to practice in secrecy, endlessly until we tell ourselves, "Ok, *now* I am fully ready!" We even forget sometimes how blissful is the gift we give to ourselves in the process, how good it feels. That alone would push us to do more serving.

So in this time of the year when we make lists of promises we intend to keep for the next year, all those things we have kept putting off in the past and will likely keep putting off in the future, I propose yet another. It's much simpler than the ones already on your list, and I can almost guarantee even without having read them, that by doing this one thing, many of the things you wish for will be taken care of in the process: *serve more tea to others!*

A Resolve to Involve

I'll throw out a few ideas for you all, some practical suggestions of how to incorporate this into your lives quite easily and creatively. Don't worry so much about your teaware or gong fu skills. Those will improve in time.

At your space: Some people live in cramped surroundings with other people. Is it possible to wait until there is no one home to have a guest over? If not, why not invite your housemate(s) to join? If you can, re-arrange your living space such that one corner can be designated as a tea serving space—it can have multiple functions of course, but once you start arranging your space to fulfill a function, it will soon take on a life of its own. Even in the most cramped of spaces this is possible to do with a little outside-the-box imagination.

If your home space is not the best option, perhaps your work space? There are usually way more possibilities than one would imagine at first. A friend has recently re-arranged a back room at her office which was used mainly as a storage-dumping ground to accommodate a comfy corner where people can sit in a circle and enjoy tea. She serves tea to co-workers when she gets the chance and has used it off-hours to invite a few friends over too.

If there are no home or work options, hey, why not use a makeshift tea space in your educational institution? A corner in a cafeteria may not be ideal, but some respite may be given to friends even there—bring your teapot over and create a little oasis. Otherwise, a friendly teacher or librarian might let you use a corner of a floor in an unused room for an hour or so to just sit with someone and enjoy tea—you never know until you ask!

Go elsewhere: Serving tea is really exciting to do in different kinds of spaces. I've seen house parties transformed by the presence of a tea space/room, where people can come and go as they like. I once served tea at an opening party for a new company. Most of the space was loud and full of motion but our tea corner was a quiet space where people came to hear themselves think, to close their eyes, to snuggle with someone, to focus on something other than action, to just be. If you hear that a friend is celebrating a birthday, or having an office party, or having a moving in/moving out gathering, tell them you'd be happy to sit and serve tea to whomever comes up and sits on the four or six cushions you lay out in front of you. If you have friends working at a gallery, museum, shop or other kind of institution which holds regular gatherings, openings, fund-raisers, lectures, meetings, etc., why not suggest to them that you show up for two hours, sit in a corner and offer a tea space. Imagine how thoroughly surprised and appreciative people will be!

If you take a yoga or a crystal sound healing class, or next time you go for a biofield diagnosis, why not suggest to your teacher/healer that you can prepare tea for small groups of people during break time, or during/after a course, perhaps in exchange for a free aura sweeping sometime when you really need it? Or at your office's next seminar or group meeting, offer to create a tea pause? At office birthday

parties, same thing, hold an alternate space in a cozy corner somewhere!

If there are some people or groups you are curious to get closer to but are perhaps not ready to get too committed, test the waters by making them a small tea event at one of their pre-scheduled events which you then get to passively participate in? A seminar coming up that's too expensive for you to take? Ask for a partial discount and in exchange serve some tea after lunch. Someone may be hosting a musical event by a musician you like—if it's a small event, offer your services there.

Know a teacher? Ask if you can go into their school sometime and give a chat/taste testing about tea to their students. Pretty much anywhere you know where there are humans working, you can be pretty certain that the attitude is likely to be open and welcoming if you make such a proposal.

Preparing tea for strangers like this might even be less intimidating than preparing for people you know well. It will certainly give you the practice needed. The best stimulus for getting more engaged is to tie in your existing interests to tea service—as I've mentioned, if you're interested in hanging out with children, or old folks, or tattoo artists, call up your local after-school program, elderly care facility or body art salon and propose something innovative and unexpected. If you want to get to know that cutie better, tell them you need practice getting your gong fu and that maybe they can help out.

Any way you slice it, there's never been a better time to step up to the tea plate than now, so choose your method and get involved. Start slow or aim high from the start. Start spreading the kind of joy you know should already be spreading.

Finally, remember to serve some GTH tea at your gatherings and speak about that project—gathering more interest about it will help to create the larger tea center in Taiwan, from which mega-spirals will emanate. Now that we know how good it feels to connect with oneself and others in such a simple, meaningful way, and now that we see how quickly and effortlessly this spreads to others, we can realize all the more powerfully how important such a tea center is. Let's do what we can to find more subscribers to GTH, and to keep spreading good feelings throughout the year.







HELP US SHARE THIS GLOBAL TEA HUT
AND BUILD OUR NEW CENTER!

