

Tea Wayfarer

Each month, we introduce one of the Global Tea Hut members to you in these magazines in order to help you get to know more people in this growing international community. It's also to pay homage to the many manifestations that all this wonderful spirit and Tea are becoming, as the Tea is drunk and becomes human. The energy of the Tea fuels some great work in this world, and we are so honored to share glimpses of such beautiful people and their Tea. This month we would like to introduce Ashley Smith:

In July 2013, I took a trip to Asia. While traveling and studying abroad, I fell in love with the East. It would be only three short months after my return to the States that I had booked a one-way ticket and was on a flight back to Asia for a more permanent stay. I landed in Taiwan January 1st, 2014. The plan was to save up and pay off student loans, travel Asia, live simply, explore my spirituality without distractions, hopefully meeting some cool people along the way. Coming to Taiwan with these preset ideals of what I wanted my life to look like created dis-ease. I came to a spiritual low-point that manifested itself physiologically, and quick. But it was during the time of my greatest surrender that the Leaf danced her way into my life and into my heart forever.

Before coming to Taiwan I was really into loose-leaf herbal teas and single origin coffee. I was a frequent buyer at a local teashop where I almost started working. Although I loved the teas, I didn't think much about them in a spiritual way. It's no surprise that my journey had finally led me to this moment. It seems like the Leaf was preparing for my arrival for some time.

As I was climbing out of my own self-made muck, I was attracted to a podcast that my cousin, Victor, had been sharing. I had never listened to a podcast in my life. But after the first episode I was hooked. I scrolled through the archive and hit play when I came across Wu De's podcast. I was captivated by way he described this magical plant. My body had chills the entire time I was listening, and it was when Wu De shared the "indigestible version" of what Tea is, *an avatar of Love*, that I found myself crying. Something inside of me felt like it was reawakened. It struck a chord deep within, of an ancient and deeply buried wisdom, recalling a knowing from a previous lifetime.

Every morning I put on music, light my incense, put on the water and sit. I drink three silent and still bowls and then, with Tea, I create, either by writing or drawing, dancing or singing. I am often times brought to tears during my morning ceremonies. The tears I cry are of deep and abundant gratitude. She helps me see and connect to how incredibly blessed I am. I have everything I need. And what a miracle that is! She gently washes away the false beliefs about myself that I cling to. She brings to the surface what the Universe is ready for me to see, so I can make space for more of



Life's blessings. Also, I have never felt more profoundly connected to Nature and Mother Earth in my entire life, and I have never felt so sensitive to the state of our world and the ways in which we are destroying our sweet home.

Any extra moments I have are spent at the center where I have made some of my best friends and most sacred memories. This tradition has changed my life. I am constantly inspired by the Love and Wisdom shared with every bowl.

So now, maybe you can see what I can see: that I didn't come to Taiwan for the reasons I thought. I came to Taiwan to be reunited, in this lifetime, with the Leaf. I have been serving tea to women each New and Full Moon. I will soon be moving back to St. Petersburg, Florida and I cannot wait to share this gift with the ones I love so dearly, as well as with my hometown community that is ever evolving and growing in Love. If you are ever in St. Petersburg, you always have a place to stay and a hot bowl of tea waiting for you.

Infinite Love and Gratitude to you all!