

A BOWL FOR THE PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

Wu De

In this article, Wu De shares some very important information about the future of this organization, so that we can all hold the vision of it to our hearts. In that way, we realize our dreams. We also promote a more responsible stewardship of the energy entrusted to us.

I couldn't think of a better way for us to celebrate the spring than a whole issue devoted to Tea community! Over the last few years, this global, mail-based Tea gathering has changed all our lives in some way. And for those of us living at the center of it all it has changed *everything*. From the heart, community isn't even the right word. Family is more like it—*soul family*. We've shared a lot of tea over the years, around the world and back to Taiwan, filling a burgeoning center with laughter, light, hugs and, of course, Tea spirit. What was at first an ember has grown into a bonfire. This is a big Tea family and it's growing all the time!

This year, we've already felt a big shift in energy, support and abundance. Things are going to change. More and more light continues to pour into this pot, steeping our dreams in possibility. It really feels like we're crossing the threshold where vision starts to have enough momentum in the physical world that you can look on and say with

confidence that it's really going to happen. There's always a stage where you can't be sure if the world will truly support your dreams. Deep down, I've always felt like it doesn't really matter. I am following my bliss, and if I spend the rest of my life traveling around and sharing Tea with beautiful people like you, it will be a marvelous life, even if I never get to see Light Meets Life built. But bowl after bowl, hug after hug, more and more I feel optimistic that I will.

We often talk in the center about how all our challenges are based on issues related to either structure or energy—Yin or Yang. I began this issue discussing how the last year has been about building structures that can support a larger Global Tea Hut. We often have to renew our contract with insights again and again. We learn through repetition. As many of you can attest to, I'm always teaching that you show the Universe that you are ready to receive something by creating the space in your life for it. It is how we show that

we are ready and responsible, receptive and open to an experience that will expand our capacity. Often, this means clearing unhealthy habits or energy to make room for new growth. And we've done that. It honestly feels like now, for the first time, we are truly ready to take the next step. The magazine has reached a new, bright design and layout, and we're almost ready to take it to a new level of professionalism through increased journalism, translations of Chinese texts and new and exciting teas to share. We've added a lot of cushions to this huge, twisting and curvy monkey-wood table, and we have the space for a lot more Tea brothers and sisters to sit down and share some bowls with us. It's time to invite them...

Some of you have been sharing Tea with us from the beginning. Your support has made all this possible. There isn't a day I don't feel overwhelmed with gratitude for your kindness. There is a very real sense in which I love so many of you—and I do mean personally—

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ered here, as well as the new friends we've yet to make.

As this vision starts to become real, we all need to hold it to our hearts in whatever way we can. I think it is important to articulate some of the changes that are coming, so that we're all on the same page. Before I sat down to write this article about Tea community, I knew that I would want to achieve these two goals: to celebrate this community as it is now, and with all the love I can muster bow in gratitude; and, secondly, to discuss our future. In order to stay focused and strong, and to keep a down-to-earth feeling based on real bonds, we will have to hold council at every step

of growth—most especially now, as we turn this corner towards a large center in Taiwan, and a much bigger international community as well.

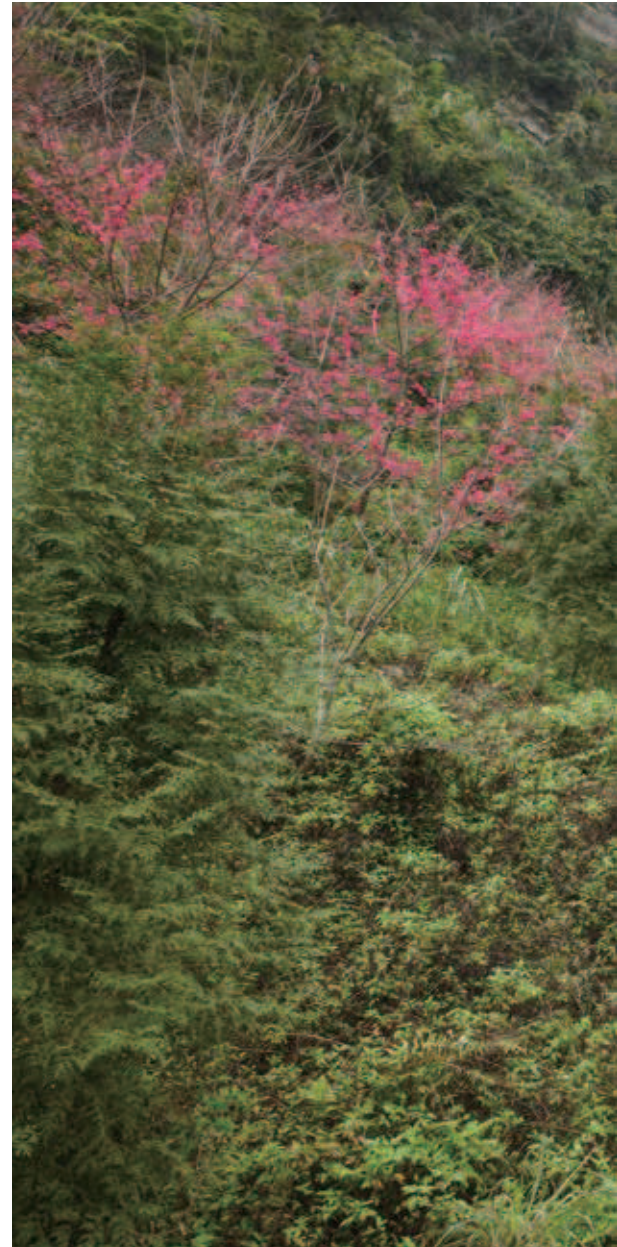
The New Center

It's important to discuss and share our visions of Light Meets Life, so that even at these early stages it can be more real and true for all of us. The more it takes form, the more energy and strength will build around it. Like a snowball rolling downhill, this vision will gather dimension and velocity, and the process of actually creating it will get easier and easier. More

important, such discussions are meant to include all of us—as each of us has our own gifts and insights, and the more ideas and creativity involved, the better the new center will be.

It is important that we build a lasting center that is home to all of us, and to future generations interested in approaching Tea as we do: primarily as plant medicine and self-cultivation. Though the fundamental principles that govern our current center, Tea Sage Hut, will be as strong in the new center, there are still a lot of areas that we can improve and extend our creativity to explore ways to improve guests' experience while visiting us in Tai-

The land that was donated to us a few years ago. During the rains, the rocks below become a roaring waterfall. In the winter, the sakura bloom (right).



wan. We like to think big, envisioning a day when other centers are built in other places around the world, modeled after the Global Tea Hut headquarters here in Miaoli. Our new center will also be run on a donation basis, and never with pressure to donate a certain amount, or anything at all. Room and board, teaching and tea will all be poured freely, as they are now. We hope to continue much of the same schedule, rules and structure that we have now as well.

The physical layout of Light Meets Life still has a lot of room to grow. Basically, we hope to have two locations: a remote retreat center and a larger main center. The

retreat center will hopefully be more off the grid, and will offer very simple, rustic accommodations that are conducive to silence and meditation. We also plan to have a tea farm of Living Tea on site, with a small tea processing facility. None of this tea will be produced commercially, but rather serve as education for those wishing to get hands-on experience. We will let the trees grow up strong and tall, and seed-propagate large-leaf varietals (mostly for red tea production).

The main center of Light Meets Life will have three main buildings, surrounded by gorgeous landscaping of koi ponds, bonsai gardens, Zen rock gardens, etc. One building will

be a large meditation hall so that we can not only continue our daily meditation practice every morning and evening, as we do in the center now, but also hold monthly short retreats and annual week-long retreats. The second building will house the tea classrooms, storage and other kinds of tea rooms for classes, ceremonies, etc. The communal dining hall will also be in this building. The final building will be residences for guests. We imagine two floors, each with five guest rooms and private rooms for residents at each end. (There may also be other small residences on the property for long-term stay as well.) Each guest room will have



tatami mats with cushions so that 4-5 guests can sleep comfortably, each with their own closet to place their belongings. They will also have a private bathroom/shower and a small tearoom with all the teaware guests will need to have tea sessions in the free afternoons (much like the current schedule) or in the evenings/night after meditation. We imagine tons of tea sessions happening in different residences all the time. In this way, the new center will be able to house around ten permanent residents and up to forty guests on any given day.

The center will of course also have outdoor tea/gathering areas. We have plans for a bamboo grove for full moon sessions, a simple tea hut for whisked tea ceremonies and maybe a small amphitheater for social gatherings, bonfires or music on Saturday nights.

While all of this is just a vision at this stage, the feel of it is already very much alive at our current center. We have already sewn the seeds of this beautiful global community, and as they sprout and grow we get more and more of an idea what this amazing plant will look like when it is grown up. We encourage you to contribute to this vision in any way you can: donating money, telling others about GTH or brainstorming ideas for how the new center may look or run logistically. Also, don't underestimate how supportive it is to simply hold this vision in your heart, praying for the love, light and energy we'll need to build it! And pray that we all will be responsible stewards, guiding and building for the good of everyone involved now, as well as future generations of tea lovers!

My Role in All This

A discussion about roles we need to fill in the creation of this beautiful new center would exceed the length of this article, and much of what needs to be considered with

regards to all the roles various people will play in this organization is still ongoing. There is still a lot to figure out, in other words. What types of skills we will need to realize this dream isn't yet entirely clear. That said, I am certain about what my role is now and what it will look like as this all develops further, and that is definitely worth discussing as it can clarify the role I play now and will play in the future. There is nothing more important for a spiritual movement than to have the role of the teacher clearly defined and discussed actively amongst the community (*sangha*).

I have two roles at the present time, one as a teacher in this tradition and the other as the manager/leader of this organization. The

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future of the second of these roles is the easier of the two to articulate: *as soon as possible, the leadership of the Global Tea Hut, as a magazine, centers, communities around the world, etc. will be handed over to a council of people.* This has already happened to some extent, as all the residential volunteers here at the Tea Sage Hut contribute creative and organizational input and/or criticism (especially our beloved Shen Su). First of all, I lack many of the skills that are needed to grow this non-profit to full size, and definitely to lead it once it is much bigger. While I may sit on the council that decides its fate, I certainly have no intention to lead it myself. I am confident that we will have all the help we need, and that all the skill sets we'll need are to be found in this community of beautiful people. By having a

council control the decision making, we can not only bring many skills and ideas to the table, but also serve as check and balance to a more responsible stewardship of our resources—towards light now and light in the future.

My role as a leader of this organization will, therefore, be over as soon as possible, leaving me to play a role as a teacher. Over the next few years, I hope to appoint other teachers from amongst the students of this tradition. Some of them will work here at the center, helping to teach the increasing number of guests coming here all the time, which will expand once the new, bigger center is built. I have no desire to be the single teacher above others in this tradition—not any more than I have a desire to be the leader of this organization. Rather, I would like to be one teacher amongst many, working side by side.

There is an old Buddhist saying that if the students don't go further than the teacher, then that is not a very good teacher. I find great truth in reading that. I honestly believe that several of my students are not only better than I am, but that they are further along in their tea practice and self-cultivation than I was at their point on the journey. It's easy to see how they will soon surpass me. We often compliment Shen around here by saying that the center can obviously do without a Wu De (I travel often), but that it would never function without a Shen Su! And he is just one example of a student with a brighter future!

The primary thing my master taught me after transmission was that when any student came to learn, the first thing that I was to do was to show them my humanity. “If they want a golden Buddha, they should go buy one!” he would often say. One of the beautiful aspects of Zen is this acknowledgment that the relationship between teacher and student is temporary and provisional—temporary because the student must one day graduate,



and provisional because it has architected within it the deeper truth that the student doesn't really need the teacher, as the truth is inside him/her already. Like our relationship to Tea, we make a provisional relationship with one another based on respect, humility and discipline so that we can learn how to grow that energy towards a place where it is the force behind all our relationships.

The world often has a confused idea about what a spiritual teacher should be, arguing that the human/faulted teacher is "inauthentic"; that the "true" teacher should be absolutely pure and holy. But calling the pure, "enlightened" saint the "true teacher" means that many who are forced into that role are also forced

to hide their real selves in a back room—a room where such darkness festers and breeds. And then, over the years, the stories come out: stories about sexual misconduct, misappropriation of funds, or even stashes of guns. And the scandals that have resulted from such behavior have made many modern seekers leery of all teachers—skeptical and doubtful about the need for such a relationship at all. But I don't think that the real, authentic teacher is the "enlightened" one without blemish. I think that the true and authentic teacher is just the opposite of this. He or she is not above the rules of the community, even if he/she is the founder. Also, it is important for the teacher to never, ever be beyond reproach. On the

contrary, the teacher's dirty laundry should be aired in the community, so that the students and teacher can work towards a better relationship together. If you are expecting to come to Taiwan to meet the "holy Wu De" let me save you the trip: I am just a man, and much like you I have work to do. My backyard is nowhere near clean, and I am not above the rules of this center. I am also cultivating myself. I sit on the same cushion my students do every day, working it out together. Furthermore, *I cannot do anything for you*. You must work out your own salvation. I am just a guide who has some tools to help you do your work.

Personally, I celebrate that my teachers were all ordinary men,

trying to navigate the suffering of human existence with some grace and wisdom, compassion and light. I wouldn't want a pure and holy, "enlightened" being to be my teacher, because one such as that wouldn't know about all the trials and tribulations of working it all out. They wouldn't be skilled at turning dust into gold, let alone in teaching me how. I want a teacher who has been through it, and has some experience transcending it as well. Every good teacher is a good teacher because he/she is a good student as well! And I make mistakes all the time. If you don't permit your teacher to make mistakes, then how will he/she ever get bet-

ter at teaching? In forgiving me my mistakes and helping me to learn from them, my students are making a better teacher out of me, both for their future benefit and for the betterment of new students who will come here.



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The Three Violations of a Teacher

T*o further clarify my role as a spiritual teacher, I thought I would share with you the three violations of a teacher that I avoid. They guide all my practice as a teacher.*

1. First, I think it is a violation for a teacher to set themselves up as an intermediary between Sacred and the student. In doing so, the student is then ill-equipped to experience the teachings themselves, or to evaluate their veracity. If the teacher is the go-between—the middle man—between the Sacred truth and the student, the student develops a relationship of reliance on the teacher. This is like a doctor who continues treating a patient despite the fact that she has shown no signs of actual healing. A good doctor should try to end visits as soon as possible, as that would mean that the patient's health was restored. Similarly, a spiritual teacher should aim for the independence of his students as soon as possible. I provide tools for communication with Sacred, and will consequently never have that communication on my students' behalf.
2. The second violation is wanting something from students. A teacher is a servant. He/she shouldn't want something from his/her students. The Dharma is priceless and has no charge. Wanting money, sex, respect or fame will only interfere with a teacher's ability to help his/her students.
3. The final violation I try to avoid is promoting any kind of mold that students should then try to fit, whether that mold is based on a copy of the teacher him/herself or on some idea from a *sutra* or scripture of what proper "spiritual" people should look like. I don't want to create a formula based on copying Wu De, nor based on any scriptural idea of what a student should be. Rather, I try to listen to each of my student's highest self. I promise to try my best to acknowledge the unique journey each of us is on, and to encourage each of my students towards their own personal fulfillment. Every being has a right to their own Buddha-nature, their own enlightenment. I truly believe that.



Wu De and Gangha: Teachers helping teachers mirror one another...



Left: Wu De giving a discourse at Tadasana Yoga Festival, 2012

Bottom Left: Alec meditating as an installation at Wu De's art show in Ethos, 2013

Bottom Center: A gathering in Ojai, CA, 2013

Bottom Right: Wu, Timo and Steve after great tea in Tallinn, 2012

Right: Hugs abound at the Hut, February, 2015

