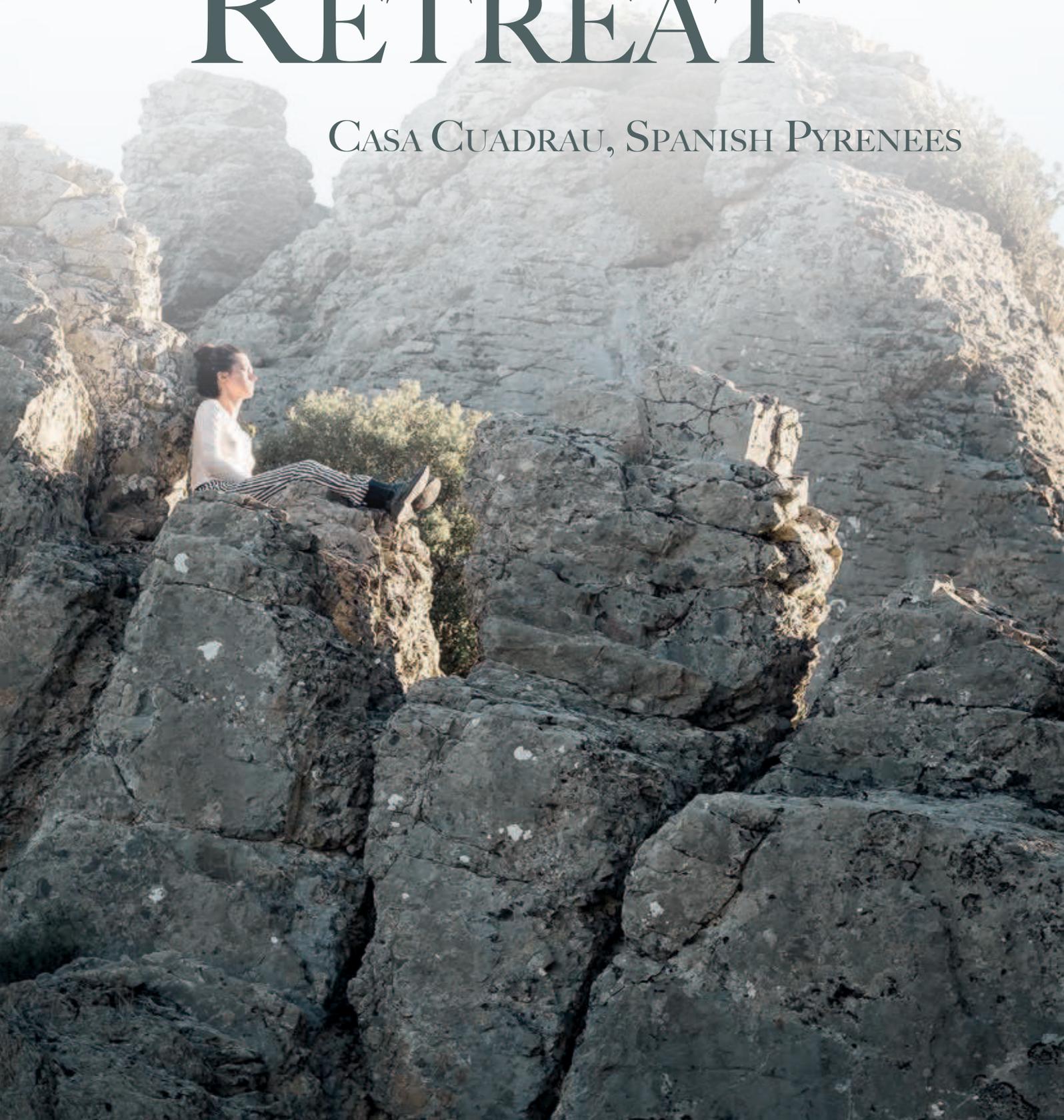


SECOND ANNUAL
ZEN & TEA
RETREAT

CASA CUADRAU, SPANISH PYRENEES



This was the second in what we hope will be an annual retreat for the rest of our lives, and maybe beyond. Casa Cuadrau is an amazing retreat center, founded and run by the most loving people: Daniel Benito and Katya Ríos Chávez. The mountains are stunning, the food glorious and Wu De says that the collaboration with Daniel is so profound he sometimes has difficulty facilitating the retreat, since he himself goes so deep into Tea & Meditation. The second year was organized better than the first, with many improvements, as well as some lessons for how to conduct an even better retreat in October of 2018. Hopefully, many of you will make it this year! We now present the accounts of retreatants Katherine Aplin, Petr Novak, Keiko, Antonio Moreno, Simon Osten & Rivo Sarapik—all of whom offer good reasons why you should come next year!



A Day of Zen & Tea Katherine Aplin, USA

Under the cover of darkness, the first bell rings at Casa Cuadrau. The setting moon, full and bright, shines its white light into my room and coaxes me awake. I linger for a moment, then dress, wash my face, and brush my teeth. I make my way across the yard and up the stairs in a blanket of quiet. Observing noble silence, we move around each other with the utmost of care. Slow, soft-footed, aware. In the wooden hall we converge and take our seats on the ground; it is time to meditate.

After the light has returned to the sky and we have chanted the Heart Sutra, we meet around the dining table. Hand-in-hand, we bless the breaking of our nightly fast. We huddle over warm bowls of porridge and eat slowly. There is no need to rush. There is nowhere to go. There is only right here, right now, and in this moment, we are free.

With satisfied bellies, we gather on the lawn in a circle facing inward. We connect with the space around us through smell, through touch, through sound, and through sight. We uncoil into a single-file line, then walk out of the gate and into the mountains beyond. Time melts as we trek, each day a different course. Up and down, over fallen logs, across wobbly rocks. We keep our own unique paces, pausing to soak in the wonder of the Pyrenees and to pick blackberries plump with

morning dew. I take notice of the flora that we pass—a piece of moss, a pile of pinecones, a pot of glowing marigolds—and wait for a spark of inspiration. With a clear mind, an idea forms of its own accord and develops organically. I gather what I need and carry the bits of nature in my arms until our journey returns us back to where we began. I arrange the foraged blooms and baubles for the *chaxi* and change my clothes for Tea.

We share three steaming bowls in silence and then shift slowly into speech. We cover folklore and the seven genres, misconceptions and misinformation, brewing tips and ceremony basics. The room is filled with many eyes and ears, all of them open, all of them focused. When the sun is high, we gather around the table once more to give thanks. We fill our plates with food that pulses with love. We eat outside surrounded by a landscape that is rugged and wild, under a sky that is crisp and blue.

Following our afternoon rest, we meet again in the heart of Casa Cuadrau, a room with windows that open out into the world. We settle onto our cushions for the second time and together, we meditate. For an hour we sit as an army of Buddhas; some of us calm, some of us stormy. Separate but one, individual yet indistinguishable. We rise from our seats triumphant and accomplished. We take turns cleaning

bowls, making the leaves spin, and serving one another. We are grounded by the practical application of what we have learned, shifting from the mind to the body, powered by the heart. We help each other with kindness and patience, for no matter where we are on our journey with Tea, we are all humbled as students of the Leaf.

In the early evening, we eat a light snack of soup and fruit. We stretch our bodies or lay in the grass and watch as the sun sets over the mountains. When we open our eyes after our third and final meditation, we are in darkness once again. We listen to the discourse like eager sponges, soaking up the wisdom of teachers past and present. As the profundity and playfulness of Zen intertwine through rascally stories, the room ripples with hushed laughter. When the Dhamma talk comes to an end, we bow to the Buddha and retreat into our sleeping quarters for the night, heart and mind filled with inspiration, and deep wisdom to both settle and unsettle us.

Back in my room, I climb into the sheets and head toward a totality of rest that is both welcomed and well-deserved. I observe as the lessons of the day begin to integrate with the rest of me, making space with their wisdom and clearing away that which is no longer needed. I smile, empty my mind, and surrender to sleep. Tomorrow, another day...

Casa Cuadrau Petr Novak, Czech Republic

When I first heard of Casa Cuadrau, the somehow exotic name was for me impossible to remember, let alone pronounce correctly. But now, after attending the Second Annual Zen & Tea Retreat, it is a part of me, and forever after...

I can happily say that the Zen & Tea Retreat surpassed all my expectations. Honestly, the days fulfilled my dreams. I was happily going to spend some Autumn days with friends, tea family—with the Global Tea Hut tribe. I did not know exactly how the retreat would be organized or what would happen, but I was content to reunite with old friends and make some new

ones. I had the intention to make this time a celebration of life, and I decided to be open to whatever happened, enjoy it fully, taking in and giving as much as possible. Amazingly, in one of the first discourses, Wu De invited us to adopt such an approach to the whole retreat. He asked us to give up all our likes and dislikes, our preferences while we were there, and surrender to the flow. We were to accept all the rules, practices, ceremonies and just see what happens.

Our dear host at Casa Cuadrau, Daniel Benito, spoke to us about the water in those mountains. “In these mountains, there is much more water under the ground than is visible above

ground. The limestone massif beneath us is full of caves and tunnels with underground wells and rivers, ponds and lakes” From that moment I started to look around at those beautiful mountains as living beings, with inner lives. Looking at the other retreatants, I could then see beautiful mountains full of hidden rivers and lakes, secret and sacred.

Reflecting on a single day of the retreat, I am reminded of Dogen’s teachings on a “moon in a dewdrop,” in which he says that if you understand one teaching, you understand them all; and if you truly understand a grain of sand, you understand the Universe. Here is a day in the life of a retreatant:

5:30AM: Morning bell. I wake up ready—feeling the body, trying from the early morning to apply the first of the “Five No-Nos” Wu De taught us: No internal dialog. Funny, that the attempt includes thoughts—indeed! I go outside to see the stars fade away, carried by the dawn and do a bit of Qigong practice before the 5:50 bell invites us to sit down on our meditation cushions. Posture is enough. This is my practice. Shunryu Suzuki said, “What we call ‘I’ is just a swinging door which moves when we inhale and when we exhale.”

8:30AM: Meditation walk. Mountains all around, hiking in silence on rocky trail. There are vultures above our heads. Beauty beyond words.

10:30AM: Tea ceremony Class. How fortunate am I, being asked to serve these sessions as “*cha tong*” (茶童). The Chajin inside me is singing and dancing. There is no better tea practice possible for me at the moment. Each person I offer a bowl to is my teacher at that moment. Wu De lectures, people receive in silence and a few questions are raised and answered. Despite the “no communication” rule between students (Noble Silence), the community feeling is growing. Tea is good.

2:30PM: The gong is inviting us to our meditation cushions again. There is guided meditation every day at this time, deepening our practice—posture and breath, breath and posture and on to other levels... For some reason, my mind is marking feelings in my legs as “heavy pain.” Question: What is the difference between pain and pleasure? Answer: Keeping the posture.

4:30PM: Tea class again. This time we sit in smaller groups and practice tea ceremony forms, from forms attaining essence to essence back to forms. Some of us are trying the tea ceremony practice for the first time, while others of us are skillful already—all learning together how to serve. Seeds are planted.

7:30PM: Evening meditation—quiet inside and out. This is my practice—right here, right now. Mind is waving, so what? Mind is quiet, so what? Curiosity about this practice. Dogen said: “If you are unable to find the truth right where you are, where else do you expect to find it?”

8:30PM: Dharma talk. Intense and cutting. And let’s face it, knowing Wu De, who would expect anything else? I am not sure how to take it—to memorize meaningful parts, write down the stories and profundities for future study and contemplation or rather just take it all in as inspiration for my own retreat life right here and now, which is “Reality,” as he points out. Perhaps the confusion is the point. Zen teachers leave us reeling... I choose to let it all wash over me, watching for words which cling and shake, ring and poke.

9:30PM: Take rest. Short walk alone before going to bed. Under the harvest moon, among mountains and medieval empty village roads. The vultures are sleeping and all under Heaven is quiet.

更深處是一面寂靜的隱藏湖





茶 *Meditation, hiking and tea echoing in the mountains...*



A Beautiful Retreat Keiko, Japan

Everything was new and fresh experience for me. Despite my fear of the unknown aspect of this seven-day silent retreat and the all-new world of Tea ceremony, it was an amazing experience, which went far beyond my expectations. From the morning meditation at 6:00AM to the teachings of Wu De, which carried on until 9:30PM, the days went by full mindfulness, meditation and contemplation, as well as a gentle atmosphere throughout. I learned so much—from how to meditate, enjoy Nature and the wonderful vegan food to how I can drink three bowls of tea with pleasure and peace. The location was superb and the house was well taken care of, everything was full of love. Next year's retreat dates are already highlighted on my calendar!

失去自己 找到自己

Zen Sketches Antonio Moreno, Spain

The following are the sketches, notes and thoughts I wrote down during the Second Annual Zen & Tea Retreat. I could of course reflect back on the retreat coherently, but I thought that a direct account in "stream of consciousness" format would be a poetic, metaphoric way of approaching a week-long way of life—a way of being and living in which I see the world differently than I ordinarily do. Since the retreat mind is apart, perhaps the language should be as well. Not only are these notes my own contemplations, but they are also highlights from the discourses, which I felt the need to record for later contemplation.

Second major retreat... Sketches of silence. Pen scratching notebook. Take Rest... Two weeks removed. The retreat is very much still with me. Still-motion. Devotion in Motion. I'm applying the teachings. My life is taking on a different shape. I'm fully charged, fully present. Fully aerated! Growing new roots.

These are challenging times for me and this retreat was a highly anticipated parenthesis to gain a new perspective and sharpen my senses. I didn't let myself down and made the most of it, new insights, new questions, new oaths. Exhale. I share words, ideas, concepts, revelations, determination, love. Inhale. Heart.

I had never heard of the *Cintamani*, the "wish-fulfilling jewel" of the enlightened masters... Endless roads, infinite

possibilities... The power of granting wishes true. Take heed (that old and familiar warning). Be careful what you wish for! The way becomes easiest when unguided by preference.

I have the *Cintamani*. My mind is the wish-fulfilling jewel. Cherish the *Cintamani*! There is no issue, only my orientation towards the issue. I have exclusive power over my orientation towards the issue. You always lose when you argue with reality. There are no enlightened beings, only enlightened actions. My dreams will all come true when I only wish things be as they are. To be aligned with reality. Accepting. Inviting. Loving. I say yes with an open heart. Bring it on! When I trust my happiness to the hands of others I give up my only true power—the power of my orientation.

Though the forest is dense, water flows though it freely. That which you resist, persists. Sharpen the tool. Sharpen the *Cintamani*. No comfort orientation! If every rub bothers/ticks/annoys/repels how will I ever be polished? Shine on you crazy *Cintamani*!

Looking out at Mondoto Mountain and the Sestrales... Deep teachings. Breathe-taking magnitude. Dylan: How many years can a mountain exist before it is washed to the sea? Sedimentary mountains. Calcareous mountains. Once a deep seabed. Once a 5,000m. glacier. Eons of erosion... Limestone returning to the sea. Water the source up at the Spring returns to the source at

the bottom of the sea where pulverized fossils come back to life. Strata. Layers. Stripped. United.

We are constant change and evolution. Nothing stays the same. Embrace the change. Flow. There's nothing to be done and yet there's a lot of work to be done! If nothing changes, nothing changes. Put my devotion into motion! Again!

A new seed of love planted in re-nourished soil. Aerated by retreat. I must water now. I turn the kettle on. I'm alone with the heart of my matter now. Crossroads. The crux... Zen is a stall selling water right beside the river. I have power over my orientation. I pour my heart. Awakening. Death of romance. Birth of love. My mistress, my lady, my soul, my spirit. The man of the Dao retreats to his sphere of influence.

Teachings are like stones we throw at the stars. They can guide our way through the dark sky or they can come right back down and fall on your head.

Who is it whom I address? Who takes down what I confess? Are you the teachers of my heart? We teach old hearts to rest. Oh teachers are my lessons done? I cannot do another one. They laughed and laughed and said Well child, Are your lessons done? Are your lessons done? Are your lessons done?

—Teachers by Leonard Cohen

A Tea Journey *Simon Osten, Germany*

At the time these words find you, months will have passed since the retreat, and since I wrote this, so I can't miss the chance—as a time traveler or voice from the past—to wish all of you a light & pleasant, healthy & exciting New Year, since we're now probably close to the Chinese Year of the Dog.

Thinking of the retreat in Spain, thinking of the village of Vió where it happened, so many profound and vivid impressions, experiences, memories and thoughts occur to me: The cold indoor sequence of reflection is now about to begin in the course of my year (German winter), and I will try to shape and share some early results of this digestive process—digestive truly, since the days this article is dedicated to were such a nutritious and intense time, which not has left me with so much gratitude to express and work to do.

I am aware of the fact that maybe some phrases of my articulation/attempt to capture what the retreat “was like” could be quite similar to other formulations of the daring dear fellows from the past-present-future Zen & Tea retreatants, who also will try to pour these experiences into vague word-vessels that seem so very inadequate. Similar because we all were allowed to spend the same outstanding time in the same beautiful part of the world, eating the same incredible food under the same stars, accompanied by the same kind of wonderful people, listening and practicing the same or at least similar Tea-chings. But please keep two important and valuable things in mind which Wu De also used as an introduction in our retreat: Tradition and Repetition.

Although we probably can all agree on this same framing, was it really the “same” experience for me as for you? Some maybe will remember the little story (Wu-necdote) about the difference of food (quality/experience) between the “mom-made pasta,” which is not the same if it is made with home-grown ingredients as opposed to the instant kind, but also not the same if her two sons eat the same meal at the same time but with a different orientation: If one son lives a boring life in the

basement and the other comes back home from a tough time on the streets, they will not experience the “same” pasta. What matters and leads to the differences in our articles is the personal heart and perspective towards a similar experience, with varying emotions and emphasis, often chosen afterwards. So, to serve you my pasta, I will try to use two different forms, which is to say that this article has two main ingredients: noodles and sauce, because my experience was kind of divided into two aspects or layers. But actually, since we didn't attend a cooking workshop in Italy, a more appropriate metaphor would be to say the Tea (text) I'm preparing consists of *leaves* and *water*. One part is the *Way to Vió* (arrival/leaves) and the other is the *Way Through Vió* (retreat/water). Therefore, here is a short story in two chapters about gathering leaves alone, placing them in a bowl in Vió and pouring hot water over them (the teachings). Notice that they are still spinning...

The Way to Vió

My journey to the retreat began much earlier. One could say the first step in the direction of Spain was taken exactly one year earlier. It was a rainy German October and I was happy to spend a whole, incredible and life-changing Tea-day in Berlin. There, for the first time I met this beautiful Global Tea Hut community in real life. I met great sisters and brothers (mostly from Berlin) together with Wu De, Antonio and also Morten, who had just come back right from the first retreat in the Pyrenees. The warm and deep impressions of this touching, unique day and meaningful experience still lingers in my heart (and will forever), especially through the personal connections which began with this first encounter and still continue to unfold today. The strong wish to deepen all those relations (to Tea and her People, including myself) in the coming months confirmed the decision to attend the Zen & Tea Retreat if possible, although I wasn't completely sure whether it would happen in 2017 or not. But through the whole

time, before the dates were announced, I had the feeling and confidence to be in Spain the next Autumn. To finally fulfill this longing, I tried to make this forthcoming occasion even more special, since I knew it really would be the next step on my Way of Tea, and also the very first ever retreat I would attend in this life.

If circumstances would allow, I knew I would embed this extraordinary week (about which I could read the nicely-written and inspiring words in last year's issue by the likes of Rich Allum and other participants) into an extended, even bigger Tea journey. It was clear for me that I should not arrive at what was then an imaginary and remote place called Vió in a quick, regular and direct way. So, I decided to embrace the Tea and Zen week with a little trans-European journey, visiting some wonderful Chajin on my way to the village and back home afterwards. In this way, I connected existing dots and discovered or added new ones on my Global Tea Hut map.

Visiting people in Germany, France and Spain was just one step. The next phase was to plan a different kind of trip, which would require a little more willpower and vitality, because I decided to reach Vió by foot. My plan was to cross the Pyrenees from the French to the Spanish side and hike the distance through the mighty and yet unknown mountains over the massive border. This would make the retreat into a pilgrimage—a personal rite of passage. Spending ten days or more alone in Nature, I thought, would be the perfect initiation into my first deeper meditation-week. And now that I have returned safely and heavily enriched back home, I can tell you that it really was worth the trouble! Through this the trip I experienced multiple dimensions of myself and tea: an outer physical aspect of body-work/exercise (the hike), followed by a second inner aspect (the retreat), which trained different kinds of “muscles.”

What could be a more adequate introduction to Tea and Zen than becoming a lonesome Wayfarer through beautiful hillsides—a cloudwalker on cragged mountaintops and a silent guest among numberless trees and an-

imals, waking up and going to sleep in a natural rhythm of the sun, simply caring about the next water source, a passable path or a safe place to stay the night creates a state of strong alignment with what's important in life. Being quiet for such a duration, alone with your body and thoughts became so much more than just a nice hike through beautiful landscapes, or even preparation for a meditative week of Zazen.

I cannot overlook the fact that this adventure at some points really deserves description, because this hike not only became one of the most impressive and amazing things I have ever done, but also maybe the most dangerous. There is probably not enough space for all the details, but walking and climbing (GPS- and equipment-free) alone with a huge and too-heavy backpack down from the 3000m peak in autumn, on a super-narrow "path" with a free fall of just one or two steps next to you, really forces you to concentrate, placing one foot in front of the other most carefully, which turned the whole hike into one giant walking meditation!

All the spirits of the weather, the mountains were gracious and helpful. I trusted my intuition, which led me to experience and learn so much along the way. Already focused, connected, quiet and enriched, I finally arrived in the small village of Vió, on the drier Spanish side of the Pyrenees, notably grateful for my life and health.

You can imagine how much this sweaty vagabond needed a good hug after all that, arriving at the now-real Casa Cuadrau, and how much he enjoyed and appreciated even the simplest food prepared by the truly wonderful people there, after so many days living on just a handful of oats. Not only my did my heart open strong and wide, but there was also a palpable energy-absorbing hole in my stomach which was quickly filled with food and love. If we remember now the metaphor of the Love-empowered pasta made by the mom, I was like a third hungry son not mentioned in the anecdote, who did not come from the street, but from an adventure in the mountains, full of rivers and night skies...

The Meaning of Vió

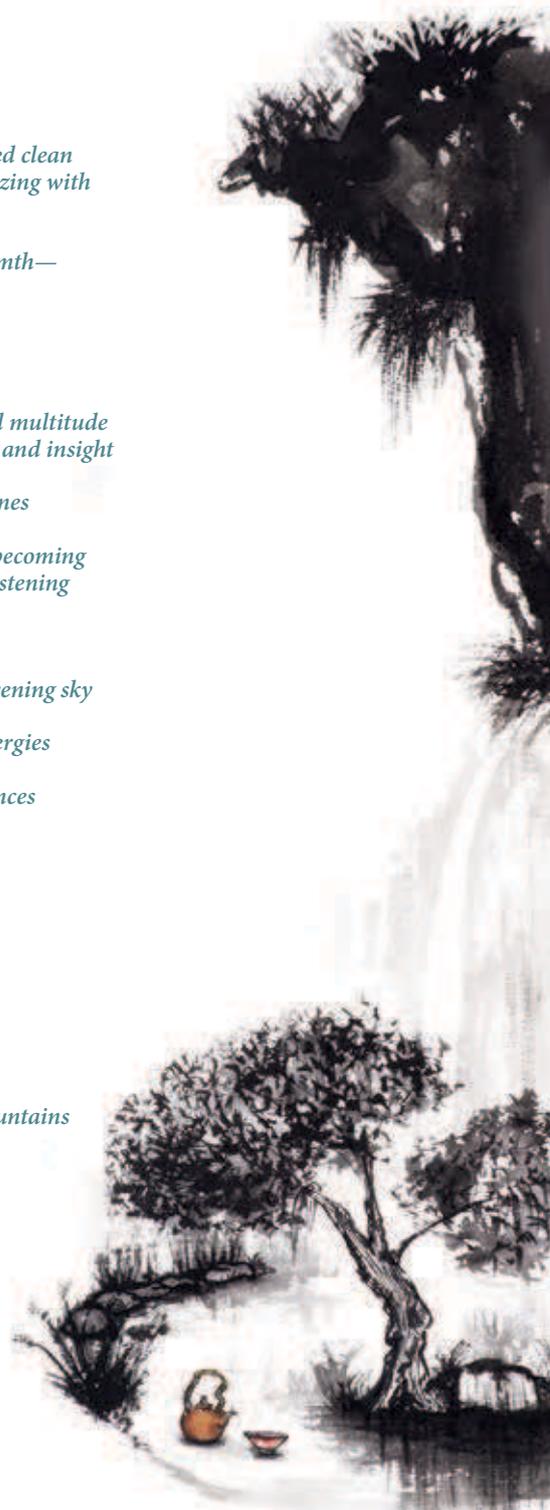
The retreat itself doesn't lend itself well to prose, so I have chosen poetry to express the culmination of my voyage, as it captures the essence of sitting, hiking and drinking tea in such beautiful surrounds, with such wonderful people. Those days have changed me in ways that will still be unfolding long after you read these words, which are missives of a precious time.

*Arrived at the end now
Arrived at the beginning
A shower together with a hug
The most necessary
Rinsing off travel and worldly dust
The brewing-vessel I've become is washed clean
Warming the body-walls and synchronizing with
The still-traveling soul,
Together clean and calm
Ready now to steep and spread the warmth—
Together now*

*I dreamt of an arrival
I dreamt of a journey
Following a golden thread to the source
I dreamt of the changing of solitude and multitude
I dreamt of vitality leading to elevation and insight
Following a feeling
Following the dewy path beneath the pines
Along the old grove's crossing
The forest bridges and mountain gates becoming
The old man the stream-enterer who's listening
To the forest songs
Cloudwalking and resting
Cloud-hidden in mountain rain
Finding the ordinary treasures in the evening sky
And the moon's white light
To gather again the spirits and their energies
Sipping the morning dew
And smelling the fresh and calm fragrances
Of the mountain wind
While a ruby red sun is rising
And Her light meets life*

*We climbed Vulture's Peak to the light
Where it meets our lives
And warmed souls and tired bodies
Sat on the burned top
We sat under the stars
And sat in communion
With the man of Leaf
Who got water from the man of the mountains
Warmed by the man of fire
The man of Leaf poured the liquid joy
From the man of the clay's praise
And all had gathered for Her*

*And I said
Soon someone will pinch me
And I will wake up from all this
And soon someone pinched me
And nothing happened*



Serve More Tea Rivo Sarapik, Estonia

The three words I chose as a title sum up the time I spent at Casa Cuadrau—not just the week of the Zen and Tea retreat, but also the five weeks I spent there previous to it, first as a karma yogi for a few weeks and then attending the event Wu De was guiding. Karma yoga means doing good for the sake of doing—serving others without any expectations, in other words. These weeks previous to the retreat played an important role in the experience of the tea retreat as well. However, the length of the stay isn't the most important part of my experience. What really matters is what I learned: all the teachings I received during these weeks, days and hours are summed up in the title of this account—serve more tea.

There are a few ways of looking at this profound, yet simple statement: The first one is to take it literally and serve more tea, which means offer more ceremonies, pour more tea into bowls and literally create and hold tea space. This means serving to myself and others. You could also look at this and see that it is also about serving Tea. This means creating time and space for the meeting as well as living in harmony with myself, others and Nature. This is a deeper and more spiritual understanding of Tea and our service to Her. Finally, another way of understanding “serve more tea” is to analyze the sentence in each part, exploring each word separately.

Serve

Service is what took me to the Spain in the first place. I arrived at Casa Cuadrau at the end of August. In a way, it was a chance to step out of my daily routine for a while (without the Internet, news or other stimulation) and replace it with more meditation, silence, tea and service to the others. But it wasn't going to be about me. I had promised to dedicate myself to the good of others.

Casa Cuadrau offers a chance to practice “karma yoga.” Attending their program means you can attend one full retreat and serve the others for the rest of your time (the minimum is five

weeks). Serving means helping out in the kitchen, doing housekeeping or carrying equipment during hikes. These simple, easy tasks become very important (and also a teaching) when you give them full attention and invest your heart. Washing dishes or chopping onions are chores I rarely take notice of when I am at home. They seemed trivial. However, in Spain, I started to ask myself why there are things that are not important enough to receive my attention. Of course, I had forgotten that there aren't any trivial tasks in our lives, as every step is needed for the next one—even on a long journey. Take washing dishes, for example. If I skip it, I won't have anything to serve my dinner on, which I might have cooked with my heart, and a well-cooked meal deserves to be on a well-cleaned plate, doesn't it? It's the same with service. Everyone who cleans the bathroom, washes the floor or rings the morning bell during a retreat frees the retreatants from that task so that they can feel held, comfortable and focused on their meditation, contemplation or tea. Every janitor who cleans the toilets at NASA helps to send the astronauts into space. Without workers like them the talented astronauts and engineers wouldn't have the time or opportunity to do what they do.

This is like tea: every part of a tea ceremony is necessary, as preparation and cleaning are equally as important as drinking the tea. In fact, there is no preparation for a ceremony, as the preparation *is* the ceremony. Wu De reminded us of this in our retreat, and you can read it on the soap that arrived with the November issue of this magazine: that 80% of Cha Dao is cleaning.

Even though I went to dedicate my time to others, I also received a lot. I had the chance to hike in the mountains, feel a connection with the Cosmos while camping one night, and have insights while meditating at the river, including that I am Life itself having a human experience. I also drank the most wonderful teas with great people, healed myself with silence and meditation and the list goes on and on. Still, I wouldn't have had these experiences without going there with the intention to serve others.

However, the real service happens when I offer because I can. Without any expectations (even for the good things that will certainly come from serving). Otherwise, it's not true service. But every servant gets something back. The skills of the task and the deep appreciation for the chance to help others at least.

There are two big lessons I took from this period of service. The first one is gratitude. I am grateful for the chance to be there and offer my time, energy and goodwill, to wake up at 4:00AM to ring the wake-up bell (and due to the early hour, see the full moon make the mountains glow), to walk the ancient paths through the forests and connect (without words) with the people attending the retreat—so much to be grateful for... The second lesson is humility, which is, of course, cultivated through service. Humility is not putting yourself down or thinking that others are better or higher; it's consciousness that enriches every experience. Putting my agenda, previous experiences, ideas and attitude aside in every moment makes life deeper, and every word and teaching glows with a special light as a result. Putting aside my preferences gives me a chance to really experience life as it comes not through the view of what I think, what I have experienced or expect to experience, but through the clear glass of being alive and focused on what is happening as opposed to what is happening *to me*. For the humble every experience is a teaching.

More

More represents one of the “Five No-No's” of Zen. *No comfort orientation*. It doesn't mean making my life miserable or looking for chances to be in discomfort or pain. It is not discomfort orientation! What I took from this is to turn my attention and intention towards learning and deepening my dedication, like meditating an hour and fifteen minutes instead of an hour, and focusing on the benefits of meditation instead of the slight discomfort of sitting. In that way, I grow and do so freely and with enjoyment.

More also includes surrendering and following the instructions, like practicing loving-kindness meditation regularly. This means dropping myself and putting all my heart into my practice will slowly but surely change the way I feel about a situation or person. This lesson has brought deep joy. I now wish everyone well. It has also helped to change my perspective from my suffering to the service of others. Love is replacing the anger and sadness in me, without the need to fight for what I don't really want. I will focus on bringing in what I do really and truly want instead. But, once again, practicing more is not about hurting myself; it's about accepting that improvement and growth requires effort. It's not the destination that matters; it's the journey. It's not the ideal, but the improvement—focus and dedication, not constant seeking.

Tea

In a way, Tea has saved my life. I first met Tea when I attended Wu De's tea ceremony in Estonia a few years ago. By the time I reached the tea event, I was in trouble. I had brought lots of anxiety and anger into my life,

and had no tools to deal with them. This meant a lot of suffering. Wu De and Tea turned my attention to meditation, silence, a harmonious life with myself and Nature and to the importance of ceremony. Things have changed a lot since then.

In Spain, my understanding of ceremony deepened. Ceremony consists of two components: attention and respect. Full attention to the time and space I'm in ceremony is paramount. When I'm serving Tea, I'm serving Tea. Choosing carefully the leaves with respect for the farmer, Nature and my guests, teaware made with love, the proper time of day, the people to invite, etc., so that a true meeting with my guests and Tea can occur. And respect for the tradition, the guests, the Tea, the water and the chance to spend this unique event together—*ichiego ichie*, one encounter one chance.

Combining these two will help to, as Wu De puts it, *remember to remember*. To notice the here and now. To notice the moments, the subtleties. Eventually this starts to steep out into the rest of life as well. Try ceremonial shoe-lacing—it definitely deserves such a mindset, as without doing it properly you might step on a loose lace and trip, hurting yourself.

There's an important component in every aspect of these three words, apart and as a whole. Even the space, or silence, between the words—in every sense, aural as well as visual. Silence can also be seen in terms of a lack of information. Casa Cuadrau is situated in the Pyrenees, far from everything. That means that when the sun sets, it's dark. When a car passes, it's silent. When you don't have Internet reception or cell-phone communication, there's no information flooding in. This silence plays an important part in your experience. This year, the Zen and Tea retreat was in full silence, which helped the participants to go deeper. When there's no talking, there's no need to spend energy on thinking what to say and when to say it, and this energy can then lead to inner discovery. It's not just meditation that becomes deeper and more profound as a result; even daily activities, like eating porridge in the morning, reach whole new levels, effecting the rest of the day.

Last year, after the retreat, I was wondering where I'd be if I followed the Way of Tea with more purpose and attention. *This* is where: an amazing time in the Pyrenees, meeting lots of wonderful beings, drinking tea in a growing silence...

