



SERVING TEA BEYOND THE HUT

Nick Dilks

Only a few people on this planet can change the course of history in ways that will be etched in the history books. One is reminded of the influence of certain individuals with the recent passing away of Nelson Mandela. Because of him, a whole country has changed for the better. The rest of us, however, may have to be content with relative anonymity. The fact is that most of us will disappear from human memory with little trace in two or three generations—a humbling truth for our egos. But this doesn't mean that we are not changing the course of history every moment through the small decisions we make and how we interact with others. I was reminded of this recently when I returned to my old haunting grounds, the Manchester Buddhist Centre (MBC) in the UK. While serving Tea, a few people thanked me for inspiring them to commit to the Buddhist path when I taught there a few years ago. One person who I formed a connection with is soon to be ordained and will be teaching another generation of newcomers this spring. You never know: the small seeds we plant today can grow into mighty trees whose canopies tower above us in the not-too-distant future.

All this talk of the expansion of Global Tea Hut has started me thinking about the next phase of my own Tea journey, and how I can make a difference with GTH from afar. After an insightful year living at the Tea community in Taiwan with Wu DE and the gang, I will return to England in April 2014. I plan to take the spirit of our Tradition back with me as an *Introducer of Tea* and *Merchant of the Leaf* in as much of a Baisao style as modernity allows. I hope this can help to give our tradition exposure to as many Brits as possible and increase our membership this way.

Some of you may have read my article in September about my 'scouting trip' back to the UK where I led a very successful introduction to Tea at the MBC. Following that, we had a couple of people sign up for GTH; two people in three hours work! My plan is to start a regular Tea morning every Saturday at the MBC. Then I will use most other weekends to travel around the country to other thriving city-based centers to do "Introduction to Tea" days. I will earn my living from donations at these events, and then also from selling Tea.

However, I want my life to be about giving abundantly and receiving whatever comes back from the Universe, so my business model will be a little bit abnormal. I will be putting a label on the Tea with how much it has cost me to import and package it. I will then leave

any further donation up to the customer. In this way, I hope to live off the generosity and inspiration of others, like my hero, Baisao. As those of you who read my article last month will know, he had the following inscription carved on the offertory bamboo tube in his Tea shop:

The price for this tea is anything from a hundred in gold to half a sen. If you want to drink for free, that's all right too. I'm only sorry that I can't give it to you for less.

For me, I won't be offering it for free, though it's an interesting idea. Who knows what the future might hold? But at least this more transparent way of earning a living allows the customer to choose if they want to add anything to the cost price.

Though Baisao is my hero, I hope my life won't be quite as ascetic as his. For instance, it's not part of my dream to often end up like a "minnow gasping in a drying puddle"! But I will have to lead a very simple life to be able to afford the pricey rent, accommodation and organic food bills in the UK. This is something I am looking forward to, and I have been studying fellow Brit, Mark Boyle's excellent book, *The Moneyless Man*, to get tips on how I can keep the costs down. This guy has managed to live for over two years in Bristol without the use of money, and he is an inspirational figure for me. Growing my own food is a definite plan. And I would like to cycle from city to city in the summer months, which, though chilly by some standards, should be a manageable five months of the year. This will also reduce my costs (have you seen the prices of trains in the UK?) and keep me healthy, if a little saddle-sore. But my main reason for doing it is to make an environmental statement too. As part of this tradition, I will not just be introducing people to awesome, organic Tea, but to a conscious attitude to Tea farming and production, and caring for the whole of Nature too. If I can ride the 250 miles from Manchester to Brighton without having a negative impact on our planet, then I feel this will be a part of truly living my ideals. I hope this will send a message to others too.

Of course, swapping a train for a bicycle or getting a friend to sign up for GTH is only a small thing. But minuscule things can accumulate and make great changes in time. This is why I'm inspired to move to England. I might not be paving the way for a personal entry into the history books. But, every time I introduce someone to the power of organic, living Tea and they stop buying the planet-destroying stuff that the masses will be the ton, then the Earth can breath a tiny sigh of



relief. The more people I can introduce, the more change I help create. And it's not just the environment that benefits. The people we introduce to Tea will change too. (The introductions go both ways, after all.) All of us here have been positively affected by drinking great Tea, and who would not want to share that with others? My dear friend San Bao introduced me to GTH in 2012 and here I am setting off to do the same for others, so everyone that I affect has been affected by San Bao too.

So, off to England I will go in April. But not alone. Wu De has promised the Tradition's full support. He's promised to come and visit to help promote what we are doing. If any of you have any encouragement, advice, money-saving tips, contacts in the UK, please contact me at: nickdilks@gmail.com. I hope to be able to share tea regularly starting next summer in this magazine with my attempts to woo some of the 98% of British Tea drinkers who rather blasphemously add milk to their brews!

Finally, while we are talking about making a small difference to GTH, I'd like to encourage you all to think of someone to introduce to GTH. They'll thank you each month as they sit down and enjoy the magazine, the gift and brew the latest Tea. I like to think big, so I'll stick my neck out and say that I reckon I can easily introduce 50 new GTH members within a year of starting my new adventure. Anyone suppose they can match my efforts?

