

Meeting with a cup of tea



During my stay in Taiwan I had this desire to learn more about the different kinds of tea. A friend took me to a 'Tea shop' where I could ask questions and taste different teas. Everything was going along smoothly, I was learning about 'white teas', 'green teas', 'Oolong Teas', 'Poor Teas' and watching the art of brewing & serving these different teas as well as seeping them.

Our 'tea master' was preparing different teas for us to taste. In fact it is quite a similar experience to wine tasting - looking at the colour, smelling the fragrance, slowly seeping the tea. Watching our 'tea master' preparing the teas was too, an experience in itself.

Cooling the water in a little jar after it has boiled so that the tea does not get a heat shock, then poring the cooled water over the tea in a glass container, covering it whilst the tea is 'waking up', discarding this first 'brew', then adding more water for the tea to reveal its qualities. From time to time she would take the lid off this glass 'tea pot' and smell the inside cover to check the fragrance. When the 'right timing' had come, she would then pour the tea into our tiny cups for us to smell, see and taste.

Quite a ritual indeed! And what to say about the 'instruments' and 'containers' used... We experienced white teas, green teas, 'poor teas' and more fermented teas like Oolong teas until she asked us if we would like to taste a vintage tea, an 80 year old tea.

Vintage tea..., 80 years old?

I am surprised, are we taking about Tea or Cognac? - OK let's try...

The first sip was a bit 'oaky' and not too pleasant, may be because of all the other teas we had experienced before, may be because it was the 'first brew'.

Our 'tea master' pores us a second brew, little darker in colour, amber like. I take a little time to smell it and start sipping it gently.

Suddenly all my senses are on alert, something is happening here. A meeting is happening; it is as if the tea is talking to me, as if the tea has a soul. It is no more a tea, some nice beverage, it becomes like a friend, a communion is happening.

I am not drinking tea - not even tea is being drunk - there is no me and there is no tea - simply a merging, a oneness.

Blissful moment, divine moment, silent moment!

All I can articulate is: 'this tea has a soul'. That tea touched my heart; I fell grateful towards this tea for giving me such an opportunity, such a divine moment.

What an experience it was, not easy to find the words to convey what happened, especially after a few days. Can any tea - or any beverage - convey a similar experience? Most probably, I guess it only depends on how I am open to 'this moment'. The previous teas, the set up, the relaxed state opened the way for this experience to take place. Still this 'old fellow' has something and it would have been pitiful to miss it.

Namaste 'old fellow', I bow to you 'old fellow', saluting the Buddha within you.

In gratefulness

Rakendra

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