

INTO THE HEART OF LIGHT

Kaiya

We recently urged readers to help make Light Meets Life a reality by envisioning it, going there in your minds and sharing that vision with others. After all, dreams are the bedrock on which every human creation is founded. I thought I'd kick things off in this special edition of Global Tea Hut by sharing my dream with you, and encourage you to envision your own dreams and share them with others this month as well. The time has come to start finding ways of forming these dreams into reality! Let these dreams be the first groundbreaking!

It's been a long trip. No direct-flight venture—I spent nearly thirty hours on planes just to land in Taipei and catch a two-hour train to my destination. I feel tired and worn out. I am finally here. I pass between two powerful bronze guardians and under an antique wooden gateway carved with old, unknown, yet somehow welcoming characters. I walk through and my thoughts are all silenced as though by thunder. Suddenly, I feel that the journey here was too easy, too fast. A tinge of... what? (Nostalgia? Regret?) flows over me. Surely such a place should require more work to arrive!

Green space welcomes me. The center's outspread arms gently undulating in paths around koi ponds and bird-baths, bonsai and statues, flowers and bridges. A small stone table sits nestled in a cocoon of bamboo, surrounded with little stone chairs. A somewhat rickety, open structure topped with rushes relaxes on the end of a thin protuberance into the waters of a lotus pond. Somehow, the richness of it all both fills and opens my heart in such an exquisite way that I am left speechless. It is the epitome of simplicity, without a bit of elegance lost. Walking into the main hall for the first time, I feel at once that I have arrived comfortably at home, and also somewhere otherworldly—a glimpse of Heaven. So entrancing is my first impression that I hardly notice the bright smile of a local student happily waiting for me to come back to earth, hugging me and offering to show me around. My quarters are simple but warming and welcoming, full of bright smiles and more hugs. Best of all, I've been expected, and a hot bowl of tea is already waiting to soothe my aching muscles and relieve the stresses of my mind...

Just a week later, I've already forgotten half the things I vowed I would never forget. Every moment has been unforgettable. The meditation hall where I learned my first

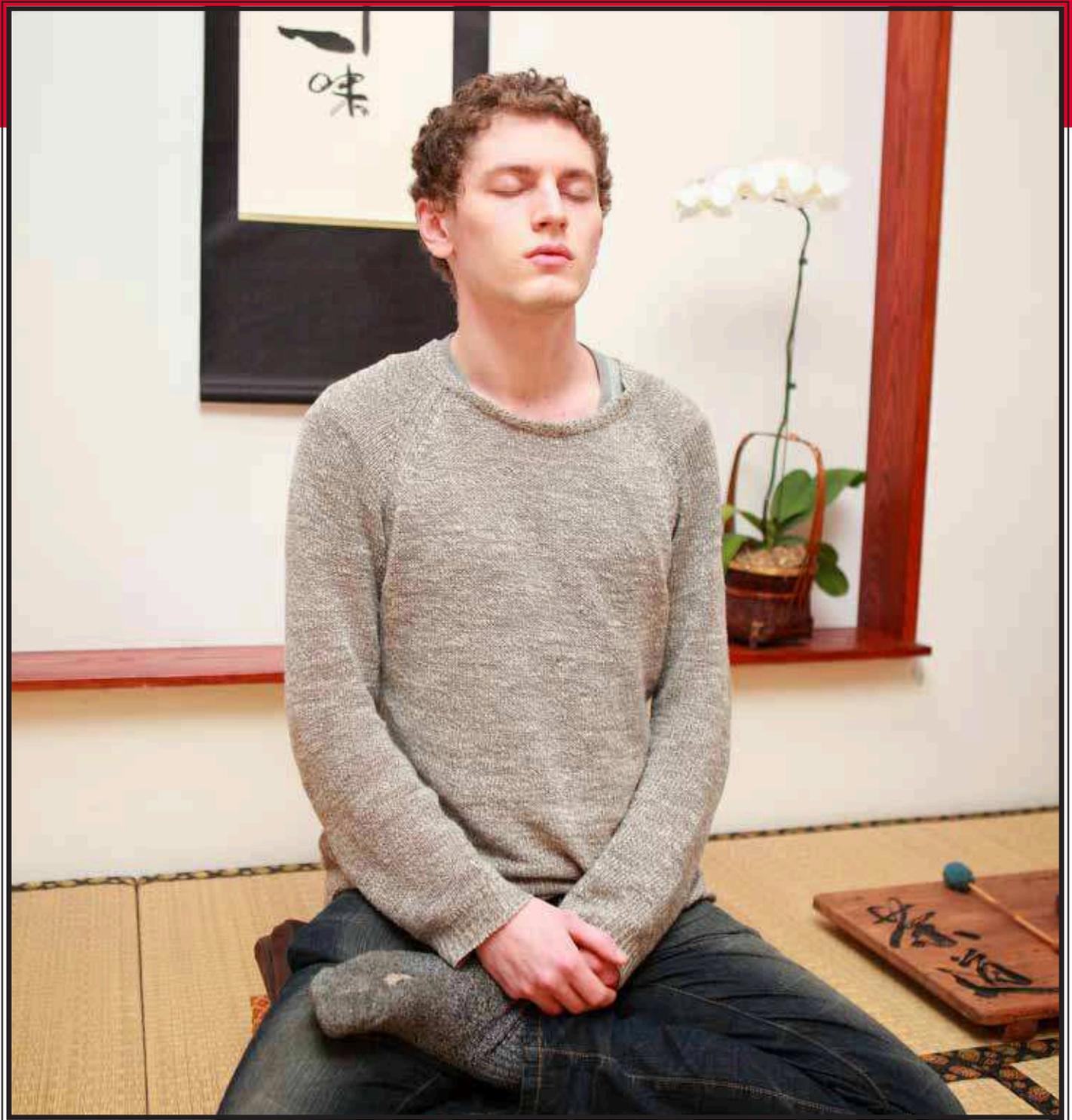
meditation technique is the essence of stillness. It reaches out and beckons to me gently each morning and evening, drawing me ever deeper towards new insights. Talismans and tea sages sat watch as I went on journeys to places never imagined without even leaving my chair in the Daoist shaman's tea room. Everything is here, from laughter and celebration, fun outings, new experiences, new friends, to the depths of inner experiences I never even knew existed.

My sensitivity and appreciation of tea are growing, thanks to the exquisiteness that is the gongfu tea room and all the amazing experiments I've participated in there. I've laughed 'til I cried at the jokes and joy that are such a necessary ingredient in the food that's prepared daily in the kitchen. I've been dumbfounded at the sharing and generosity evidenced as extraordinarily rare and precious teas have been drunk from the vast library of Puerh teas. The gardens and ponds moved me deeply and I found reconnection through tea sessions punctuated only by birdsong and gentle plops in still waters. And just as I started to feel homesick, movie night came to the rescue! My homesick stirrings were reassured by the familiar and natural merging through once a week movies and popcorn in an eye-popping home theater room.

I realized then that this place is just that; a bridge between worlds. It merges the modern with the ancient, the busy with the calm, the World with the Spirit in a way that is transcendent and natural, simple yet powerful. It leads from the one into the other yet stands outside of them both at the same time. But still, I begin to yearn for something even deeper...

I awake to a gentle nudging. It's dark outside, and I can't tell what time it is. Someone is asking me if I'd like to drink tea. I sleepily concede and clamber out of bed, reaching for some warmer clothes. Surprised but not averse, I find myself led out to the parking area and getting into a comfy van. An hour later, we are climbing up through mists along a bumpy mountain road.

The light of the full moon shines brightly, guiding us along a thread of forest trail, the sounds of a waterfall splashing and bubbling somewhere not far away. It's been hard getting here, but this time the awed stillness strikes me deeply: the warm orange light of charcoal embers dances with the moonlight, mingling together across a round, polished white stone struck with silver veins—cups, saucers and teapot waiting quietly. The Chajin gathered here stand and hug us each in turn, big smiles the only words, then silently gesture for us to take the last seats around the small table so we can begin to drink this magic, accompanied by the ethereal whisperings of the bamboo that surrounds on all sides, aglow in the moonlight...



Again a week has passed, and again I am overcome by the depth and richness of this place. I've drunk tea accompanied by the silvery cascades of a waterfall, chased the chills away with a dip in hot spring mineral pools, danced to the drums of an Autumn bonfire and hugged brothers and sisters for the first time in what I know will be a lifetime of brotherhood and sisterhood. I have drunk tea steeped under the bright Sun atop the mountain, and tea steeped in fire and shadows, my nose filled with the scents of the Earth. I know it now deeper than words: I am not the same as I was. My room is one of five, housing up to five people each. It's both more luxurious and simpler than my room at home.

Here, I am free of the pull of all my devices and so-called "connections". In return for this sacrifice, our rooms each have their very own tea tables complete with kettles, burners, cups, bowls, teapots and an appropriate selection of organic tea. What a great trade! Each evening (and some mornings) I wander into one of the other "huts" to join the sounds of laughter and tea. I notice the conversations are deeper and the connections are more meaningful here than they were in my "ordinary life" back home, and I am grateful for the change of pace and change of space.

The main meditation hall is a true inspiration, and I know that I will think of it often after I leave, taking its

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energy with me as fuel to continue my practice. Surrounded on all sides with glass walls and sitting in such beautiful verdure. I can clearly feel the energies of Sky and Earth meeting here. Like never before, I feel the love and compassion I am sending out to the world are being broadcast and received, far and wide.

I even learn about cooking and preparing healthier, simpler meals each day I am here. I find great healing in the way we all come together to prepare our day's most important medicine for one another, participating in everyone's health, and I won't forget the most important ingredient: dance! I'll keep that practice when I cook for the ones I love back home. It's an inspiration to see how this community is completely self-sustained, growing its own fruits and vegetables, and to feel the incredible power and energy difference in the food here!

But of course I can't leave out the best part: the tea spaces! How to choose from amongst them? Like all the buildings here, they are magical in the way they seem to grow out of Nature Herself, none intruding, each a natural extension of Her grace. Outside there is the bamboo grove we drank full moon tea in. Then there is the waterfall portal, and the Eagle's rock. But perhaps my favorites are the so-called 'found' tea spots: the ones nobody built. These spots call out often enough that they are now a part of the constant flow of tea sessions that trickle all across this mountainside, in and out of the buildings, all day long. "Hidden Gate" and "Tranquil Plain" are some of the names that have grown around them. Then there are the main tea rooms. There's a room suited to every purpose, exquisitely designed by Tea Herself: nothing more and nothing less than what is needed. From celebrations to insights, dizzying heights to subdued depths, calm joy and everything in between, these rooms embody the whole spectrum of human emotion and experience, just as Tea does...

My reverie is interrupted as one of the long-term students from the permanent residences stops in. We are going to go view the tea-gardens and make some tea for ourselves today! I realize then that of course the tea spaces are not the best part after all. Most of all, I am touched by the people, the ones who are the living embodiment of everything here, and by Tea Herself. I feel honored at this opportunity to play a part in the creation and continuation of all of this, at the chance to support this, my new home, and these, my new family. Such rich rewards should be more difficult to attain. And yet, here I am. Brushing aside the tears that well in my eyes, I set out for the gardens, each step steeped in gratitude and joy..

Light Meets Life already mystifies and amazes; it inspires gratitude and awareness. It's transcendent and it brings us to transcendence. It is a place that startles and stills. A place of power and beauty that inspires an awakened consciousness in the world, and leaves you feeling that if this can be so accessible, so free, and so freely given, then surely anything else can be as well...

This is but one dream of many, and that is always the beginning of every creation. There must first be dreamers. I invite you to join me now, be it in dream or in the formation of that dream. Believe me, the dream is reaching fullness; it is ready to be formed. Although we are going to do our best to build a place so incredible that it transcends all barriers, there still will be a difference in the center you helped create and the one you visit through a plane ticket alone. All of you are already a big part of that process through your support and donations to Global Tea Hut each month. We've come a long way together and made some impressive strides, and the opportunities to work and create are bursting upon us as a result.

Imagine what it will be like the first day when you walk through that gate and drink tea with all your gathered tea brothers and tea sisters for the first time in a center you helped to build!

This is the opportunity of a lifetime. There's no need to focus on the results or the outcome. The day is coming when Light Meets Life will be a simple plane ride away! There is something extraordinary and powerful in that. But for now, don't let this unique opportunity pass you by. Help us make this dream your dream as well! Then help us make it come true!



