ForeWord Reviews

COOKING

The Way of Tea: Reflections on a Life with Tea
Aaron Fisher
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Judging by Chinese records, tea connoisseurs were surely the pioneers of food writing. For nearly 3,000 years, they have been describing its taste, ferreting through the forest for exotic leaves, and ruminating on the spiritual edification of imbibing it. New-fangled enthusiasts have branched out, elaborating on the beverage by designing tea rooms, shopping for tea ware, and orchestrating tea ceremonies. At a time when the subject seems exhausted, it is refreshing to read Aaron Fisher's *The Way of Tea*.

Scorning the way of food writers, which is a path of quaint anecdotes and quirky historical characters, Fisher's ambition is to bring "a bit of mythology" back to tea. Tea masters, he reminds the reader, relished the tranquil image of a single tea tree growing in the wilderness. He includes a generous number of ancient ink drawings of tea masters, buttressed by his own interpretations. Fisher's skill at redacting thousands of years of writing into short summaries is remarkable. Limning the Chinese and Japanese tea traditions, he chooses only the most significant figures in tea history and writes wisely and austerely about the Japanese social hierarchy that was built on tea, the master who was coerced into a ritual suicide by the emperor, and a wandering tea seller who gifted his teas to paupers. They are the muted heroes of his tales; Fisher illustrates their lives as stepping-stones in the path to discovering tea's spiritual values.

For beginners, the path of tea is not a particularly long commute: even a few minutes of brewing and drinking tea every day, as a miniature ritual of spirituality, can infuse joy, quietude, and clarity into the most modern, helter-skelter lives. Brewing tea is not about extracting flavor, but imparting emotional qualities to the tea: tasty teas are brewed by peaceful souls.

Fisher's recipe for a spiritual life reflects his decade-long peripatetic pilgrimage through Asia. Currently residing in Taiwan, American-born Fisher also penned *Tea Wisdom* and is the senior editor for *The Art of Tea Magazine* and founder of *The Leaf*, an online magazine.

He concludes that following the path of tea will profit followers by teaching them the paths of everything else in life. Paramount to all else, tea becomes a metaphor for life. A joyous book with a fan of elegant ink drawings and photographs, *The Way of Tea* is recommended for

readers of philosophy and food writing.