

Tea Here Now

October 2006

Transitions

For many of us in the Northern Hemisphere, October is a transition month. We leave behind the warm, full days of late summer for the crisp, cool brightness of fall. The beauty of fall is a product of the noticeably colder nights and shorter days, inevitable as nature follows its course and offers us a gradual transition to winter.

In the *chanoyu* tearoom, where the host gives every consideration to the comfort of his guests, the *furo* (brazier for heating the tea water) moves closer to the guests. In the summer, the *furo* was positioned as far away from the guests as possible, so that they would suffer none of its unwanted heat. Now in October, as the tearoom becomes colder, the *furo* is positioned in its transition place – closer to the guests, but not as close as it will be in November when the *furo* moves to the sunken *ro*, where it will warm the guests' body and spirit all through the winter. It is only at this one time of the year - very close to the vernal equinox, nature's midpoint between summer and winter - that the fire of the tearoom pauses at its midpoint, eloquently articulating the transition at hand.

As for myself, my taste in tea transitions from the cooling teas of summer to those that are more warming. Instead of light, floral green oolongs, I reach for the fruity, honey-toned dark oolongs like Bai Hao from China, or Fancy Formosa Silver-Tip Oolong of Taiwan. These highly oxidized oolong teas are themselves a type of transition tea, not as light as green teas, not as dark as black teas. They appeal to me now as I start to crave more warmth in the mornings before the sun warms the day.

In the afternoon, instead of light green teas, I reach for Hojicha, a roasted green tea from Japan with a smooth brown color and rich, toasted flavor. Its aroma fills the room with a cozy feeling of warmth; its flavor is full and satisfying as the day cools quickly with the setting sun.

At this time of year, sitting down with tea invites us to contemplate the change of seasons as we appreciate anew a hot cup of tea in our hands.

Working with Transitions: Focuses for well-being:

- Bring attention to how the dawning of autumn is influencing your physical and mental well-being
- Consider shifting your tea and food choices to enhance the season by choosing more warming, earthy teas and foods

- Take some time to transition from activity to activity. Fall invites us to slow down a bit.
- The warmth of summer has dissipated. Encourage warmth through hospitality and invite friends over for afternoon tea.

From Tea Here Now, Chapter 6

Shinzen Young, a Buddhist meditation teacher, calls transitions “gateways of opportunity.” When we are in the process of transition, we are in an in-between state, between roles and activities, not really one thing or another. When we partake of tea in a conscious way, we become more fluid, like the tea liquid; more vaporous, like steam; and more ethereal, like the aroma floating in the air. Tea transitions afford us the opportunity to become adaptable, flexible toward ourselves and the world.