

善用茶感受

USE YOUR TEA SENSES

-Wu De

Tea preparation is an art and a means of cultivation. It's great to use a linear approach to study tea, especially when you're starting out. But eventually the artist has to rely on her own intuition, gauging amount by sight and steeping by feel.

In preparing our water, the actual relationship with our tea ceremony begins. The skills of the tea master are developed over years of refining sensitivity. She approaches every aspect of the tea ceremony with mindfulness, and skill—gongfu. This is how the Way is achieved in a natural and unaffected approach. For that reason, we should avoid approaching water or any other aspect of the tea ceremony with our intellects. The more we research or analyze, the more disconnected we will be. There are several ways to gauge the temperature of the water. And in moving away from the intellectual approach to tea, the inclusion of all five senses is everything the mindfulness of tea is about. We listen intently to the gentle crackling of the charcoal, the bubbling of our kettle, or perhaps the birds and Nature if we are drinking tea outdoors. Tea sages of long ago often drank beside the spring or river where they gathered their waters, in part to be able to listen to the water's song. The smell and taste of the subtleties within tea is apparent; and the touch is in the mouthfeel, as well as feeling the energy in our bodies, or even the tea's warmth; while we use our sight to appreciate the beauty of

our teaware and surroundings. Let all the senses alight naturally, without effort; and being present to them is perhaps the greatest summation of Cha Dao itself.

When our tea is made with all the senses, its peace will radiate through everyone sharing the tea; and not an escapist kind of peace, but stillness within the motion and commotion of life—*wu wei* in Chinese. Soon enough, we won't need to cultivate the Way in our tea sessions, but just brew it naturally and allow the nature of the water, fire and leaves to flow of their own accord.

There are four basic temperatures of water important for making tea: “baby water” (app. 65C-70C), “crab-eye water” (app. 70C - 80C), “fish-eye water” (app. 80C - 90C) and “old man hair water” (100C), which is sometimes also called “dragon water”. Sometimes tea lovers add two other kinds of water as well, “shrimp eye” and “string of pearls”. All these kinds of heat are named after the size of the bubbles at these temperatures. There are several ways to distinguish these temperatures and different senses can

even be used according to individual taste:

Sound: Many people listen to the sound of the kettle. When the water reaches the “baby” stage, the kettle will often begin to make a humming sound. Later levels will pop like popcorn to various degrees and can thereby be distinguished.

Feel: One can either feel the heat by resting the palm near to the kettle, or often just by feeling the vibration in the handle. Many kettles begin to vibrate at different frequencies as they reach the stages of boiling.

Sight: The easiest method, and often the first one taught, is to look at the water. For this a glass kettle is convenient (without it one can just lift the lid and look inside). One can judge by steam or bubbles both. Baby water has no bubbles rising but they are beginning to form at the bottom. Crab-eye water is composed of the smallest bubbles rising in packs. Fish-eye water is when the bubbles are large but haven't yet begun to boil. This is the ideal temperature for most teas. Finally, dragon water is when the water has reached a full, rolling boil. Since each kettle makes different sounds



and vibrates differently, it is best to look at the water and thereby learn the other methods comparatively.

The crab eyes are gone and the fish eyes have arisen. The wind is whispering through the pines. Strings of pearls fall from a coarse pile. Dizzily, slurries of snow swirl about the edges of the boiling water in the silver kettle. The ancients too often neglected the spirit of boiling water.
—Su Xi

Most teas are resilient. Though they are best steeped with fish eye water, slight temperature changes won't damage the tea too much. In fact, subtle temperature changes may indeed produce pleasant variations in the flavor of some teas. Lighter teas, like green and white teas, are more sensitive and require lower temperatures. This is often achieved simply by removing the kettle from the heat source, taking off the lid and allowing it to stand for some time. Alternatively, one can pour the water into a decanter to allow it to cool. We should try to avoid using old man hair water (boiling) as the oxygen evaporates at this heat and the crisp freshness and energy of the water are lost. It is

important to stop the water before it reaches that state—full of too much *Yang* energy just like water drawn from turbulent rivers.

Some modern kettles will reach boiling electronically. This is convenient and acceptable, but not ideal for making tea. It is far better to control the process, stopping it at the desired temperature. As mentioned so often in these tips, much of the skill in tea preparation comes from the same place that great art or even food preparation comes from: *our intuition*. If you use your intuition you may mistakenly brew your tea, but you will have uplifted the process to an art form, a gongfu, regardless. And in the end whether it is a tin cup and a tea bag or antique porcelain and very nice puerh, the elevation and enjoyment of the Leaf is what it's all about.

When the water is boiling, it must look like fish eyes and give off but the hint of a sound. When at the edges it chatters like a bubbling spring and looks like pearls innumerable strung together, it has reached the second stage. When it leaps like breakers majestic and resounds like a swelling wave, it

is at its peak. Any more and the water will be boiled out and should not be used. —Lu Yu

For this month's experiment, start out with a glass kettle in order to get to know the fire in tea. Make friends with it, which ultimately leads to mastery over the harnessing of heat in tea. Start by watching the bubbles in the kettle and associating them with various temperatures. Later you can use other senses, like hearing the different sounds the kettle makes, or touching the handle and feeling its vibrations, but start with the bubbles because that is the easiest way.

Experiment with different temperatures. Some teas, especially green, white, lightly oxidized oolong and yellow tea, can be more delicious with slightly lower temperatures. (But if they are high-quality, they will also respond to higher temperatures as well.) Otherwise, the more heat the better. It conveys the Tea's essence to us and distributes it throughout our bodies, facilitating deeper and longer-lasting communication. As usual, we are excited to hear about your insights: globalteahut@gmail.com