

TIME *for* TEA





Lindel Barker-Revell

TIME *for* **TEA**
The Gentle Art of Reading Tea-Leaves

 inspired
LIVING

ALLEN&UNWIN

*To the spirit of tea-leaf lovers of the past and to
the wise women to come—Megan and Kara*

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1

The pure magic of tea

Tea has a wonderful quality that draws people together and, mysteriously, a shared cup of tea always seems to taste better than tea drunk alone. Tea-leaves bring their life and spirit to our cups. When we make time for tea, we make time for ourselves and for each other—time to watch the tiny leaves that have travelled so far, slowly unfurl. One of the forgotten joys of taking leaf tea is the opportunity to see the magical images that appear in our cups and to learn from these pictures what we might need to know. Reading tea-leaves is a wonderful art. It will surprise and delight you, and bring much fun and laughter to gatherings with old friends and new.



The gentle art of reading tea-leaves



What the ancient Chinese—the first tea-drinkers—made of the shapes and patterns that appeared in their teacups we can only imagine, although we do know they believed in signs and portents. It was the wandering Romany people who brought tea-leaf reading to Europe. This art has been largely nurtured and practised by women, who have carefully passed on its secrets from one generation to the next by reading the tea-leaves whenever family and friends gathered. When tea bags became popular this delightful art, also known as tasseomancy or tasseography, almost died out. But now, with the wonderful range of loose-leaf teas available, women are once more inspired to read the leaves.



The miracle of a leaf of tea



Tea-leaves are like snowflakes in their glorious individuality. Each of the leaves in your cup was once alive, once felt the sun and wind and rain. Maybe it grew on a mountain bush, or nearer sea level. When the moment was right, it was plucked, sorted, steamed and maybe rolled. Perhaps it was left whole or cut into pieces, processed to different extents, and at last packed into a dark container ready for the journey to you. The tea-leaf's last gift is the way it unravels into a shape for those with eyes to see, for the pictures it makes are innumerable. Like the petals of a flower, it's important you open up to the possibility of seeing these pictures, and all they reveal.



*Whether it be grown on a lofty mountain ridge,
by a crystal-clear stream, or in a cool green valley,
each tea embodies the place where it was grown
and the people who made it.*

TJOK GDE KERTHYASA, *Tea Master*

How tea was discovered



The legendary emperor Shen Nung, the father of Chinese medicine, is believed to have discovered tea over five thousand years ago. While he was out on an expedition two or three stray green leaves fell into the water he was boiling for drinking. Shen Nung sipped the water and found he liked its refreshing taste. Having located the right bush, he took a cutting, and so began the cultivation of tea. The love of tea spread throughout China. Years later, in AD 800, Lu Yu wrote *The Classic of Tea*, which was the basis for Japan's famous tea ceremonies. This ancient book is still revered today.



Tea arrives in Europe



Tea first made its way across the world from China as diplomatic gifts to the royal houses of Europe. As fascination with the Orient grew among wealthy Europeans, so too did the taking of tea. When it arrived in England in the middle of the seventeenth century tea was slow to take off, until coffee houses serving tea caught on. By 1700 there were 500 such coffee shops in London. Several years later, Thomas Twining bought Tom's Coffee House just off the Strand, where he began to sell high-quality loose-leaf tea. Exotic tea gardens also began to spring up. Here people from all walks of life could take tea, meet potential suitors, be entertained or simply wander through lantern-lit landscapes. London's most famous tea gardens were the Vauxhall and Ranelagh gardens—the latter is now the site of the Chelsea Flower Show. Ranelagh Gardens even included a Chinese pavilion, boating canal and huge domed rotunda.



Tea comes to America



The entrepreneur Peter Stuyvesant brought tea to America in 1650, and by the time the English had acquired the colony New York was consuming more tea than England. Even though tea cost a small fortune, such was the craze for this new beverage that tea gardens were opened at the corner of Roosevelt and Chatham streets in New York. At this time the colonists were heavily taxed by Britain. Those seeking independence began to smuggle tea into the colony, causing the East India Company's revenue to plummet. Britain tried to force the issue with the colonists, so on 16 December 1773 fifty men boarded three British ships in Boston harbour, and threw 9659 pounds sterling-worth of Darjeeling tea overboard. This protest, which became known as the Boston Tea Party, helped spark the American War of Independence.





Types of tea



There are so many intriguing aspects to tea. It's hard to believe that green and black teas, oolong tea and the highly prized white tea, all come from the same plant—the Chinese camellia with its pointed evergreen leaves and fragrant white five-petalled flower. The colours and many flavours of teas are due to the different processes the newly picked tea-leaves undergo. Beautiful, pristine environments seem to foster the taste and quality of their teas. It is said that China's most exquisite tea is picked just as dawn rises over the high slopes of Hangzhou. Here only the two delicate top leaves and a bud are plucked at a time, by the gentle fingers of expert young women.



Where tea is grown



Even today, the finest teas are surrounded by legend and treated with great reverence. The very best teas are grown at altitudes of more than 2000 feet and picked in spring. Always look for teas that are high-grown, as their taste is exceptional. It is thought that the harsher conditions found at these heights stress the tea and make it more fragrant. When wild, tea trees can grow to a substantial size, but in plantations they are cultivated as bushes, to allow for easy picking. These bushes can produce tea for up to a hundred years, as only the tips of the bush are harvested. Different soils, altitudes and climates produce very different teas. Discerning tea drinkers look for the colour and fragrance of the liquid, as well as taste.



The thirst for tea spreads



In ancient China, fresh tea-leaves were boiled well, then eaten as a vegetable with rice. The precious liquid and leaves were also used to make ointments. As the demand for tea grew more widespread, effective ways of drying and preserving the leaves for transportation were found. So treasured was tea, that pressed cakes of green tea were presented at court, and used as currency. When the tea was to be drunk, the cakes were broken up, pounded and placed in pots with water. Orange, ginger, cloves or onion were often added to enhance the flavour. For centuries the knowledge, expertise and tradition of tea cultivation was guarded fiercely by the Chinese, but eventually plants were smuggled to other parts of the world. Tea is now widely cultivated from China and India to Kenya, South America and New Zealand.







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Choosing your teacup and teapot

Before you start to read the tea-leaves, find a teacup, or set of teacups, that catches the eye. Choosing the right cup can be lots of fun. Take time to note the cup's pattern and shape, the feel of its handle and the way the cup nestles in your palm. The more delicate the china, the more subtle the experience of taking tea will be—that is why bone china remains popular. When you hold a fine bone china cup up to the light, you can see how the diffuse light shines through the porcelain. You will know the cup that is right for you when you see it and feel it. Or you may have been lucky enough to have inherited an old tea set or cups and saucers from an aunt or grandmother. This link with the past can enhance the whole experience, as you may feel these women with you as you place their cups on the table.



The best cups for tea-leaf reading



Simplicity is the key for cups used in tea-leaf reading. The more open your teacup, and the finer its rim, the easier it will be to see the pictures. Mugs or coffee cups cannot be used, as they are too square at the base. Many of the classic china cups are perfect, as they curve out gently from the base, allowing the tea-leaves to rise unrestricted up the cup. As you want to see everything the leaves reveal, white or cream cups or subtler shades are best. The less ornamentation on the inside of the cup, the more the leafy pictures can be revealed. And a saucer is important, as traditionally the excess liquid is upended into the saucer.

In many parts of the world, tea is taken in glass cups. Herb and fruit teas, or tisanes, are often drunk this way. Some Chinese and Japanese teas also lend themselves to glass cups. Once these teas are immersed in hot water, it is wonderful to appreciate their colour and watch the tea-leaves unravel before you. However, it's not as easy to read the leaves in a glass cup. If you are set on using a glass teacup, place a white napkin or tissue around it, so you can see the pictures that await you.



The fine china frenzy



How we came to use china teacups is a happy accident. Fine china first made its way to Europe as ballast on tea ships, as tea was a very light cargo. No one could have predicted how popular this delicate china would be. Then as tea-drinking caught on, a whole new industry began to develop around china teacups and saucers. Milk jugs, sugar bowls and tongs, and silver teaspoons followed. A handle was soon added to china teacups, to prevent ladies from burning their fingers while taking tea. The Chinese teapot, devised during the Ming Dynasty, was given a spout. Quick to capitalise on this new craze, Josiah Wedgwood became one of the first Englishmen to design fine china and pottery, followed by Josiah Spode, John Doulton, and others. Gold- and silversmiths joined in the excitement, producing exquisite tea services that would become family heirlooms.



*The first cup moistens
my lips and throat;
the second cup breaks
my loneliness.*

LU TUNG



What to look for in a teapot



Your choice of teapot is an important part of reading the leaves. Today teapots are usually made from porcelain, clay or metal. When you are searching for the perfect teapot, make sure it not only delights the eye, but also pours well. Look for teapots with a hole in the lid, as they allow air in, making it possible to pour the tea. The best spouts are straight, wide at the bottom and narrow at the top. Check to see if the lid has a lug to stop the lid falling off when tipped. The ideal teapot should have plenty of space in the handle for your fingers, so you don't get burnt when the pot is full of hot tea. Glass teapots can also be fun. It's wonderful to watch the tea-leaves open. The Chinese call this unfurling 'the dance of agony'.



Inside the teapot



All shapes and sizes of teapot can work for reading tea-leaves. Check inside the teapot to ensure the strainer at the base of the spout isn't too fine, as the tea-leaves need to be able to flow freely through the spout and into the cup. Teapots that have largish filter holes tend to work well. Some tea-leaves will always remain in the pot, and that is as it should be. Only those leaves wishing to reveal themselves will make the journey out through the spout and into your cup.

Sometimes modern teapots have built-in mesh strainers. If this is the case, they can usually be removed for the purpose of reading the tea-leaves.



Treasured teapots




When you're hunting for a teapot, don't think only of a new one. Second-hand shops and markets can be treasure-troves for the teapot hunter. No matter how lovely a teapot is, make sure there are no chips or cracks in the porcelain. It's also important to try to get an idea if the pot will pour well. Stainless steel teapots are often well designed and can work effectively, but avoid aluminium teapots at all costs, as they cause a build-up of tannin and will make your tea taste bitter.

Think about how big you need your teapot to be. Small teapots generally make two cups of tea. A medium-sized pot should fill three or four large cups, while larger teapots can make eight to ten cups of tea. You may need a small teapot for everyday use, and a larger one for when your friends come for afternoon tea.





Finding the ideal tea



Once you have your teacup and teapot, it's time to consider what kinds of tea you like to drink. Selecting the right tea is worth the effort, as there are so many varieties to choose from. If you are having guests, do you know whether they prefer strong tea, or one with a lighter taste? Or would you like to serve a floral tea? It is also important to consider the time of day you are taking tea, as some teas are better suited to the morning or afternoon.

From time to time, specialty tea shops have tastings. These are a good opportunity to sample a range of different teas. As you are also intending to read the tea-leaves, it is important to see the wet leaves if possible, so you have some idea if you can work with them. Look for variations in leaf colour, size and shape as they can help create interesting pictures in your cup.

Getting to know your teas



One of the wonderful aspects of tea is its sensuality. Each tea has its own special qualities of touch and aroma, even before you add water to it or taste it. In good tea shops samples of dry tea are displayed in small bowls, enabling you to touch and smell the tea. You can also appreciate its colour, and see if any flowers or spices have been added. Don't forget that when tea is open to the light and air it can lose its aroma. If you are unsure about whether you like a certain tea, ask the tea merchant to open some fresh tea for you to look at and smell.

Some green and oolong teas are hand-rolled into coils and rings, tied in knots, or twisted—these are called 'artisan' teas. Other teas, such as Buddha's Tears, are formed into balls that open into marvellous shapes in hot water. When you begin tea-leaf reading, a black tea is best as it gives the best contrast to the porcelain.



Black, oolong and green teas



Black tea is referred to as red tea by the Chinese because of the reddish colour of the liquid. There are many styles, including English and Irish breakfast, Russian Caravan, orange pekoe, Assam and Darjeeling. The strong, distinctive flavour of black teas doesn't flatten when milk or sugar is added. To brew a black tea, use a teaspoon per person, and one for the pot if you like your tea strong. Brew for three to five minutes—larger-leafed teas need longer than a fine-leaf tea. If you leave it for longer than five minutes, the tannin begins to release and the tea can start to taste bitter.

We can think of oolong tea as halfway between black and green teas, as it is not processed for as long as black teas. Good green tea is processed immediately after picking to retain its colour and flavour and is an excellent tea for reading tea-leaves. You may like to try Sencha, a Japanese green tea, Chinese Dragon Well, or one of the fine hand-rolled green teas that unfurl beautifully when water is added. For the best results, pour the water on the tea just before it reaches boiling point. Use one teaspoon per person and only brew for two or three minutes or it will become bitter.



*If a person has no tea in them,
they are incapable of understanding
truth and beauty.*

JAPANESE PROVERB

Grades of black tea



It helps to know a little about the grading of black tea so you know what to look for. Once processed, tea is sorted according to quality and size. Some of the most important grades use the name of the initial downy bud or 'pekoe' the bush produces. Tea is separated first into broken and unbroken leaves. The smaller and younger the leaves, the more delicate-tasting the tea. Orange pekoe refers to the orange or gold blush on the tip of the bud, which is visible when dried. Pekoe, pekoe souchong and souchong teas are made from coarser, broken, older leaves. Broken leaves are sold with a 'B' in front of the grade, such as broken orange pekoe (BOP). All broken teas are good for tea-leaf reading, but you may also like to add some longer-leafed tea to broken tea to get more interesting pictures.



White teas



The best white teas are made by plucking the new-growth bud and first two leaves from the tip of each stem. Early buds are silver in colour, while the new slender leaves have a light ashy dust on them. As white tea has minimal processing, it enjoys the highest anti-oxidant content of all teas. White teas include Pai Mu Tan (White Hairy Monkey tea), Pai Loong Choo (White Dragon Ball tea) and Silver Needles, one of the most expensive of all teas.

When brewing white tea, use two teaspoons per cup. Pour the water onto the tea when the bubbles first appear, before it comes to the boil. White tea does not have a strong taste but once you get used to its pale orange colour the memory of this tea will stay with you. It may be refreshed two or three times with hot water, but is never drunk with milk. The long, narrow white tea-leaves are excellent for readings as they produce marvellous pictures, like bamboo-brush paintings.



Teas for different times of the day



Strong teas, such as English or Irish breakfast tea, are best taken in the morning. They will help you wake up, as will the Assam, Nilgiri, Yunnan, broken orange pekoe, Java black and African teas. Good green teas for morning consumption include Gunpowder tea from China and Gen Mai Cha from Japan, which contains roasted rice. Ti Kuan Yin, a good-quality, pleasant oolong tea for the morning, is best drunk with a light breakfast.

Scented teas, such as the classic black Earl Grey or Lady Grey, lemon or vanilla teas, are best enjoyed in the afternoon, as is Rose Congou, a Chinese black tea with rose petals. Russian Caravan and Lapsang Souchong, with their distinctive smoky flavour, are equally good afternoon teas. Darjeeling, the champagne of teas, also works well in the afternoon, as do green teas. Hand-fashioned green teas, including Jade Ring and Snow Dragon, are best appreciated in the afternoon as well.

Oolong teas can be drunk throughout the day, as can herbal teas—except for calmativte teas, such as chamomile and lavender, which are better taken before bed.





Fabulous floral and fruit teas



Flowers have long been added to green or black tea, or drunk on their own, delighting drinkers as they bloom once more in the cup. Whole layers of meaning are added when there are buds and petals in the tea, as they form wonderful shapes in the cup. Rose petals are always a favourite. Pure floral teas are never drunk with milk, although they may be sweetened with sugar or honey.

Fruit teas, or tisanes, can be made from a range of things—a mélange of dried chopped citrus peels, cherries, apples, pears or berries, small whole fruits, or fruit that has been macerated into small granules, as in rose-hip tea. Fruit tea is always drunk black, with sugar or honey to taste. Use one heaped teaspoon per person when making fruit tea. These teas may be brewed a second time by adding more hot water.

Herbal teas have long been drunk for their medicinal qualities and their taste. All parts of the herb—the leaves, the flowers, the twigs and the roots—may be made into tea and work well when reading the cup.



Single origin teas and blends



Most special tea is from one garden or plantation and is never blended with tea from other regions. While regular tea drinkers like the reliable, familiar taste of their favourite tea, connoisseurs seek out single origin teas. More and more people are now coming to appreciate the beauty and singularity of these teas. They are increasingly available from specialty tea shops.

As the quality of tea can vary from season to season, skilled tea tasters create blends of leaves from various sources to maintain the taste of more widely available brands of tea. Earl Grey, one of the most popular blends, was originally created in China from fine black tea blended with the essence of bergamot. Some blends of tea, such as Queen Anne and Prince of Wales, have been specially made for royalty.



Storing tea



As tea easily loses its volatile oils and readily absorbs other scents and flavours, it is best to store it in an airtight tin, tea caddy or dark glass jar. The word ‘caddy’ comes from the Malay word ‘kati’, which referred to a unit of measurement of roughly 600 grams.

Eighteenth-century tea caddies were ornate and able to be locked, reflecting the value of the tea. Old tea caddies are very collectable, because they are made from fine china, inlaid ivory, valuable wood or, more recently, decorated tin. The very best caddies have two lids, to help keep the tea dark and enclosed. When kept in this way, tea can last for up to two years. You can purchase these caddies in specialty tea shops. If stored properly, tea does not go off. It will, however, begin to taste flat and lifeless after its use-by date, so tea is best drunk and enjoyed while fresh.





*Great love affairs
begin with Champagne
and end with tisane.*

HONORÉ DE BALZAC

Making the perfect cup of tea



It is said that the tea-leaf is only half the greatness of tea; the rest lies in the water. Ideally, tea should be made from the water where the tea was grown, or from the same altitude, because the tea and water should complement each other. As this is unrealistic for most of us, why not try a small piece of rose quartz in a jug of cold tap water overnight. After an hour or so, it looks as though the water is being breathed into as you see oxygen bubbles coming from the crystal.

To ensure your tea is flavoursome, make sure you use cold tap water, then set the water to boil. Water from the hot tap is low in oxygen and will deprive the tea of its flavour. When the water comes to the boil, tip some into the teapot to warm it. This allows the water to stay near to boiling point when it meets the tea in the pot. Some tea connoisseurs even warm the cups. Replace the water in your hot water jug once you've made your tea, as the oxygen will have boiled away.



The three stages of boiling water



If you really want to get the best out of your tea, it is worth getting to know the different stages of boiling water. The Chinese say there are three parts to this process. The first, ‘crab-eye water’, is when the water begins to bubble. This is followed by larger ‘fish-eye’ bubbles, and is completed by large bubbles—‘old man’ water—when the water is on a rolling boil. If you have a glass kettle, you can be very precise about which stage you need to take the water off the heat. If not, you can often hear when the water is about to boil. For most tea, the second stage of boiling is preferred, but for floral, herb, green and white teas, crab-eye water is best, as hotter water scalds the tea, making it bitter. Discerning tea makers never allow the water to overboil.



And now for the tea



Once your water and teapot are heated, tip out the water warming the teapot and spoon one teaspoon of tea per person into the teapot, plus an extra one for the pot if you prefer. Pour the water into the warmed teapot, then set it on the table while the tea brews. Steeping time depends on the type of tea you are using, but is generally from three to five minutes for black tea and less for other varieties. If you are uncertain about the timing, check the package. If your tea is too strong after the brewing time, reduce the amount of tea you use the next time.

If you are taking milk with your tea, the next decision is whether you pour the milk into the cup before or after the tea. The English upper classes always poured the tea into the cup last, because they had teaspoons to then stir in the milk. As the lower classes didn't have such luxuries, they had to pour the milk in first. Today it's simply a matter of taste.







4

Time to read the tea-leaves

Once you have grasped the basics, reading tea-leaves is great fun. As you practise your skills it will become easier to see pictures in the cup. Boost your confidence by reading for your friends and family, and they can read for you in return. When deciding who will read first, you'll find that sometimes one person may feel the gift of sight more strongly one day and less so on another. It all balances out in the end. Never rush to see what is in the cup, as you're likely to become confused. The best readings happen when you feel comfortable and relaxed.

While all kinds of loose-leaf tea can be used for a reading, over many years of looking into teacups my best results have come from blending longer-leafed tea, such as unbroken orange pekoe, with a shorter or finer-cut tea such as English breakfast or fine Assam. The layering and bold brushstrokes that you get from the longer leaves work well with the form and definition of the smaller leaves.



Preparing the cup



Take your time finishing your tea as it is important to leave about a teaspoon of liquid in the cup for a reading. Drink the liquid almost to the bottom of the cup, leaving a few drops of liquid behind with the leaves. If you find there aren't enough leaves in your cup, add a teaspoonful of leaves from the pot. Taking the teacup in your non-dominant hand, swirl the tea-leaves around gently. Slowly turn the cup upside down on the saucer, with the handle pointing towards your heart. Then, taking the handle, with the cup still upside-down, turn the cup anticlockwise three times until the handle faces you again. Invite the spirit of the leaf picture into the cup, by tapping gently on the overturned cup three times. Now turn the cup upright and hand it to the person who is going to read for you.



Where to start in the cup



To read the cup, hold it with the handle facing your heart. Then, with an open mind and a slightly softened eye, take a look inside. The best way to draw the meaning out of the first picture you see, even if you feel a little hesitant, is to start to describe it. Sometimes the image will be very clear, while at other times only a tiny bit of a picture may be apparent. As you start to talk about what you see, the picture will reveal itself to you. If, for example, you have seen part of a house, start to describe it. As you do so, you may start to see people or animals in the house, or other images nearby. What is important is that you describe what the picture is suggesting to you. Sometimes the leaves do not seem to make sense, no matter how long you look. It may be that the cup does not want to be read, or you may be too tired or distracted. At other times the shapes in the teacup may convey a feeling rather than an image. Just note the feeling. You may like to try another reading by drinking a second cup of tea. If that cup is unreadable, then it is probably best to leave your reading for another time.



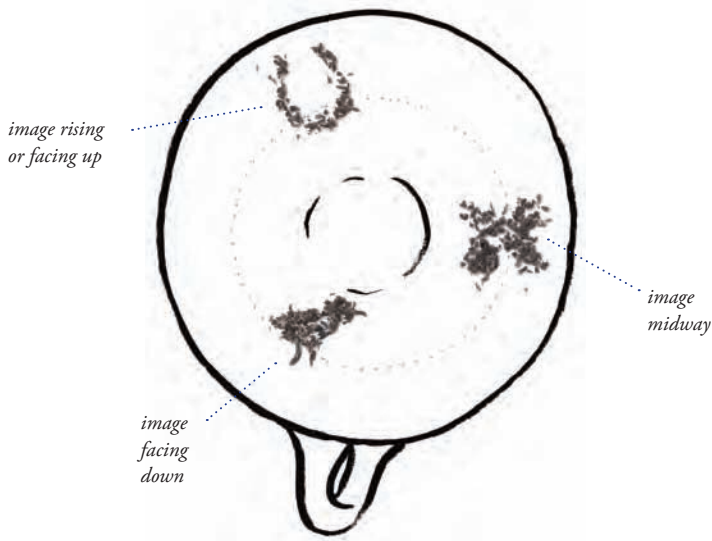
*A leaf that continues
to float on top of the tea
means you can expect a visitor.*



The geography of the cup



Leaves rising up the cup indicate improving conditions, while the closer the images are to the rim, the stronger the outcome. When the pictures are pointing down towards the bottom of the cup, or are at the base of the cup, they are less fortunate. These images may also be indicating something central about a person or event. When the pictures appear halfway up the cup, there will be the normal ups and downs around this person or situation.



Pictures and colours in the cup



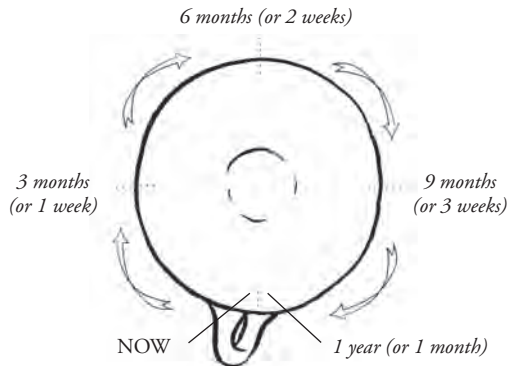
Once you have started to make out images in the cup, you will be able to see them more easily the next time. Don't worry if you are not sure what they mean. The art of reading tea-leaves is an intuitive one. Look into the cup with an open mind and a slightly softened gaze, and wait for a picture or idea to come to you. Images in the cup are rarely exact and, like the shapes in clouds, different viewers may see different things. I still have moments when the leaves are indistinct or appear to be nothing at all. When this happens I relax and turn the cup a little this way and that. When a group of leaves catches your eye, don't look any further, as it's time to describe what you see. A good first step is to note the colour of the leaf, and its position in the cup. Then see what other pictures or symbols surround this image. There are grades of colour in black tea—from light to dark. Lighter, brighter colours are always more positive in tea-leaf reading. Greenish leaves suggest a burgeoning, energetic person or situation, while bright brown or gold leaves indicate joy. Remember—always be guided by your intuition.



The timing of events



Divide the cup into four equal parts, starting at the handle, and moving clockwise. Each of the quadrants can represent the four quarters of a year, month or around a week. The pictures closest to the handle and near the rim of the cup refer to events that are closest in time to the present. Those closest to the handle in the fourth quadrant are the furthest away. The numeral 7 could suggest seven days, seven months, or even the seventh month, July. If the letter S appears it may be suggesting the month September, summer or Sagittarius.







5

Staging the perfect afternoon tea

Once you have had the chance to discover just how much a handful of tiny tea-leaves can reveal, why not celebrate your new skills by gathering some friends together for afternoon tea. You don't have to do all the readings—encourage others to have a go. The beauty of afternoon tea is that there are now so many wonderful loose-leaf teas to serve—why not try a few? The accompanying sandwiches, cakes and pastries can be prepared beforehand. There are many inspired touches you can add to your afternoon tea without too much effort—from old linen tablecloths, napkins and table-runners to sugar cubes and grandma's teacups. One of the best things about afternoon tea is that you can enjoy quality time with your friends.



How afternoon tea began



Afternoon tea as we know it began in the early 1800s when Anna, the 7th Duchess of Bedford, asked her servants to bring her tea and light refreshments one summer afternoon, as she was feeling peckish between meals. The duchess enjoyed the experience so much she began to invite her friends to join her for tea, cake and sandwiches at five o'clock. In no time, elegant tea parties became the fashion, along with fine bone china teacups, silver tea services, cake stands and tea caddies. An invitation to afternoon tea soon became an opportunity to dress up in the height of fashion and meet the best company. Great importance was placed on how to serve tea—accompanied by slices of lemon, a jug of cream and a bowl of sugar—the correct way to hold one's teacup, and what to do with teaspoons. The hostess would traditionally brew the tea herself, as it was kept under lock and key. When handing around sandwiches, the hostess would announce their fillings so guests could accept or decline without embarrassment. Then, as now, it was a chance to try new cake and biscuit recipes or revisit favourites.



High tea or low?



We tend to think that afternoon tea is the same as high tea, but that is not how it started out. The afternoon tea the Duchess of Bedford took with her aristocratic friends was initially known as ‘low tea’. Perhaps this was because she experienced a ‘low’ feeling in the midafternoon, or so it could not be confused with ‘high tea’, a meal generally eaten by the poorer classes. They only had money for one main meal a day, which they ate at midday. High tea, or tea, was the meal they scratched together after dark, at around six o’clock in the evening. Later, with the rise of the middle class, high tea became more substantial and contained meat, fish, eggs and pastries. Afternoon tea became an institution, and is now generally held midway through the afternoon.



*Love and scandal are the
best sweeteners of tea.*

HENRY FIELDING

Time for tea



Wherever we are and however we drink our tea, the taking of tea unites us all in pleasantly relaxing rituals. In Japan, the host may spend days of planning to ensure a tea ceremony is perfect, for as in China taking tea is seen as a very special moment that will never come again. In India, people participate in the drinking of 'chai', a highly spiced, milky and sweet tea that is becoming popular in the West. South Americans love their healthy herbal 'maté' while in South Africa, 'rooibos' or 'red tea' is widely enjoyed. In Russia tea is taken from the samovar, an elaborate tea urn, which is given pride of place on the table. Here the tea is drunk black and sweet, while in Tibet tea is mixed with butter made from yak milk, and boiled with salt. While the rituals may differ, all over the world people delight in coming together and sharing tea to re-energise friendships and lift spirits.



Loving touches



As you are hoping to create a beautiful space in which everyone can relax and enjoy afternoon tea, it's wonderful to add a few special touches to enhance the mood. One of the most beautiful ways to dress the table is with fresh flowers. There is something about flowers that seems to enhance our ability to see pictures in our teacups, possibly because they symbolise the openness we need to bring to the table when we read the tea-leaves. Scatter petals on the tablecloth or add a few petals to the tea to enrich the experience and delight your friends. It's always interesting to see who gets petals in their teacup. Candles are a delightful way to create a warm and nurturing space. Even in daylight, a candle flame can add a touch of the sacred to the simplest tea ceremony. These and other special touches can help you to create an ambience that will be remembered long after everyone has gone home.



Dressing the table



An afternoon tea party is the perfect excuse to get out your best china and linen, especially if you have inherited an old damask tablecloth and napkins. If you don't have cloth napkins, pretty paper napkins are a great substitute.

Think about how you want to serve your food. Hotels often use three-tiered cake stands, with sandwiches and savouries on the bottom tier, small cakes or pastries on the middle tier, and gently warmed scones on the top tier. Cups and saucers usually come with matching side plates, or you may prefer to lay the table more informally with a pile of mixed side plates. You can serve your guests granulated sugar, or add a little interest with sugar cubes and tongs. A small dish for sliced lemon is a nice addition for those who like their tea black and a milk jug for those who don't. Cake forks and a fork for the lemon are a dainty touch. Afternoon tea parties don't need to be formal—the important thing is that everyone has fun.





Deciding on the menu



The best afternoon teas are a delicious mix of cakes and savouries. Think about the different taste sensations and colours you can offer your guests. The secret to good sandwiches is to cut very thin slices of bread and ensure they stay moist. It helps to cut the bread while it's partially frozen. No true afternoon tea is complete without cucumber sandwiches. Simply butter the bread lightly and make sure the thin cucumber slices overlap on the bread. Add a sprinkling of white pepper, press the bread gently together and cut off the crusts. You may cut the finished sandwiches diagonally into triangles, or into three lengthwise.

For a more substantial sandwich, make up some triple-decker sandwiches with layered fillings. One favourite combination is to start with a white bread layer and a brightly coloured filling, such as sliced tomato, followed by a brown bread layer with a pale filling, such as egg combined with chives. Add another slice of white bread and then a stronger colour, such as smoked salmon, finished off with a final layer of white bread. Hold the sandwich together carefully, and cut off all crusts. Slice the sandwich lengthwise into three, and secure with toothpicks.



CLASSIC SCONES

Makes 12

No afternoon tea is complete without a plate of freshly baked scones.

250 g (9 oz/2 cups) self-raising flour

½ teaspoon salt

50 g (1¾ oz) butter

200 ml (7 fl oz) milk or buttermilk, plus extra for glazing

Preheat the oven to 220°C (425°F/Gas 7). Flour an oven tray.

Sift together the flour and salt. Rub in the butter until the mixture resembles breadcrumbs. Make a well in the centre of the mixture and pour in all the milk. Mix with a knife to a soft dough, not touching the mixture with the fingers as this heats the dough and it needs to be as cool as possible.

Turn onto a lightly floured board and gently roll out to a thickness of 2 cm. Cut out rounds with a 6 cm scone cutter and place onto the prepared tray, arranging the pieces close together.

Glaze the tops of the scones with milk. Bake for 10–12 minutes.

Remove from the oven and transfer to a wire rack. If soft scones are desired, wrap in a clean tea towel (dish towel). If left uncovered, they will remain crisp on the outside. Serve with jam and cream.



MELTING MOMENTS

Makes 12

These melt-in-the-mouth treats are hard to resist.

30 g (1 oz/¼ cup) icing (confectioners') sugar
125 g (4 oz/½ cup) butter
90 g (3 oz/¾ cup) plain (all-purpose) flour
30 g (1 oz/¼ cup) cornflour (cornstarch)
glacé (candied) cherries, for decoration

Buttercream filling


3 oz (90 g/½ cup) soft icing (confectioners') sugar
2 tablespoons (40 g) butter
2 tablespoons custard powder
½ teaspoon natural vanilla essence (extract)

Preheat the oven to 150°C (300°F/Gas 2). Using electric beaters, cream the butter and sugar until pale and fluffy. Sift together the flours, then add to the creamed mixture and work it in with a blunt-ended knife. Using floured hands, roll teaspoonfuls of the mixture into balls. Place on a greased oven tray and flatten slightly.

Place half a glacé cherry on top of half of the balls. Bake until just golden. Remove from the oven, leave on the tray for 5 minutes, then transfer to a wire rack to cool completely. When cold, sandwich together with buttercream filling.

Buttercream filling: Cream all ingredients together and use to join the biscuits.





*Bubbles on top of the tea mean
money is coming to you,
so scoop them all onto a
teaspoon before they disappear.*

TEACAKE

The classic teacake is a must for every afternoon tea.

165 g (5½ oz/¾ cup) caster (superfine) sugar
60 g (2 oz/¼ cup) butter
1 egg
185 g (6½ oz/1½ cups) self-raising flour
60 ml (2 fl oz/¼ cup) milk
butter, extra
cinnamon
caster sugar, extra

Preheat the oven to 190°C (375°F/Gas 5). Grease two 16.5 cm (6¼ inch) sandwich tins and line the bases with baking paper.

Sift the flour and set aside. Using electric beaters, cream the butter and sugar, then add the egg and beat well.

Fold in the flour and milk alternately, beginning and ending with flour, blending carefully. Do not overmix. Spoon into prepared tins, smooth the surface and bake for 25–30 minutes.

Remove from the oven, cool in the tin for a few minutes, then turn out onto a wire rack. Invert so that the baked top is uppermost and butter the top well. Sprinkle with the combined cinnamon and sugar. The cake is best served warm with cream.



GINGER CUPCAKES

Makes 16

What would life be without the frivolity of cupcakes?

125 g (4½ oz/½ cup) butter
175 g (6 oz/½ cup) golden syrup or treacle
60 g (2 oz/¼ cup) sugar
185 g (6½ oz/1½ cups) self-raising flour
1 teaspoon ground ginger
60 g (2 oz/¼ cup) chopped glacé (candied) ginger
2 eggs, beaten

Preheat the oven to 180°C (350°F/Gas 4). Grease two standard 8-hole muffin trays, or line with paper cases.

Combine the butter, golden syrup and sugar in a medium-sized saucepan and stir over low heat until the butter and golden syrup are melted and the sugar is dissolved. Allow to cool.

Sift the flour and ground ginger into the cooled mixture, add the eggs and glacé ginger and mix well. Spoon into the prepared muffin tins and bake for 10–15 minutes. Remove from the oven and allow to cool in the tins for about 5 minutes, then transfer to a wire rack and allow to cool completely.

When cold, cut off the top of the cupcake and add a dollop of whipped cream before replacing the top of the cake. Sprinkle with icing sugar before serving.



COCONUT MACAROONS

Makes 30

These sugary mounds of coconut never fail to delight the senses.

- 3 egg whites
- 230 g (8 oz/1 cup) caster (superfine) sugar
- 180 g (6 oz/2 cups) desiccated coconut
- 2 teaspoons cornflour (cornstarch)
- 1 teaspoon natural vanilla essence (extract)

Preheat the oven to 150°C (300°F/Gas 2). Line two baking trays with baking paper.

Using electric beaters, beat the egg whites in a medium-sized heatproof bowl until soft peaks form. Place the bowl over a pan of hot water and continue beating, gradually adding the sugar until it dissolves. Fold in the coconut, cornflour and vanilla.

Place heaped teaspoons of mixture on the prepared trays.

Bake for 30 minutes or until set. Remove from the oven and allow to cool on the trays for about 5 minutes, then transfer to a wire rack and allow to cool completely.







6

What the tea-leaves reveal

Once you have settled on your teacup, teapot and choice of tea-leaves, it's time to see what secrets await you in your cup. The following meanings are simply a guide as to how to interpret the images you see. You can build on these interpretations with your own responses to the shapes you see. Over time you may like to add to your repertoire by using a book of symbols or a dream dictionary. Sometimes the picture before you might not suggest anything to you. That's fine too, because not everything you see will be meaningful. The important thing is to enjoy reading your tea-leaves. The more relaxed you are, the more intuitive you will be.



Triangles and squares



A triangle appearing in your cup, especially when its peak is pointing heavenwards, is a sign of good fortune. If, however, the triangle is on the bottom of the cup, or its apex is pointing down towards the base, be cautious. Perhaps someone you thought trustworthy will disappoint you. If the triangle sits alongside a heart, it may indicate a love triangle.

A square can represent protection or restriction in your life, as squares can box us in or help keep us from harm. The square before you might suggest a time for building and consolidation. Symbols such as a gun or a knife inside a square or a box signify you are protected. However, the appearance of a person or animal inside a box can indicate you are feeling restricted. If a square appears on a path between two people or animals, it suggests there's an obstacle you need to overcome.



Dots and crosses



Dots frequently appear in teacups. They can suggest money, talk or communication. A lot of dots in your cup may indicate you will be very busy. If the dots form a picture, it may be time to take action, as in 'joining the dots'. So, if you see the dotted outline of a car in your cup and want a new car, you need to do the legwork to make it happen. When an image is emerging out of the dots, it is coming your way, but it isn't quite here yet.

Crosses can indicate you are at a time of major decisions in life, or that there is sadness around you at present. When your cross suggests a crossroad, look at the surrounding pictures to see what you are leaving behind and what lies ahead. Sometimes the appearance of a cross is like an exclamation, as in 'x marks the spot'. Crosses near a ring or heart can mean kisses.



Circles



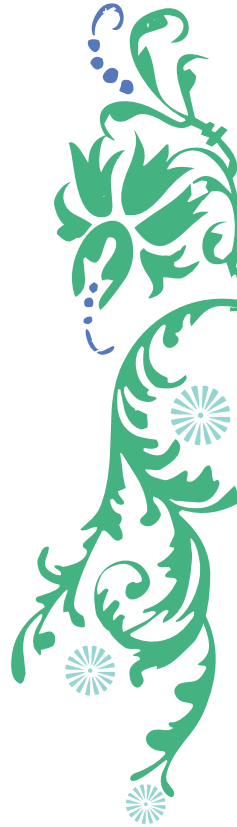
A clear, unbroken circle in your cup suggests a time of good fortune, when wedding rings, job offers or other opportunities might be yours. Should your circle be incomplete, you may still receive an offer but it may take time to come to fruition. If the circle in your cup looks like a ring, it is very auspicious, suggesting marriage or other kinds of partnerships are likely. Two rings that are joined together indicate joy and happiness, while three or more rings create a chain. This can be positive or negative, depending on the surrounding symbols, as chains can imprison us or keep us secure. As an egg is the symbol of life itself, an egg shape indicates something absolutely new is about to hatch in your life.



Diamonds



Diamonds in your teacup indicate a gift of jewellery or money coming your way—or perhaps it's your turn to shine.



Lines



Straight lines in your cup indicate a straightforward way ahead. If a line connects two images, it shows a strong link between the two. Imagine a picture of a house, connected by a line to a boot-shape. You could interpret this to mean you are about to move to Italy, or that someone from Italy might be coming to visit. If the line between the two images is straight, it suggests an unimpeded move. A straight line between people shows you have good communication and connection to others. Wavy lines can indicate an up and down road ahead. If there is a heart symbol near a wavy line, it suggests a rocky time in love or with someone you love. If there's a boat floating on the wavy lines, you may be about to undertake a sea journey.



Stars and spirals



Stars bring brilliance to your cup, indicating success in presenting yourself or that your abilities will be recognised as you shine out from the crowd. Or perhaps you'll meet someone who is a star. If stars appear along with other lucky symbols, it may literally be time to 'thank your lucky stars'. When a star appears, it may also be guiding you in a certain direction, so don't forget to look at the images around it for more information.

Spirals add zing to your reading, as they are very powerful life symbols—the galaxies themselves are great spirals of stars. Spirals are at the very core of our being—our DNA is a spiral structure. Should you find a spiral in your teacup, you may be about to experience a great surge of creativity. If it is spiralling downwards, perhaps this is how life feels at present. If, however, there is a heart or a ring near the spiral, your love life may be about to get a boost.



Pigs



A pig in your cup
brings pleasure and abundance.



Animals



Animals have a rather special place in tea-leaf reading. Whether wild or domesticated, the creatures we find in the cup correspond to aspects of our own inner nature, or that of others. The ancients knew there was great power and wisdom to be gained from observing the animal world. In these cultures animals weren't seen as captives or servants, but as sisters, brothers, teachers and friends. If you see a large, powerful animal in the cup it may even be an animal totem or protector appearing to you, bringing you a message. The cup will reveal whether an animal is showing its positive or negative aspect by the brightness of the leaf, how high it appears in the cup, and so on. An animal or fish near the rim is always good fortune, unless the animal looks threatening. While we are all familiar with the broad meanings of certain animals, always take your first impression into account.



Cats



The Dalai Lama was once asked if he was a cat person or a dog person. He said he was a cat person, and went on to explain that cats are like happiness: you can try to cajole and coax them to join you as much as you like, but they will look at you in disdain. Yet, if you sit quietly and relax, and allow them to be free, they will come and sit on your knee and purr loudly. And that is how it is with happiness. So, whenever a cat appears in your teacup it is a happy symbol, suggesting domestic joy and contentment of spirit. However, if your cat looks reluctant or has its back arched, be cautious—wait for happiness to come to you.



Dogs



Dogs symbolise loyalty and trust in all its forms. Traditionally representing loyal friends, a dog in your teacup can also mean loyalty between partners, family members or friends. Some of the images of dogs might not be quite so friendly. In these cases, the tea-leaves are trying to warn you that a trusted friend may turn on you, so beware. However, it might also be saying that you are in need of a friend right now, or that a friend may turn up unexpectedly. When you find a dog in your teacup it may be suggesting that you stay loyal to yourself and those you care about.



Horses



The noble horse represents freedom of spirit, strength and speed. Horses have the ability to carry us beyond our present circumstances, emotional or physical, and can suggest a journey ahead. The horse also represents work—if the horse in your cup seems weighed down, it indicates that even though you are working hard, you will achieve your goals. It also reminds you to take care of yourself, just as you would a working horse. A bucking or rearing horse may reflect your own restlessness. If your horse looks like a racehorse, then this suggests a desire to win and win fast. And a horse rising up your cup is an excellent sign for all your ventures.



Horseshoes



An upturned horseshoe suggests a lucky time ahead,
but if the shoe is pointing downwards
your luck may be running out.



Cows



A cow appearing in the cup suggests patience, gentleness and abundance. The cow is such a feminine symbol that the ancient Egyptians believed the entire heavens were the body of the great cow goddess Nut. Each evening Nut would devour the life-giving sun, then give birth to him in the following red dawn. In those ancient times the stars in the night sky were described as the milk streaming from Nut. If you are fortunate enough to have a cow in your teacup you can be sure that abundance is flowing to you at this time. As cows are also very dependable creatures, supplying their milk to us daily, a cow in your tea-leaves also promises a deep sense of security coming your way.



Bulls



While bulls symbolise great strength and stability, they may also indicate rage and mayhem. A bull suggests wealth, prosperity and good investments—that is why we talk about a bull market when the stock market is strong. If the tea-leaves are in the shape of the bull, it may represent someone around you born under the sign of Taurus. A bull in a woman's cup often represents a Taurean man she is strongly attracted to, as Taurus is ruled by Venus, the goddess of love. As we associate bulls with the country, people who live in the country or country pursuits may be present in your life right now. When a bull appears, grasp all the opportunities before you and you will have the strength to see them through.



Bears



Bears are wild creatures that inspired awe in our ancestors. If you see a bear in your teacup, perhaps someone around you needs respect at this time, or perhaps you need to respect yourself a little more. We call the Pole Star the Great Bear, so if a bear should appear it offers you strong guidance. The bear is a wonderful image, especially if you are feeling lost, because it assures you that you will find your way home. However, not all bears are so reassuring. If there are any zigzags or marks around your bear's head, then be wary, as a bear with a sore head can create havoc. Bears also suggest the need to hibernate for a season. Should this ring true, then three months hence may be a more favourable time for action. Teddy bears are images of uncomplicated love, joy and support.



Rams



New beginnings and fresh starts may be yours should a ram,
the sign of Aries, appear in your teacup.



Lions



A lion appearing in your tea-leaves brings you courage and leadership. As king of the jungle, the lion may dominate other images in your cup. While we tend to regard lions as a male image, they can represent Leos of both sexes. If your lion seems to refer to your partner and appears next to a heart or a ring, it represents an ardent lover, who likes to be the centre of attention. A lion with a closed mouth is a positive image. However if your lion is open-mouthed, it may be suggesting fury and rage. Are you feeling furious at present, or perhaps there's someone around you who is angry? Lions can represent your boss or someone in a leadership position. The lion can give you the courage to say something that you may have been holding in or do something you were worried about. It also suggests you have powerful friends you can call on at this time.



Tigers



Tigers are great hunters. So when you discover a tiger in your teacup, you may need to take some time out to be alone, or to fight fiercely for what you want. The presence of a tiger also suggests victory. If there is something you need to battle for, learn from the tiger. Be clear about your strategy before you leap into action. The clever and cunning tiger can perhaps prompt you to be smarter about how you handle things. These beautiful animals also use their camouflage well to ensure the element of surprise, so you may surprise others in work, love and play. To thrive, tigers need to be free and without restrictions.



Foxes



A fox suggests cunning or a false friend—
someone lean, slick and somewhat boastful.

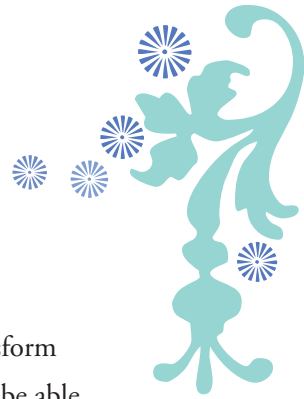
Or perhaps you are feeling ‘hounded’,
and need to be as clever as a fox to escape.



Snakes



Snakes bring to your cup great creativity and the capacity to transform yourself or your situation. As the snake sheds its skin, so you will be able to cast off those parts of your life you have outgrown. This may simply mean clearing out old clothes and books, or transformation at a deeper level. The key is to let go of all those things that no longer serve you, so new people and experiences may be yours. A snake can also represent healing and healers, especially when it is entwined around a staff. Coiled snakes can suggest unexpressed power that can spring into action at any time, so you contain this reservoir of energy within. A snake in your tea-leaves may also indicate unscrupulous people close by—‘snakes in the grass’—or unhelpful friends who give you false information.



Elephants



It is an honour to have the elephant grace your teacup, because it offers you the gifts of its strength, endurance and kindness. The elephant magnifies the importance of everything around it. One of the most impressive characteristics of elephants is that they never forget. So when an elephant appears you will find yourself remembering the wonderful and challenging people and events that have shaped your life. Like the elephant, move forward with dignity from the more difficult situations of the past.

You won't have to make this journey alone—your elephant will be there to guide you, as they always know the way home. So don't be in too much of a hurry. Remember, elephants walk slowly and steadily, and always reach their destination, even if they have to walk through obstacles on the way. Trust your elephant and you may be surprised where it takes you.



Giraffes



When a giraffe comes to you, it offers you the opportunity to reach life's highest and tastiest leaves. Problem-solving becomes easier for us when the giraffe appears in the cup. Giraffes—with their star-like heads and skin that looks like the parched earth—link heaven and earth, so they can help you bring together what you or others had thought impossible. Giraffes herald a time to be inspired, to come up with brilliant ideas and to make your own luck.



Birds



As creatures of the air, birds represent freedom, news and ideas. Should you find a bird in your teacup, you may unexpectedly hear from someone or a bright idea may pop into your mind. Specific birds carry their own unique message. Far-sighted eagles help provide perspective on present matters, while owls offer wisdom and insight. Geese have a reputation for being fiercely protective and fertile, and may even offer you a golden egg. Known for their beauty and grace, swans can suggest something beautiful is emerging out of something that seemed ordinary. And even though ravens and crows may seem sinister, they can be useful messengers, warning us of trouble ahead. Peacocks are famous for their pride and conceit; when they display their tail, great riches may be yours.



Chicks



When a small fluffy chick hatches in your cup,
something new is coming your way.



Spiders



Spiders have long been associated with money and can indicate a small windfall. The spider is also a very creative symbol, as it draws its web from its own body, and spins magical designs. When you see a spider, it may suggest that design or creativity may be important to you at present, or that you will be given the understanding and patience to solve a problem creatively. The spider can also describe people who may want to entrap you in some way. If you find a spider in your cup, especially when it is at the base of the cup, there may be a dubious person or situation trying to ensnare you. Beware of that which glitters like a web hung with dew. Just as the three fates in Greek mythology spun the destiny of humans, the presence of a spider suggests fate is at work in your life right now. Remember you always have free will, even if it is restricted to how you will respond to a situation.



Bees



Whenever there are bees in your teacup, you can be sure you are going to be very busy. Even though you may find yourself rushing around, like the bees you can achieve a great deal in a short time. Bees are very social creatures. They remind us that we don't have to do everything on our own—working together with others can bring much satisfaction. If a hive appears, there will be a lot of activity around you, and you may even be the queen bee for a while. Should you see a hive, honeycomb or a honey pot in your tea-leaves, it suggests happiness and loving times to come—that's why we call those we love 'honey' and go on honeymoons. A bee with an obvious sting is probably driven by fear, or the need to protect the hive. If someone around you is feeling this way, then be careful or you might just get stung.



Beetles



Sacred to the ancient Egyptians, the scarab, or dung beetle, rolled cattle dung into small balls and disposed of it overnight.

If life is difficult at present, the beetle will make short work of it so you can move forward.



Wings



Wings are associated with the spirit rising to the heavens. Should you see a wing in your tea-leaves, you may feel uplifted, or perhaps you have been thinking of friends and family who have passed on. If a wing appears on its own, or is attached to a figure in your cup, it adds another dimension to that symbol. A winged hat or helmet suggests your ideas are about to take flight, while winged feet can bring you swift messages or speed up your activities. One of the most well-known winged figures is Mercury, ruler of communication and travel, and messenger of the gods. If a winged figure appears in your tea-leaves, you may be inspired to speak or write, or perhaps you might be taking an unexpected trip.



Angels



An angel gracing your cup is always a blessing, as it is a divine messenger. Angels bring us news, warnings and protection from harm. Having an angel close by helps you to move beyond present fears and will guide you as well. So, if you or someone around you is sick, be assured your angel is watching over this worrying situation and may even assist in healing it. Notice where your angel is placed in relation to the other images in your teacup, as it will send rays of help and hope to these pictures as well.



Dragons



Although you may feel concerned should a dragon appear among your tea-leaves, it is not always a fearsome symbol. In the East, dragons are strong, fierce guardians of the treasures of the gods, and protectors of emperors. Most of the images we saw of dragons when we were children were of giant beasts guarding their treasure. Perhaps your dragon suggests some treasure for you or the need to be on guard.

Often associated with wild winds, storms and rain, a dragon can foreshadow a change of atmosphere in some aspect of your life. If you feel the dragon represents a lover or partner, it suggests that person is strong and passionate, if unpredictable.



Fish



A fish swimming up your cup, or near the rim, is a positive omen, suggesting financial benefits and emotional wellbeing. Monetary gain is likely, especially when your fish is found alongside such symbols as coins, purses and dots. In legend, large fish grant boons and wishes, so, when you see a fish, something close to your heart may come true. Fish can also symbolise projects and ideas that take time to mature but will be successful in the end. Two fish swimming in opposite directions represent Pisces, indicating a gentle, creative person or situation.



Sharks



When a shark appears,
someone unscrupulous may be circling.
Stay calm and the danger will pass.



Whales



The great whale offers a kind of rebirth for you or things that are important to you. Your love relationship may get a new lease of life, your business may have a facelift or a new name, and so on. If you feel unsure of yourself or where you are going, the whale has come to let you know that you will soon find yourself in a much better place with many more options. After difficult times, whales indicate renewed faith in yourself and in life. And just as whales communicate through their haunting songs that reach out far across the seas, so you will link with others of like mind near and far. The presence of a whale may also suggest that you are drawn to the sea, or may be about to go on a sea journey or take up singing.



Dolphins



In myth and legend, dolphins come to our aid to carry us beyond danger. So if a dolphin has formed in your teacup it may mean that, while you are currently in an uncomfortable situation, your dolphin will help you to move beyond it. You will never feel lonely when you have dolphins in your cup, as they offer you the gifts of better communication and playfulness. These sociable creatures can also suggest a happy time ahead with friends and loved ones. Dolphins bring gifts of cooperation, diplomacy and a sense of fun to any uncertainties you have at the moment. A partner represented by a dolphin is both loveable and utterly disarming.



Seahorses



The tiny seahorse promises
family joy and harmony.



Crabs



When a crab finds its way into your teacup, perhaps you are feeling crabby, or find your moods keep changing. Your crab may indicate that family members and domestic matters are important. It can also suggest that the people around you may be clingy and demanding. Some may even give you a nasty nip. The crab represents the sign of Cancer, and has a strong association with the changing moon. As crabs are also shy, you may long to hide in your own shell and let others get on with things. If you are feeling this way, remember you don't actually need anyone at the moment. You have more resources than you realise. You are strong when you need to be, but right now it's time to let go a little and believe in yourself.



Frogs



An ancient symbol of good luck and the creativity inherent in life, it is very lucky to see a frog rising up the cup. This master of transformation starts life as an egg, then becomes a tadpole, before it can be a frog. As the frog emerges from the water to the air, it offers you its ability to adapt to change. Or just as fairytales tell of the girl who dares to kiss a frog and release the handsome prince, so your frog may portend romance. Keep your eyes open—someone unlikely may be about to become your prince.



Crocodiles



It is said that the ancient Egyptians worshipped the crocodile because it was the only animal that had no tongue. Crocodiles thus represent the silent power and strength of nature. Should a crocodile take shape in your tea-leaves, perhaps it's time for you to be strong and keep your thoughts to yourself. The crocodile makes good use of its instincts. It knows exactly where it is going, and rarely deviates from its path. Long-lived, the crocodile suggests you may have many years ahead. It's especially important to listen to your intuition when you find a crocodile in your teacup. Don't forget the song, 'Never smile at a crocodile'. It may be warning you of an enemy who is feigning friendship.



Trees



Trees in leaf are wonderful symbols of the fullness of life. Just as a tree puts down roots, enabling its branches to grow upwards, we too need strong roots in the earth so our spirits can reach heavenwards. Trees represent the family, or the home or land in which we grew up. If your tree is without its leaves, perhaps you are feeling stripped and exposed, or perhaps family problems are demanding your attention. Trees indicate growth ahead so take note of other images close by your tree. The appearance of a boot, spade or chair may point to opportunities at work, while the presence of a heart may indicate spiritual or emotional growth. Each type of tree or leaf can also have a specific message. Oaks represent wisdom, while poplars and other tall trees are associated with ambition. Fir trees are associated with Christmastime.



Butterflies



These beautiful creatures can suggest a deep yearning for spiritual freedom. They may also remind you of the pure joy that comes when you live in the present.



Flowers



While different types of flowers have specific meanings, in general flowers suggest that happiness and recognition are coming your way. A bouquet or posy of flowers in your tea-leaves represents an admirer or perhaps that you have fallen in love. Posies can also represent appreciation for something you have done. Roses are associated with the heart, and their furled petals represent the many layers of love. Rosebuds can suggest a potential new romance or show love in its early stages. Daisies and sunflowers indicate there is much to be happy about, while lilies can mean purity or loss. Due to their narcotic properties, poppies can suggest deep sleep and drugs or wealth and extravagance.



Fruit



Fruitfulness will be yours when you see fruit in your teacup. Specific fruits add another layer of meaning. Figs indicate the sensuous delight of love and sexuality, while their many seeds represent temptation. Lemons can suggest matters may turn sour, so take a good look at what other images surround your lemon, to see what may be affected. Apple trees were sacred to the Druids, as the tree of life. So when apples appear they represent the many gifts of life. And just as the folklore hero William Tell needed perfect aim to shoot the apple on his son's head, the appearance of an apple may suggest you need to be precise in your dealings. Should you be lucky enough to discover grapes in your tea-leaves, abundance and celebration lie ahead. When grapes appear, be patient as things can take a while to come to fruition.



Lighthouses



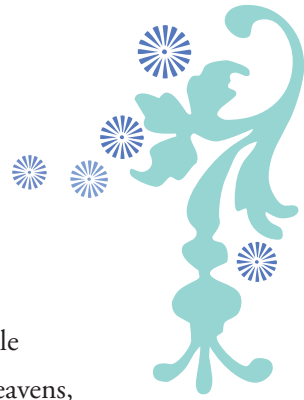
A lighthouse in your cup has been sent to protect you
by warning you of hidden problems ahead.



Churches



When you find a church in your tea-leaves there are several possible meanings. A church with a tall steeple, reaching up towards the heavens, can bring to you a sense of spiritual wonder. As a church also represents a kind of family, it may highlight aspects of your own family or community, or where you feel you most belong. Traditionally churches were the place where everyone got married, so the appearance of a church may mean a wedding will soon be announced. This is even more likely if you can make out hearts, bells or rings in the leaves. Take a careful look in your cup to see if there are numbers or letters close by, as a letter may indicate the name of the person getting married, and the number might tell you when the marriage will take place.



Skyscrapers



As the world's tallest buildings, a skyscraper can suggest the ultimate worldly achievement. A skyscraper in your tea-leaves may also mean that you, or someone you know, is driven to achieve at the moment. You may be overextending yourself, or perhaps you feel proud and superior to those around you. Remember, even skyscrapers aren't totally safe. Nor are our achievements assured. Sooner or later someone will build something bigger and better. So, in spite of all you have achieved, perhaps it's time to be cautious. From the top of a skyscraper, we may see the landscape around us very clearly. Try to see the overall picture and consider your options before you take action.



Pyramids



When the pyramid appears in your cup you are especially blessed, as it is a profound spiritual symbol and a strong structure that has lasted the test of time. Based on a square, the pyramid has four triangular sides, rising to an apex. If your pyramid is rising, or pointing upwards towards the rim of the cup, it will strengthen all your endeavours. Inverted pyramids, pointing down the cup towards the base, prompt you to take note of any destabilising influences, as things may be topsy-turvy for a while. The step-like structure of pyramids is also significant, because it can help you to move step-by-step towards your goal. The Egyptian pyramids are also associated with the annual flooding of the Nile. So, if you are experiencing a flood of emotion or activity, don't despair. Little by little these experiences will fertilise all areas of your life in the year to come.



Houses



When you see a house in your tea-leaves it may refer to your present home, your ideal home, or somewhere you may live in the future. Sometimes the house in your teacup may only form part of the picture. If your house is emerging from a tree, which can symbolise growth and knowledge, it suggests you are 'at home' with learning and growing at this stage in your life. If your house is on a boat, which symbolises emotions, this suggests you are comfortable with your emotions, or with the emotional environment you are in at present. Don't forget to look out for additional details, such as people or animals nearby, as these will add even more texture to your interpretation.



Fences and gates



If you see a fence in your tea-leaves,
perhaps someone or something is fencing you in.
Look to see if there's a gate in the fence,
as it may be offering you a way out.



Windows



A window in your cup brings new opportunities. Windows allow you to look into a room or out of it, depending on where you are standing. If you are drawn to looking inwards at this time, you may discover part of yourself that is currently hidden from view. Sometimes when we look inwards we may even glimpse our soul's purpose.

If you are looking out through the tiny window in your cup, be aware of the window frame, as this may just be the time to frame new ideas or reframe old ones. Whether you are looking in or out of the window, be sure to grasp the opportunities before you, as the time to act will soon pass. If your window appears dirty or broken, then perhaps a situation or friendship needs to be repaired or cleaned up before the opportunity will arise.



Doors



Doorways represent the passage from one place to another. When an open door appears in your cup, it suggests a new beginning. If, however, the door is closed, you may be feeling rejected or dismayed. Should you find a handle on your closed door, perhaps it's time to take hold of the situation so you can solve it and move on. There is great wisdom in the symbol of the door: it reminds you that as one door shuts another one opens. If your door appears alongside symbols of work (such as boots, shoes, horses, chairs), you may be facing an opening up or closing in that area of your life. The same holds true with matters of the heart. If there are love symbols (such as hearts, rings, churches) nearby, then changes are afoot. As with a handle, a key in the cup can assist you to open a door that seems closed to you at present.



Ladders



When a ladder appears,
you may be about to claim something
that has been out of reach.



Vases



A vase of flowers suggests domestic joy and that your efforts are appreciated. The shape of the vase can also indicate an empty womb-like space that needs to be filled—that is why a vase is often associated with women and pregnancy. A vase in your cup may also hint at a romantic secret you have been harbouring. If your vase is upturned it may mean trouble ahead—but don't despair, ultimately hope will win out.



Brooms



The broom can sweep into your life, brushing away the cobwebs, to help prepare you for what lies ahead. Brooms near work symbols—such as spades, chairs, horses, boots or shoes—can mean many changes. If the broom is dark it can suggest a lot of hard work yet to be done. A broom can indicate the need for a good spring-clean, inside and out. Should you be fortunate enough to find a witch's broom in your teacup, it brings with it a definite sense of magic, promising a wonderful journey ahead.



Keys



A key is a wonderful symbol because it means something that has been closed will be opened to you. Note the images around the key in your cup to sense what is about to be unlocked. Someone unapproachable may become more open, or you may have to turn a corner, as one turns a key, or free up a situation. A bright key near a house can symbolise a new home for you, while a key near a book may indicate the unlocking of knowledge. Keys are symbols of achievement, such as when heroes are given the keys to the city. You may be fully appreciated or have a new freedom granted to you. A key also represents entry into adult life and the gifts and responsibilities this brings.



Swords



When a sword appears in your teacup, it suggests the forging of your strength in the fire of experience. You may have felt like the sword as it is heated, beaten, then plunged into icy water, only to be reheated and beaten again. A sword's supple strength is the result of being tempered in fire (thought) and water (feelings). The triumphant sword represents the power we attain when we learn to think and feel in equal measure. The sword in your tea-leaves suggests you have been brave. Its lesson is to remain humble regardless of how much you achieve. If your sword is upright, and progressing up from the base of the cup, the gifts of courage and resilience are yours. If your sword is broken you may be ill, or perhaps something in your life needs mending or your courage needs bolstering.



Axes



This powerful symbol of achievement helps you clear the dead wood from your life and opens up the way ahead.

Do think before you act, however,
as you may destroy something you later regret.



Hammers



Thor, the Norse god of thunder, wielded his magical hammer, filling the heavens with lightning and thunder. So, when your tea-leaves form a hammer, flashes of intuition and great strength are yours. It is time to come up with new ideas or to construct something. Perhaps you are renovating or building a home, or your work or your relationships may be restructured. As the blacksmith's hammer can form red hot metal into many shapes, so you may feel you are being beaten into a new shape by the forces of life. People associated with the hammer can hold strong opinions and try to force their ideas on you or others as they attempt to hammer home their point of view. When the hammer appears in a woman's teacup, it can symbolise a physically strong man in her life.



Spades



Generally a spade symbolises work ahead, but spades can also mean the spadework that has been done already. Now the ground has been prepared, the way ahead will be much easier. The size of the spade represents how big the task is. Again it helps to look at what other images are around the spade. If your spade is resting against a building or you can see a person leaning on a spade, it's time for you to take a break from work, so why not book a vacation or treat yourself to a massage. Spades also represent honesty, hence the expression 'calling a spade a spade'. Perhaps you need to take a good honest look at yourself and your present situation.





Springs



This potent symbol of pure water bubbling out of the earth
brings you the promise of healing
and of a renewal of the life force within.



Hills



While hills and mounds have long been associated with pregnancy and birth, the presence of a hill in your teacup need not refer to a physical pregnancy or birth. It can relate to almost anything that has yet to be birthed—an idea, a creative work, a business. As the hill is also a symbol of spiritual contemplation, perhaps this is an excellent time to pause, just as you would after a climb. You may be keen to get to the summit, but by taking some time out you will have the chance to assess your journey thus far, and to plan for the future.



Mountains



Mountains are the meeting-place of earth and sky, symbolically the place where humans meet the divine. The taller the mountain in your tea-leaves, the more powerful the image. Perhaps you have lofty ambitions that you are steadily working towards, or maybe your spirit is seeking the purity of the mountain peaks. The mountain before you will support all your present aspirations.

Whenever a mountain appears it will tend to strengthen the other images around it, so take a close look at what else appears in your teacup. If your mountain is tilted, it suggests life is probably a little chaotic at present. You may feel you will never reach your goal, no matter how hard you strive. It is time for you to take a rest from your efforts and a more balanced view will emerge. If your mountain is partly hidden by clouds you may be confused about what you truly want or need in order to be happy. Simply meditate on the image of a clear mountain peak, and wait for the clouds to pass.



Rivers



It is rare for this beautiful symbol of our life's journey to appear in a teacup, but when it does it suggests you will have a long life ahead of you. To qualify as a true river, the image must appear longer than a snake, originate in a mountain, or end in a delta. If your river contains fish, it brings you the message of health and abundance. Darker patches or turbulence in the river may indicate life's difficulties, while lighter patches suggest the happy times that await you. Whenever there is a bridge across a river, it hastens any action you are involved with at present, and reassures you that you will get the help you need to carry you beyond current difficulties.





Hearts



When a heart finds its way into your teacup it suggests courage, love and understanding. Regardless of its size, if the heart shape is well formed, and/or rising up the cup, it indicates love and that there may be romance in the wings. You can put your heart into everything you do and you will have the courage to follow where your heart leads. A heart that is indistinct or incomplete can portend a time of sorrow and heartbreak. The heart symbol in your tea-leaves may be indicating that you are passionately drawn to the creative side of life.



Hands



Should hands appear in your teacup, take note.
Are they asking you to stop, or encouraging you on?
Two linked hands suggest love and loyalty, or a promise.



Faces



When you find a face in your teacup, what kind of expression does it have? Notice the features. Eyes in the cup can indicate someone watching you, or that you need to keep an eye on someone or something, so make sure you read the fine print. As the centre of the universe is often depicted as a giant cosmic eye, this image may have come your way to call you to a higher purpose in life. Ears can suggest that you need to listen deeply to avoid misunderstandings. When noses appear by themselves, or feature prominently on a face, they represent the sense of smell and your ability to sniff out the truth. Long noses are associated with keen interest, deception or someone who is very 'nosy'. An open mouth, especially with dots around it, indicates a talkative person, while a tightly closed mouth suggests someone who keeps their thoughts to themselves. Curly hair suggests a rebellious or inventive nature, straight hair a logical mind. Long hair indicates a romantic nature.



Arms, knees and feet



Different parts of the body that appear in the tea-leaves have much to reveal. Arms in your teacup suggest how open or otherwise a person is. If the arms are outstretched then the person in question is welcoming, while closed arms indicate someone who holds themselves back. Sometimes different areas of the body will demand your attention. A bent knee, formed by dark leaves, may suggest knee problems, or perhaps you need to take good care of your knees at the moment. A kneeling figure may point to a proposal of marriage. Or maybe you feel as if you have been ‘brought to your knees’. Feet are an excellent symbol, indicating action and stepping forward in life. Be realistic about your plans by keeping your feet on the ground—then you will be sure to succeed. If there is a heart or ring alongside the feet it may hint at romance, as in ‘stepping out’ with someone special.



Cloaks



The fascinating cloak indicates something not yet revealed.



Hats



You may feel on top of the world when a top hat appears, as you have a clear head and are well equipped to make bold decisions. A beret may suggest love of the unusual and all things creative, while a witch's hat hints at much magic around you at present, or an increase in your personal power. You may have something to do with police when their helmets appear. It's always fun when you find a sunhat in your teacup as it can suggest holidays or happy times ahead. If there is a figure in your teacup with a hat pulled down over their eyes, it may indicate someone is trying to hide something from you. When a crown comes your way it indicates leadership, wealth and that you are being noticed or in the limelight.



Shoes and boots



Footwear can tell much about people we meet. It may also reveal clues about our path ahead, or the footwear we need for this journey. Strong working boots indicate that even though there may be tough times ahead, you have the ability to persevere. High-heeled or fashionable boots suggest good times await you in a cool climate or in winter. Cowboy or riding boots point to someone who is connected to horses or racing, or a journey or adventure ahead. Dainty shoes suggest someone who has an easy life, filled with parties and dancing, or just someone who loves to have fun. Bright boots and shoes are positive indicators of work and career.



Glasses



Glasses can appear on their own, or worn by a figure in your cup. If the glasses are alone, you may have to adjust your opinions about someone or something so you can see the situation clearly. Sometimes when glasses appear they are asking you to take a wider view, or to give more thought to the future. What is clear is that your eyes are not enough at this time. Glasses worn by a person in the cup indicate you need to take a close look at the qualities of that person, or that they are looking at you carefully at present.



Cars



A car in your teacup may indicate a journey ahead for you, or the progress you have made to date. Are you enjoying where you are heading, or are you driven in everything you do? If your car appears alongside other happy symbols, you are probably travelling well at the moment, and at a pace that suits you. However, if your car seems to be racing, or is upside-down or heading towards the base of the cup, you are going the wrong way or moving too fast. Perhaps it's time you pulled over so you can reassess your journey. If a poorly formed image of a car appears in your cup, make sure you get your car checked out.



Anchors



When an anchor appears it brings hope and reprieve,
allowing you peace in the storms of life.



Planes



Planes usually indicate long journeys. If your plane is elevated in the cup you may travel to another country or a long way from home. If your cup also contains palm trees or beaches, it suggests holidays or relaxation. When a plane is near family images, such as trees, houses or hearts, it suggests that you will soon be visiting loved ones. A plane also means you will arrive swiftly wherever you are going. On an inner level, a plane can mean your thoughts are soaring, and that perhaps you need to come up with more down-to-earth plans and ideas.



Rockets



When a rocket appears there's little doubt you are ready to take off. As a rocket is the only way we can leave earth, it indicates you are about to undertake an adventure into the unknown. This may be a physical journey or one that takes you deep within. Either way you have no idea what this adventure will entail, so you will need all your ingenuity and creativity to be successful. Make sure you are organised, as you will have a definite sense of countdown and blast-off. When you arrive at your new destination you will need to be prepared for unfamiliar conditions. The best position for a rocket in the cup is when it is rising up the sides. Should your rocket be heading downwards, your adventure may be cut short. You are likely to come down to earth with a thud—but don't worry, the dream will linger and you will eventually try again.



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- p. 131: 'Chintz' (Antique Blue) Oxford cup, saucer and plate, Maxwell & Williams*
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Further information can be found at

www.maxwellandwilliams.com.au
www.robertgordonaustralia.com
www.T2tea.com
www.villeroy-boch.com
www.waterfordwedgwood.com.au



*It was long ago recognised
that tea had the ability
to take the drinker
wherever they wished to go—
if that is what they wanted.*

TJOK GDE KERTHYASA, *Tea Master*

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