



Peace Meal Supper Club #23: Buzz

Versailles ~ March 9, 2024

For the benefit of Palestine Children's Relief Fund

Course 1: Molecular Humanity

Roasted Cauliflower Soup ~ Cherry Chocolate Sourdough

Course 2: Distant Early Victories

Red Bean Paste in Filo ~ Dark Roast Tomato Concassé
Espresso Cream

Course 3: War & Zen

Pu'er Smoked Mushrooms ~ Sencha-Infused Ful Medames
Darjeeling Beurre Blanc

Course 4: Melange à Trois

Cafe Mocha Cupcake ~ Assam Coconut Whip
Syrup x2

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What would you call a drug which has spawned centuries of global war, displacement of indigenous people, industrial espionage, theft of guarded national secrets and technology, forced importation of narcotics, labor abuses including child and forced labor, decline and rise of empires and syndicates, smuggling and human trafficking—not to mention destruction of habitat and the decline of biodiversity on a grand scale? On the other hand, what would you call a substance which is legal, socially acceptable, frequently consumed on a first date, and sanctioned by use in government offices, NGOs, churches, schools, and virtually every workplace and home?

You might call this drug caffeine. Or you might call it by its various incarnations: coffee, chocolate, tea. Heavy users of this drug might be called coffeeholics, chocoholics, or...um... theists.*

So here's the buzzkill: Caffeine is a powerful psychoactive drug. It alters brain chemistry by penetrating the blood-brain barrier. It is chemically addictive and can cause anxiety and panic attacks. Physical symptoms of caffeine use include palpitations and gastrointestinal disorders. Caffeine withdrawal carries with it clinically significant physical and mental symptoms. Fancy a cup?

~ 1 ~

Chocolate—or rather its more natural form, cacao—contains many beneficial nutrients and antioxidants alongside its caffeine content. Hidden within cacao's molecule is a flavor link to cauliflower, and that is what makes this course work so well. Such deep-down harmony can become dissonant in the larger world: workers in cacao plantations are among the most distressed on the planet, while the most affluent global citizens enjoy several cups a day of their favorite beverage.

Our capitalistic model emphasizes the roles of *producer* and *consumer*. But hidden down within our human selves are other vital elements: the possibility of compassion, an urge towards fairness, an understanding of the lives of others. Is my desire that my neighbor—even if she's a continent away—enjoy her life as much as I enjoy mine a manifestation of a deeper, harmonious, simply human connection?

~ 2 ~

Coffee is overwhelmingly abundant in our culture. Look at the coffee aisle in your habitual supermarket: can all those brands and varieties actually carry the same quality and concern for the land and people who produced the beans? Amidst the coffee tsunami are organizations that work to equalize the exchange between worker and consumer. Fair trade, as a social movement, scored early victories with coffee through cooperatives such as Equal Exchange, which favors small producers who receive fair pay for their work. But it's about more than fair pay: fair trade organizations favor democratic social processes, safe working conditions, workplace equity among genders, environmental sustainability, and the pledged absence of child exploitation. With a goal toward long-lasting relationships, fair trade is a supportive exchange, not an extractive one. Caffeine has proven to be a transcendent substance.

~ 3 ~

Tea, for all of its Zen, is a model for how not to do things. Kept tightly under control in its native China, it was violently ripped from its roots in the 1800s by the British. They waged two brutal, global wars with China in order to control access to this strong stimulant. The resulting treaties set the standards for modern international trade with all of its imbalances and dominance-based inertia. These standards applied not just to sanctioned substances such as tea, but also illicit substances such as opium. The debasement of China during these wars, known as *the century of humiliation*, led to China becoming a major world power in the mid-1900s. Their current challenging of Western hegemony is to be expected: yin must balance with yang.

~ 4 ~

Caffeine challenges our balance, not just in its physiological & mental effects on us. It challenges our sense of fairness. How has a drug with such a troubled history found acceptance in all sectors of life, for all ages? Though we have found ways to equalize trade and minimize harm, there is yet another imbalance: the acceptance of one drug over others. The US consumes more illicit drugs than any other country in the world. Has caffeine been embraced because it can be captured and commoditized—much like the land and labor needed to produce it?

*yes, this is a joke