

Date: 12/23/2023 12/24/2023
Location: Double Saltree Meditation Center

Topics:

- 1: Dharma talk: Amitabha's Vows and the Western Paradise**
- 2: Buddhist Diet Health: Rice Cake**
- 3: Buddhist Diet Culinary: Rice Cake with Mixed Vegetables**

Main content:

1: Dharma talk: The Pure Land

Welcome to Double Saltree Meditation Center, everyone! Amitabha Buddha, the Buddha of Infinite Light, is a central figure in Pure Land Buddhism. His Western Paradise, known as Sukhavati or the "Land of Ultimate Bliss," is a realm where sentient beings can be reborn to continue their spiritual journey free from the sufferings of samsara (the cycle of birth and death). Amitabha's compassion and wisdom are central to this practice, and his Pure Land provides a path of salvation that is accessible to all who sincerely aspire to it.

Amitabha's Vows and the Western Paradise. Amitabha is revered for his 48 vows, which he made as a bodhisattva before attaining Buddhahood. These vows reflect his boundless compassion and commitment to saving all beings from suffering. The most significant vow is the 18th Vow, which promises that anyone who sincerely recites his name with faith and a desire to be reborn in his Pure Land will be welcomed into it after death.

Amitabha's Pure Land, or Western Paradise, is described as a place where:

Suffering does not exist: There is no birth, aging, sickness, or death. All beings experience joy, peace, and contentment.

Practice is effortless: The conditions in the Pure Land are perfect for attaining enlightenment. Beings there are free from distractions and obstacles, allowing them to focus solely on spiritual progress.

The presence of the Dharma is constant: Beautiful sounds of the Dharma flow through the air, and even the environment—trees, flowers, and rivers—express the teachings of the Buddha. Everything in the Pure Land is conducive to deepening one's understanding of the Dharma.

The Practice of Reciting Amitabha's Name. Amitabha Buddha's Pure Land is unique in that it offers a path of salvation that is both accessible and simple. Practitioners engage in the practice of reciting Amitabha's name—a method known as Nianfo in Chinese or Nembutsu in Japanese. By reciting "Namo Amituofo" with sincerity and devotion, practitioners can develop a deep connection with Amitabha and aspire for rebirth in his Pure Land.

This practice is rooted in the belief that Amitabha's compassion is infinite, and by invoking his name, even those who struggle with meditation or who have lived imperfect lives can attain salvation. In this way, Amitabha's Western Paradise is a realm where ordinary beings can find refuge, free from the difficulties of the human world.

Symbolism of the Western Paradise. The Western Paradise is often depicted as a celestial realm filled with golden light, blooming lotus flowers, and tranquil waters. The golden light symbolizes Amitabha's boundless wisdom, while the lotus represents purity and the potential for enlightenment. Inhabitants of the Pure Land are often shown emerging from lotus flowers, symbolizing their spiritual awakening.

The Pure Land is also a reflection of Amitabha's unconditional compassion. Unlike earthly realms, where beings are subject to karma and the consequences of their past actions, the Pure Land allows all beings to advance on the path to Buddhahood without fear of falling back into lower realms.

The Inclusivity of Amitabha's Pure Land. Amitabha's teachings emphasize inclusivity—anyone, regardless of their past actions, social standing, or level of understanding, can aspire to be reborn in the

Western Paradise. This inclusivity makes Pure Land Buddhism particularly appealing to lay practitioners, who may not have the time or ability to engage in deep meditative practices but can still cultivate faith and devotion through the simple act of reciting Amitabha's name.

For many, Amitabha's Western Paradise represents hope. It is a place where the complexities of life are transcended, and where spiritual progress is not hindered by worldly distractions. This assurance has made Pure Land Buddhism one of the most popular forms of Buddhism across East Asia, especially in China, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam.

2: Buddhist Diet Health: Rice Cake

Rice cakes, a staple in many Asian cultures, hold a special place in the Buddhist diet for their simplicity, adaptability, and nourishing qualities. Whether made from glutinous or regular rice, they are a versatile food that aligns well with the principles of a plant-based, mindful eating practice. In Buddhist cuisine, rice cakes are not just sustenance but a reflection of the broader spiritual and cultural values of simplicity, purity, and interconnectedness with nature.

Health Benefits of Rice Cakes. Energy Source: Rice cakes, especially those made from brown rice, are rich in carbohydrates, making them a quick source of energy. This can be beneficial for those who lead active lifestyles or practice fasting before Buddhist ceremonies.

Low in Fat: Most traditional rice cakes are naturally low in fat, making them a heart-healthy choice. They contain no cholesterol, which fits well with a diet aimed at reducing harm and promoting longevity.

Gluten-Free: Since rice is naturally gluten-free, rice cakes are an excellent option for individuals with gluten intolerance or celiac disease, making them accessible to a wide audience, including those who follow the Buddhist diet.

Easily Digestible: Rice cakes are light and easy to digest, making them a favored food for practitioners during periods of meditation or fasting. Their simple ingredients reduce the burden on the digestive system, allowing the body to focus on spiritual practices.

Rich in Minerals: Depending on the type of rice used, rice cakes can be a source of important minerals like magnesium, phosphorus, and manganese, which support bone health and metabolic function.

Rice cakes are used in various forms across Buddhist cultures, from soft, chewy versions like mochi in Japan to crispy varieties enjoyed in Korea and China. Their neutral flavor makes them an ideal base for both savory and sweet dishes, and they can be paired with an array of plant-based ingredients to create balanced meals.

Snacks or Desserts: Sweetened rice cakes, such as Korean tteok or Japanese mochi, are often enjoyed during Buddhist festivals. These can be flavored with natural ingredients like red bean paste or sesame seeds, offering a mindful indulgence that honors the principles of balance and moderation.

Cultural Significance in the Buddhist Diet. Rice holds deep cultural and spiritual significance in many Buddhist countries. It is often associated with the earth's fertility, nourishment, and the cyclical nature of life, making rice cakes a symbolic food. In Buddhist teachings, meals made with rice are often seen as an offering of gratitude to nature, reflecting the interdependence between all living beings.

During Buddhist festivals and ceremonies, rice cakes are a traditional offering at temples and altars. For instance:

In Korean Buddhism, rice cakes like baekseolgi (a type of steamed rice cake) are often offered to ancestors or deities during rituals.

In Japanese Buddhism, mochi is a significant food during New Year's celebrations and other important events, representing longevity and prosperity.

The act of making rice cakes can also be a form of mindful practice, where each step—from washing the rice to molding the cakes—is done with awareness and intention. This mirrors the larger Buddhist principle of mindfulness, where even the most basic tasks are carried out with a focused, present mind.

3: Buddhist Diet Culinary: Rice Cake with Mixed Vegetables

Ingredients:



Ingredients:

- 200g rice cakes (store-bought, cylindrical or sliced)
- 1 medium carrot, julienned
- 1 bell pepper (red or yellow), thinly sliced
- 100g cabbage, shredded
- 100g mushrooms (shiitake or king oyster), thinly sliced
- 1 small zucchini, julienned
- 1 tablespoon soy sauce
- 1 tablespoon sesame oil
- 1 teaspoon vegetable oil (for stir-frying)
- 1 tablespoon light soy sauce or tamari (for gluten-free option)
- 1 tablespoon mirin (optional, for sweetness)
- Salt and pepper to taste

Steps:

1. Prepare the Rice Cakes:

If using refrigerated rice cakes, soak them in warm water for 10-15 minutes to soften. If they are fresh, you can use them directly.

Drain and set aside.

2. Prepare the Vegetables:

Wash and slice all the vegetables into thin, uniform pieces for even cooking.

Set them aside in separate bowls for easy stir-frying.

3. Stir-fry the Vegetables:

Heat 1 teaspoon of vegetable oil in a large wok or skillet over medium-high heat.

Stir-fry for 30 seconds until fragrant.

Add the carrots and stir-fry for 2-3 minutes.

Add the zucchini, bell pepper, and mushrooms, stir-frying for another 2-3 minutes.

Finally, add the cabbage and stir-fry for another 1-2 minutes, until all vegetables are tender but still crisp.

4. Cook the Rice Cakes:

Push the vegetables to the side of the pan, and in the center, add the rice cakes.

Pour in 1 tablespoon of soy sauce and stir to coat the rice cakes evenly.

Stir everything together, allowing the rice cakes to cook through, which should take about 2-3 minutes until they become soft and chewy.

5. Season and Finish:

Drizzle sesame oil and mirin (if using) over the stir-fried rice cakes and vegetables. Stir to combine.

Taste and adjust the seasoning with salt and pepper as needed.

6. Garnish and Serve:

Transfer the rice cake and vegetable stir-fry to a serving plate.

Garnish with toasted sesame seeds and chopped scallions for added flavor and texture.