

In the Flow

By Rivo Sarapik

The most powerful tea session of my life (so far) happened accidentally and with grace. Who would have known? The road to amazement was paved with disappointment, though... “Nope, there’s nothing here to work with,” slipped from my mouth. Another Chajin, Andrus, and I are standing in front of a puddle of water in the middle of the forest. Our feet are a bit wet from the hike. It’s autumn and red-yellow-orange leaves cover the forest floor. Temperatures barely reach zero degrees Celsius at this time of the year in Estonia.

We had a plan: to fetch water from a spring and drink some tea next to it, in the wild. Only the spring looks more like a swamp (due to the heavy rainfall this week), with no place to stand and reach the surface of the water or see where the water reaches the ground. The shores are wet, eager to swallow you into the water as soon as you step close to them. We’d need wetsuits to fill our water tanks. *Sigh.*

“Let’s go. Nothing to do here!” We nod to each other and start our hike out of the woods. The road back to the car is silent. It has been raining for a couple of days now and the week has been busy for us both. The prospect of fresh water, as well as a nice meditation to quiet the mind while drinking tea outdoors, has been filling my head with anticipation all week. The vision is fading now, though.

The GPS in the car offers a soothing: “There’s another spring not that far.” An hour of extra driving takes us to Nõmmeveski. This time we are lucky. A good soul had built a small pipe for the water to flow so others could easily access it.

We carry our equipment: canisters for water, a teapot, a couple of bowls and something to sit on. There’s a river flowing nearby. It sounds quite loud, painted brown as the water rushes past the path, carrying mud and silt with it.

We fill the canisters and then lay down a blanket and sit down. I take off my gloves and put them on my feet to warm them. I take out the pot, bowls

and the, setting them up, while the kettle starts heating on the gas stove. I realize it’s going to take a while for the water to reach boiling point.

I stop and breathe for a moment, and then the magic happens... It’s crisp outside, but the sound of the river flowing by has caught both of us in its magical music-current. Within minutes, we are in a state of meditation, without the slightest pressure or struggle (yes, it sometimes happens). With just us, there is no pressure or nervousness in being the one serving tea.

The sound of the water resonates deeply, with a commensurate relaxation growing inside me. Not a single thought passes by—just the feeling of flow and clarity, taking everything unnecessary away with the silt the stream carries to the distant sea. *Total bliss.*

We just sit there, eyes closed. Meditating. Focusing on the breath and on our inner world.

It takes almost an hour for the water to reach boiling point. Usually, it would be awkward, making people wait for that long. Not here. I have surrendered to it, lost in the tale of the river. By his relaxed face, I can see Andrus has succumbed to it, as well.

I have Light Meets Life shou puerh with snow chrysanthemum to drink on this day. I break a small piece, rinse it, and start steeping and sharing it. What follows is a bit blurry... Brewing and serving just kind of happens—it’s me working with the tea, but I’m not thinking about what I’m doing. I’m not fixated on what to do next (has it steeped long enough, is the water hot enough, etc.). Everything just flows and works out on its own. Every bowl is magnificent—just right.

Finally, it starts to snow a little bit and we return to our bodies, directing the focus from the inner flow to physical sensations. It’s getting cold. Time to head back.

We’ve been listening to the song of the river for almost three hours by this time. As we walk further away, the sound of the water detaches from our souls. Suddenly, we reach silence and

it feels strange. It’s like the flow has just stopped and shaken us awake from a dream. Then a car rushes by, and the sound of the engine works as an alarm clock. We arrive back in the world, not sure where we went but feeling calm, nonetheless. These kinds of situations remind me of three things:

First: Always keep a “beginner’s mind.”

Be open to what’s about to come and cherish what you have. Sitting in Nature by a river sounds like something all too simple. Why even mention it? I did that often when I was a child. But it’s really never the same experience. I have changed, the circumstances have changed and every moment is different. The variations presents themselves when our minds are open and present.

Second: It’s wise to skip judgment.

Whether what’s happening is good or bad is not really important. It’s egoistical to share my opinion about things. Sometimes things don’t work out the way you planned, but getting stuck in judgment can stop good things from happening. Regret is a waste of both time and energy. Head for the solution first, and then see what happens. Something always will.

Third: Nature knows and works best.

It’s easy to forget the connection with Nature we all have while living in an urban environment. We are not only surrounded by Nature, we *are* Nature. We are part of it. This reminds me that the experiences offered by a short trip out into Nature are everyday necessities: silence, darkness at night and light during the day, a calm mind, deeper breathing, clean water, sleep, etc. Tea offers us the space to remember and notice these things.

When drinking tea indoors, there are always details to consider—the chaxi, music, incense and so on. It’s different outside, as Nature takes care of all this and you can focus on the basics: serving tea and your guests, and, more importantly, just being.



