



# The Eight Bowls

## STUDY, CONTEMPLATION & PRAYER

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With the first two bowls of moral uprightness and meditation now steeping within us, we partake of yet another bowl as we continue along our journey through the Eight Bowls of a Life of Tea. The leaves are only just starting to unfurl...

As we take our first sips from this bowl, it reminds us to engage in daily acts of humility and gratitude. There is always an opportunity to bow deeply and always something to be grateful for. It reminds us to study earnestly; the teachings of the wise, past and present, abound to guide us. It reminds us to carry out contemplation and prayer; life is a miracle in constant flow, and we give praise to stay connected with that fact. All of these qualities compliment our meditation and tea, just as Zen is the daily state of being based in both wisdom and meditation.

### *Study & Contemplation*

If someone told you life is about doing what you want, most of us would resort to a teenage interpretation of doing *whatever* we want, essentially being a slave to our own impulses and indulging in sensual pleasures. But, in a manner of speaking, life really is about doing what you want. The question isn't just, "what do you want?" but rather, "what do you *really* want? What really matters?"

Through study and contemplation, paired with meditation and tea, and further combined with the bountiful teachings of masters past and present, there is no lack of fuel on the path towards awakening and liberating ourselves. And it is only in really knowing ourselves that we may confidently answer the questions above. We engage in academic study not simply to accumulate knowledge for its own sake, but to accumulate knowledge for the good of all beings, and to be able to articulate ourselves in practical situations. Categorizing and analyzing information is, at least spiritually, only useful for mapping our journey. It should not be used to describe reality as it is, because conceptual understanding can't do that. At least not absolutely.

At the center, we study all facets of tea. Of course we address the spiritual aspects in every tea session, gaining experiential understanding of the Leaf in every sip. That happens daily. But we also hit the books, write notes, conduct experiments, study sutras, review texts, reflect on affirmations, visit farms, and generally learn by working with the Leaf in all capacities on a daily basis. This helps us broaden our understanding of Tea in all its various forms.

We become equipped to articulate all aspects of tea, from farming and harvesting, processing and ageing, brewing and serving to history, folklore and culture, and even science and technology. Tea is a beverage, a hobby, an art, and a Way of life. Here at the Hut we like to cultivate a deep understanding of all the different approaches to tea. The most important part of any tea ceremony is the heart of the brewer. And that is what makes tea a Dao, and the mastery of tea a mastery of the self. For that, we'll need some tools...

### *Prayer*

Prayer is a connection to something greater than the self (call it what you will—perhaps your higher self). To acknowledge this inner state of being, or our higher self, we make altars adorned with flowers, fruit, incense, tea, and light. This sacred space is a reflection of our own sanctity. Bowing before the Buddha, I bow not to some historical figure but to the Awakening and Stillness in me. Each bow before any altar is in part to acknowledge a quality within. It is here at the altar where proper prayer can take place. If an altar is to be our connection to the Divine, to a power greater than ourselves, it should subsequently be the cleanest place in our house. Fruit and flowers should be beautiful and fresh, offerings of tea should be made frequently, and incense lit daily. In prayer, we do not seek to petition the Divine with our desires, but rather to practice humility and gratitude, forgiveness, loving-kindness, healing, and to ask for knowledge of the Divine will and the power to carry it out—for the good of all beings.

At our center, our tea stage (*chaxi*) is also an altar, a beautiful and clean place dedicated to connection with ourselves, others, and with the spirit of Tea. Guest and host bow deeply to each other through the simple act of serving and receiving tea.

### *Humility*

A great stalk of bamboo, strong yet flexible, tenacious yet light, will often develop a great arc, bowing in a modest attitude. Like this, we too can find great inner strength, flexibility, tenacity, and levity in bowing deeply. Qualities such as humility and surrender are often associated with weakness, though there is great power in the acts of bowing and surrendering. At the altar, prayer can

always be accompanied by bowing to bring more humility into our lives. The simple act of laying yourself before something greater than yourself will immediately humble you. Partly for this reason, the famous Japanese tea master, Rikyu, incorporated a small door (*nijiriguchi*) as the main entrance to the tea space. Each guest would essentially crawl or bow in order to enter the tearoom, symbolizing the humbling act of shedding one's social status. No matter who you were, samurai or peasant, laborer or scholar, everyone bowed equally upon entering the tearoom. This was in recognition of the equality and sacred oneness of each guest with each other and their host.

*Keep me away from the wisdom which does not cry, the philosophy which does not laugh, and the greatness which does not bow before children.*

—Khalil Gibran

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**The whole of this third bowl is simply to bow, to give thanks; to learn and grow, and to connect to the Divine through prayer. There are countless opportunities to embody these qualities for the person of tea. And all of them can be achieved at the tea table. Bowing deeply in prayer and giving thanks for the miracle of life, we learn everything we need to know. Wisdom flows downhill; put yourself beneath it and let it flow in...**

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## *Our three main prayers*

### *Gratitude*

There are countless things to be grateful for all the time. Just witness how much is happening on your behalf in every moment. Your heart is beating all the time. Your body is carrying out innumerable processes without any conscious effort on your part. A complex miracle of molecules in motion is the state of existence at any second of your precious life. There is *always* something to be grateful for. A healthy dose of gratitude is then naturally projected out onto the world where we find unlimited blessings to continue being grateful for, through sickness and through health. Prayers of gratitude for the endless blessings that shower us daily remind us that life is precious and worth celebrating. It also reminds us how short our time here really is, so that we treasure our opportunities.

### *Forgiveness*

As Wu De always says, "If all were known, all would be forgiven." Though we may not have the capacity to know everything, we can give and receive forgiveness through daily prayer. In forgiving others, we ourselves are also forgiven. There really isn't much to be said here. Everyday, forgive those who may have wronged you through action of body, mind, or speech. Grant pardon. In turn, also ask that you may be forgiven of the same. Forgiveness is in accordance with the teachings of the wise. Personal experience is easily generated to confirm those teachings. Simply forgive and forgive simply. Wu De asks us to try a week of resentment versus a week of forgiveness, for self and other, and then you can decide which energy you wish to surround the rest of your life with.

### *Loving-kindness*

As you may know from reading about, and ideally experiencing the second bowl of tea, meditation plays a key role in the life of a student of tea. At the center, we always follow our meditations with a period of loving-kindness, yet another opportunity to practice gratitude and to generate a healing energy for the good of others. Loving something you do is greater than the act alone. People can be silent because it is good for them or because they have to, but to love silence is powerful. Similarly, you can meditate because it is good for you, but that isn't as powerful as a true love of meditation. So too loving to be kind is a force greater than kindness. Of course, we always say, we are not here to learn how to *make* tea, but how to *serve* tea. And so, a love of serving tea for the benefit of others is what we are really seeking in ourselves. For these reasons we practice loving-kindness through various mediums, such as prayer, serving tea, and meditation.

