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Self Evaluation

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Over the span of my time researching the chemical components of the tea plant Camellia sinensis, tea processing, as well as, the physiologic, physiologic, and therapeutic effects of tea, I felt intellectually closer to tea, and also, very far away from the soul of tea. For myself, to understand the chemistry is beneficial because it compliments my experiences by creating a richer spectrum of knowledge from which to pull from. For example, when I look at the beautiful red-brown liquor of a cup of Pu er, I see stones pressing tea cakes, strong hands delicately plucking tea leaves, the forest floor, and now, the chemical structure of thearubigins.

Chemistry can be intimidating. I wanted to reshape my relationship with chemistry and find as much comfort as possible. I found this comfort by using the knowledge I gained to form stories. I would imagine each chemical as a friend that creates the various expressions of tea and interacts uniquely with the human body, mind, and sprit. When I taste bitterness on my tongue I think of the presence of Catechins. As I look at the bright green color of Green tea, I know that the color, due to the chlorophyll, was preserved purposely by halting the enzymatic process by human hands. Just as the fragrant floral notes of Oolong was developed by the use of the very enzymatic process avoided in green tea production.

I began to ask myself, what is knowledge but adding imagery to the mind so that the imagination can use it to embellish ones inner story? Stories are a way to add depth to ones reality, which, is inevitably shaped by the stories we develop as individuals. What I love most about understanding some of the chemistry of tea is that it creates opportunities for me to connect and communicate with a larger spectrum of people through stories; I now know I have the basic foundational knowledge of tea to comfortably talk with a tea farmer, tea buyer, shop owner, a researcher, a close friend, or a stranger. Through my experience teaching tea workshops I found myself connecting with my peers most through building stories from facts from my research.

Another learning component of my independent contract was time management and learning how to teach and facilitate. Planning the tea workshops helped but, a lot of the efficiently I gained was through trial and error. I began to learn how much I could share within the forty-five minutes I was allotted, while maintaining balance between experiencing the tea and learning about the chemical components and the history. I was most inspired by these workshops because it reinforced what I was learning, and also revealed to me how important the social ritual is to the positive psychological and physiologic effects of tea. The quote that revealed the parallel between my thoughts on social ritual and the chemical components, came from the book Tea: a symposium on the pharmacology and psychologic effects of tea, by Henry J.Klaunberg, “Man as a practice, supplements, the pharmacological stimuli he seeks in beverages by psychological and social stimuli, which reinforce and accentuate these pharmacological stimuli.” After reading this quote I could no longer attribute the psychological and physiologic effects of tea solely to its chemical components (tannins, caffeine, and polyphenols). The majority of the positive effects of consuming tea is through the holistic experience.

It started to become more clear to me that what we take into our bodies and what affects our central nervous system is what will survive. It is just as healing to be affected by the chemicals that are naturally created when we feel socially accepted as it is to consume the polyphenols and antioxidants in tea which physiologically and psychologically bring one closer to homeostasis. Looking forward as I develop what my part is in sustainable food and agriculture advocacy, and what it will look like, I see it is important to recognize how important it is to interact with people’s nervous systems as well as their minds.

Although this quarter was challenging intellectually and emotionally it was an amazing experience. My ability to work was affected by my fluctuating mental and emotional health due to a death in the family at the beginning of week one, that in it self was a challenge to learn how to continue to work hard while going through the grieving process.