

## I Want My Water Hot

“So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth (Revelations 3:16).” The Bible is talking about a separate kind of temperature, but when it comes to the water that I drink, I want it hot—boiling hot—at least 90 Celsius degrees. I want the tip of my tongue to tingle and my entire esophagus to languish like a baked muffin. I want the water I ingest to flow down without a hiccup, like magma, coalescing into a hot spring in my stomach. And just to get this straight, this request still holds true even if it was 40 degrees outside, and I have sweated through both sides of my shirt.

In a group excursion to restaurants, ordering your drink is an art. Water is the boring option; soda earns you a nod or two; diet pop is understandable; and if you really want to make an impression, get a bloody Virgin Mary. However, even a bloody Virgin Mary with a little umbrella does not receive as much raised eyebrows as my order. “Do you have hot water?” That is the first thing I ask, which deserves a pause by itself. If the answer is affirmative, I follow up with: “Can I have hot water with a piece of lemon?” Obviously, the response is not always to my satisfaction; in that case, I must resort to “room-temperature” water, which was essentially poured from the same buckets but with the ice cubes removed. I usually leave these restaurants with a parched throat. Consequently, I developed my list for accepted restaurants. Local Chinese gourmets always have the hottest waters; high-end American restaurants use what they have for herbal tea; and surprise, that one Subway inside Walmart gave me hot water in a plastic cup. For those that do not have this option, I avoid them at all costs.

At first, since I was not inclined towards lengthy explanations or drawn-out debates, I blamed it on my culture. “I’m Asian. What do you expect?” Yes, Chinese people do fancy hot things to drink: tea, soup, porridge and water. However, this preference is deeply rooted in our

ancient medicine. It is essential to balance the Yin and Yang in your body. A cup of warm water not only wakes up your digestive system in the morning, but it is also the cure to all ailments, from your seasonal cold to cholera. Girls especially benefit from the boosted blood flow, a fact corroborated by a practitioner of traditional medicine, for there is nothing better to balance a chill than a steaming cup of ginger brown sugar tea. I revere that as what saves me every month from cramp. On the other hand, the worship of hot water is also a historical precaution. Drinkable water in rural China, riddled with contamination, was the biggest catalyst for communicable diseases. Experts from the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention concluded that a heating process can kill the germs, which spurred the mania for boiled water. Even today, the water source that many developing countries rely on is still questionable. And with the recent toxic spill in Ohio, fortunately, the authorities found 3,500 dead fish before they had any human deaths on their hands. In that sense, drinking hot water doesn't sound so crazy anymore, doesn't it?

There is another health benefit that I did not recognize until I was hospitalized for an appendix rupture. Asian folks, especially Chinese, have poor gut bacteria, and this characteristic is purely from genetic reasons. I, unfortunately, fell victim to that. Prior to and after my surgery, my diet is on par with a nutritionist's recommendations, I exercise regularly and I make sure to cover my abdomen with two good layers no matter the season. However, inflammation and indigestion quickly ravaged my bowels. At one point, the primary doctor did not know what to do with me. Even today, as I still battle with my stomach, only a cup of hot water or a bowl of hot porridge can pacify my insides.

Thus, I am proud that I irritate waiters regularly, and I am proud that people inquire my reason afterwards. Serving icy water is, in fact, only a custom in some western countries, while

the majority of cultures boil water to drink, administer medicine and make other dishes. To be honest, the absence of hot water is what I miss the most after moving to the United States. I see seven-pound packaged bags of ice in all markets, and I wonder how much water has gone to waste. Water is indeed readily available everywhere in America, but even drinking fountains go through the hustle to produce 5 Celsius water that almost freezes your throat. Therefore, I carry my pink insulated bottle with me wherever I go, taking a sip throughout the day to quench my thirst or to remind myself of home. No matter where I go, drinking hot water will always be a part of me. My mom even packs the electric kettle when we go on a trip, and whenever I come home, drained from school, there is always a mug of lemon water sitting on the table for me that can restore my fatigue.

Once in a while, restaurants placate me with impostors: truly “room-temperature” water or hot water that already cooled before the waiter got to it. Those would not do. I stand by my penchant for water fresh from the boiler that can scald the cavities of my mouth. No matter the weather, the circumstance and the availability, I want my water hot.