

Tea Ceremony

Tea meditation is a time to be with our community in a joyful and serene atmosphere. Just to enjoy our tea together is enough. It is like a “good news” occasion, when we share our joy and happiness in being together.

At times, when we are drinking tea with a friend, we are not aware of the tea or even of our friend sitting there. Practicing tea meditation is to be truly present with our tea and our friends. We recognize that we can dwell happily in the present moment despite all our sorrows and worries. We sit there relaxed without having to say anything. If we like, we may also share a song, a story, or a dance.

We may like to bring a musical instrument or prepare something ahead of time. It is an opportunity for us to water the seeds of happiness and joy, of understanding and love in each one of us.

Practice

Here is the way we organize a formal tea meditation in Plum Village. Children enjoy this practice very much. They can help greet the guests as they enter, and a child can be the one to offer the tea and cookie to the Buddha. Sometimes the children organize their own lemonade meditation to which they invite their parents and friends. You can modify the tea ceremony to fit any occasion. Tea meditation can be as simple as sharing a cup of tea with a good friend.

In a Tea Ceremony, everything is done with mindfulness. The hosts for the Tea Ceremony will need to come together as a team well in advance. They will need to prepare the tea and biscuits, the meditation room, and themselves in mindfulness in order to welcome their honored guests.

Hosts

Tea Master, Bell Master, Incense Offerer, Tea Offerer (who offers tea to the Buddha), Tea Servers (depending on numbers, usually two are needed), Assistant Tea Servers (one for each Tea Server)

Items Needed

Incense, candles, matches, small bell, large bell, napkins (leaves can be used), cookies, tea and teapot, tray, plate with flower, tea and cookie for offering to the Buddha

Welcoming the Guests

- The hosts for the tea meditation stand in two rows on each side of the entry door and bow to each guest as they enter the meditation room. The guests pass between the hosts and sit in sequence around the room facing inward, ushered to their cushions by the Tea Assistants. While seated, everyone enjoys sitting meditation, following their breath in silence.
- Once everyone has been welcomed into the room, the hosts take their seats. The Bell Master wakes up and invites the small bell to signal to people to stand up and face the altar.

Incense Offering

- The Tea Master and the Incense Offerer walk mindfully to the altar, and the Incense Offerer lights incense. After bowing to each other, the Incense Offerer passes the incense to the Tea Master and stands to the side.

- The Bell Master invites the large bell three times. The Tea Master chants the incense offering before passing incense to the Incense Offerer who places it at the altar. This is the time, if we wish, we can bow to the Buddha and bodhisattvas.

Offering for the Buddha

- The Tea Server mindfully pours tea into a cup to offer the Buddha and holds the decorated plate/tray with tea and cookie for offering at head level. The Tea Offerer walks mindfully to the Tea Server, bows, takes the plate, and walks mindfully to the Tea Master. The Tea Master stands up, bows, takes the Buddha's plate, and walks mindfully to the altar, bows, kneels, and places the plate on the altar. The Tea Offerer and Tea Master return to their cushions and bow to each other before sitting down. If a child or a young person is present, they can be the one to place the offering on the altar.

Serving the Guests

- The Tea Servers now pass the tray of cookies. A Tea Server offers the cookie tray to an assistant. Smiling and offering a lotus in gratitude, the assistant mindfully takes a cookie and napkin, places them on the floor, then takes the tray. The assistant now offers a cookie back to the Tea Server. The tray is then offered to each person sitting next to the assistant. As described above, each person takes a cookie and napkin before taking the tray and offering it to the next person in the circle.
- While the biscuits are passed, the Tea Servers pour the tea (filling as many cups as there are people present). When the trays for cookies are returned, the trays with teacups are passed around the circle and received just like the cookies.

Invitation to Share

- Once the empty trays are returned, the Tea Master offers a gatha on enjoying tea and cookies and invites everyone to enjoy their tea and cookie.

Tea Gatha

*This cup of tea in my two hands,
Mindfulness is held uprightly.
My body and my mind dwell
In the very here and now.*

After enjoying tea in silence for a short while, the Tea Master invites people to share songs, poems, experiences, etc.

Ending the Ceremony

The Bell Master should announce when there are five minutes left before the end of the ceremony. The Tea Ceremony ends with three small bells. At the first, everyone stands up. At the second, they bow to each other. At the third, they bow to the altar. The hosts then go to the door first and bow to guests as they leave slowly and mindfully.