

Creating Your Own Tea Rituals

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There are three primary tea traditions that influence Western society at present: **Chinese, Japanese, and British**. From these, other tea traditions have emerged, including Moorish, Persian, Russian and Indian, and what I call “fusion tea”, which is the creation of a tea experience that might borrow from traditional tea cultures, but ultimately offers its own unique expression of tea or tea rites, rituals and customs. When you create your own tea ritual, you may want to borrow aspects of traditional tea rituals practiced by Chinese, Japanese, British, or any other tea culture.

IN CREATING NEW TEA RITUALS, CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING:

(First & foremost, tea is about relationship -- the relationship of the tea server to the environment, the tea, the teaware, the guest (if there is a guest), and to him- or herself.)



TEA: The kind and style of tea you will be serving:

- **Japanese** (usually green, sometimes white teas) Examples are matcha, sencha, gyokuro.
- **Chinese** (Black, green, white, oolong), Examples are white peony (white), keemun (black), bi lo chun (green), te kuan yin (oolong)
- **British** (Usually black Indian or Ceylon teas) Examples include Darjeeling, Lapsong Souchong, or Earl Gray.
- **Herbals**-Any edible plant or spice can be steeped in water and consumed. These are technically considered to be tisanes or infusions, and are not “real” teas (which come only from the *Camellia sinensis* plant). Examples of herbals are rooiboos, peppermint, chamomile, or rose.
- **Iced tea**--Americans love iced tea, and more iced tea is sold here than any other kind of tea. You can make an iced tea from any kind of tea-green, oolong, black, or white or from herbal tisanes. Just steep it on the strong side and then add ice. Note: iced tea is not considered de rigeur by tea experts. But it can still be plenty fabulous for you, especially on a hot summer day.



NOTE: Most serious tea lovers choose loose leaf teas over teabag teas. Loose leaf teas tend to be of a higher quality than teabag teas. Teabags traditionally use the leftover tea dust or “fannings” of the tea plant. Now, however, some high-end teabag tea makers, like Mighty Leaf Tea, are using whole leaf teas and whole spices.



TEAWARE:

What kind of tea you decide to prepare might also influence the kind of teaware you will use in your ritual. Here are some examples of interesting teaware and what tea cultures inspired them:

- **Japanese tea bowl**, tea scoop & bamboo whisk for matcha (powdered green tea)
- **Chinese gaiwan** (porcelain teacup and saucer with lid) with or without small porcelain cups and serving vessel.
- **Chinese Yixing teapot**: These matte clay teapots are made in Yixing, China. Tea connoisseurs use one pot to make green teas and another to make a particular kind of oolong, and another to make black teas. The darker the tea they use, the darker the color of the clay pot. Over time, the oils from the teas and from the server's fingers are imbued in the porous

pots, and therefore the pots become treasured personal items that “ripen” with age. The teapots are usually heated with boiling water before tea is steeped inside of them.

- **British teapots** & teacups (we all know what these look like)
- **Contemporary teaware** or teapot for fusion experience. There are a lot of fun and interesting pots and cups available, which you can buy through specialty teashops or online tea sellers.

GUESTS OR SOLO:

Solo or with a guest? If alone, what do you want to gain from a tea ritual? How can the tea ritual enhance your solitude or time for reflection and revitalization? What thoughts, objects (i.e. flowers, light, etc.) or music help to relax you? If with a guest, how can you create harmony, intimacy, and sanctuary with and for your guest(s)?

ART & POETRY:

You can help to create a fun, relaxing and/or stimulating environment by including the arts, such as good poetry, music, photos, paintings or anything else you consider to be “art”. You might want to create or bring a poem during or to a tea. It can be a poem that relates to something in your guest's life or your own life. You could also bring photographs, art or other objects that have special significance to you or to your guest or within your community. Or bring one of your cherished life stories to tell and ask your guest(s) to do the same.



NATURE:

Flowers: In Japanese tea ceremony, it is customary for the host(ess) to create a flower arrangement using either wild flowers (even weeds) or flowers from one's own garden. The flowers are to be arranged artfully and very simply, with the intention of allowing the flowers to express their own nature, and therefore, the nature of all things. Lovely...

Water: it is very important to use clean filtered water. This makes the tea taste good and also helps provide a healthier cup of tea.

Other Natural Objects: Rocks, stones, trees, and other natural objects like acorns, pinecones, wood, etc. can be used to create beauty and simplicity, which are the hallmarks of real sanctuary in a tea-room.



Light: The kind of light that you “invite” into your tea ritual will help create ambiance. Do you want to use natural sunlight? If so, filtered? Dappled? Direct? Indirect? Do you want it to be sunrise, sunset? Candlelight? Starlight? Light from the fireplace? Party lights? Of course, the time of day will help determine the quality of light.

FOOD:

British typically serve finger sandwiches, petit fours, as well as condiments for the tea, such as milk or cream, sugar and/or lemon

Chinese typically use no condiments with tea, and during a formal tea ritual, would not usually serve food. Rather, the focus is on the taste of the teas themselves. At the same time, informal Chinese and Hong Kong teahouses often serve dim sum (light small dishes, most especially noodle dumplings filled with shrimp or meat or vegetables).

Japanese tea ceremony includes the imbibing of special sweet treats, almost always homemade by the host(ess) of the ceremony. Mochi (rice flour based doughnut-like sweets with sweet bean paste or other sweets inside) is an example of a Japanese sweet.

“Fusion” tea lovers eat whatever they want (or nothing at all) with tea! Sweets, pastries, salads, soups, sandwiches, or lobster thermidor.....The sky is the limit, you can create anything!

SAMPLE TEA RITUALS

1) A SOLO TEA RITUAL: The Gratitude Ritual

The goal of this ritual is to give thanks. Giving thanks provides outstanding health benefits both mentally and physically. It reminds you to focus on what is right rather than wrong in your life. Positive emotions are known to reduce stress, support health and healing, and therefore benefit you physically as well as mentally.



- Find a quiet place in your home or office. If possible, sit on the floor or in a comfortable chair near a window, where you can enjoy the natural light. Remember that the art of performing a tea ritual includes the intention of slowing down and paying attention to the people, objects, and sensations in the here and now.
- Put some tealeaves in a small teapot and steep for the desired length of time (to get the optimal flavor from your tea, you might want to experiment with the balance between the amount of tealeaves you use and the length of time you steep the leaves).
- While the tea is steeping, take a moment to notice your surroundings as well as how you are feeling. Do not get caught up in ideas about your surroundings, but notice the light, the temperature, the weather, the objects in the room, etc. Also, consider your energy level and emotional outlook.
- Before taking your first sip, give thanks for the quiet moment you have and for the luxury of having tea. For example “I give thanks for this tea and for these moments.”
- During each subsequent sip, give thanks for a different aspect of your life. For example, your second sip might find you saying to yourself, “I give thanks for my friend, xxxx..” On the third sip, “I give thanks for my healthy mind.” I'm sure you can think of many things to be thankful for such as your mental or physical health, the beautiful smiles or fun antics of children, your marriage, your job, and the abundance in your life. (I often give thanks that I am well nourished-physically & emotionally while having tea, or sometimes for the love of my family and friends).
- On the last sip of your tea, offer a general gesture of thanks, such as “I give thanks for the great abundance in my life.” Or simply, “Gratitude, gratitude, gratitude.”
- As you clean your teaware, think of how the gesture of your tea ritual also cleaned your mind as well as your body!

2) A SHARED TEA RITUAL: Tea Poem Ritual

- Invite a creative friend to tea. Tell him or her that you are going to create a tea poem together.
- Provide a special piece of paper, maybe Japanese rice paper or a watercolor paper.
- Put the paper and one colored pen on the table in your designated “tearoom”. (This can be in your kitchen or dining room, or on the floor of a sunroom or even in an office.)
- Bring your favorite tea to the table and make whatever kind of tea you would like to have. Pour (or whisk, if Japanese matcha tea) a cup or bowl of tea for yourself and for your friend.
- Enjoy a first sip of tea together. Invite your guest to write the title of the poem on the paper provided. This means your guest begins the poem.
- Have your guest then hand the paper to you. You will take a sip of tea and then write the first line of the poem. Return the paper to your friend.
- Continue to take turns writing a line of the poem, one after the other, until you have decided that your poem or your tea is finished. Give the poem to your guest as a gift, along with a small bag of the tea that you shared with him or her.

3) TEA RITUAL FOR ONE OR MORE USING A GAIWAN:

(Based on Chinese tea ritual)



- Put some tealeaves (1-2 tsp) in the gaiwan. Rinse the tea by doing a short steep with hot water for a few seconds. Pour this water out.
- Smell and visually examine the tea, now that it has “woken up.”
- Steep the tea for the designated time, usually from one to three minutes depending on the tea. (You can ask the tea seller or read the back of the box to get a good idea.)
- Use the lid to hold back the tealeaves as you pour the steeped tea into a serving vessel (like a small glass teapot) or directly into smaller ceramic cups.
- Enjoy your tea with yourself or your friend.

Here are some links to information on tea traditions and rituals from different cultures:

British tea ritual:

http://www.morbidoutlook.com/nonfiction/articles/2001_05_hightea.html

Chinese tea ceremony:

<http://www.holymtn.com/tea/chinetea.htm>

Japanese tea ceremony:

<http://www.sg.emb-japan.go.jp/JapanAccess/sado.htm>

Making matcha (Japanese powdered tea in a bowl, as made in formal Japanese tea ceremony).

<http://www.matchaandmore.com/howtomake.htm>