

Date: 04/27/2024 04/28/2024
Location: Double Saltree Meditation Center

Topics:

- 1: Dharma talk: Spreading Zen**
- 2: Buddhist Diet Health: Sesame**
- 3: Buddhist Diet Culinary: Sesame Noodles**

Main content:

1: Dharma talk: Spreading Zen

Welcome to Double Saltree Meditation Center, everyone! The spread of Zen Buddhism from its origins to different parts of the world is a story of adaptation, cultural exchange, and spiritual evolution.

Starting in India, where it was rooted in meditative practices, Zen traveled to China, where it became Chan Buddhism, and then further east to Korea as Seon, Vietnam as Thien, and Japan as Zen. Its journey eventually reached the West, where Zen found new expressions in modern life.

Origins in India: The Foundation of Meditation, Zen's foundation lies in the Dhyana (meditation) practices taught by the historical Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama, around the 5th century BCE. Meditation, or the practice of stilling the mind and directly experiencing the nature of reality, was central to the Buddha's path to enlightenment. These teachings eventually became part of the Mahayana Buddhist tradition, which placed a greater emphasis on compassion and wisdom, forming the basis for the later development of Zen.

Spread to China: The Birth of Chan, Zen's transformation began in the 6th century when the Indian monk Bodhidharma traveled to China, where he introduced the meditative practices of Indian Buddhism. This teaching, known as Chan in Chinese (derived from "Dhyana"), focused on direct experience over the study of scriptures or reliance on rituals. Bodhidharma's teachings emphasized the importance of mind-to-mind transmission—an unspoken, experiential understanding of one's true nature through meditation.

In China, Chan Buddhism blended with elements of Daoism, a native philosophical tradition that emphasized simplicity, spontaneity, and living in harmony with nature. This synthesis shaped Chan into a unique form of Buddhism that prioritized inner insight, often summarized as "a special transmission outside the scriptures."

Zen Practice Today, Zen practice can be found in monasteries, meditation centers, and urban environments around the world. Its core practices remain consistent, focusing on:

Zazen (Seated Meditation): The heart of Zen practice, where practitioners simply sit and observe their breath, thoughts, and the present moment.

Zen's spread across different cultures and countries reflects its adaptability and universal appeal.

Whether in ancient China or modern cities, Zen continues to offer a path of self-realization and inner peace, inviting practitioners to experience the world with a clear and present mind.

2: Buddhist Diet Health: Sesame

Sesame seeds have been a staple in the Buddhist diet for centuries, valued for their rich nutritional profile, versatility in cooking, and symbolic significance in Buddhist culture. Known for their subtle, nutty flavor, sesame seeds are often used in a variety of dishes in Buddhist temple cuisine.

Nutritional and Health Benefits of Sesame:

Rich in Healthy Fats: Sesame seeds are an excellent source of unsaturated fats, particularly omega-6 fatty acids. These fats help support heart health by improving cholesterol levels, reducing the risk of heart disease, and promoting overall cardiovascular well-being.

High in Protein and Fiber: Despite their small size, sesame seeds are rich in plant-based protein, which is essential for muscle repair and overall vitality, making them a valuable addition to a vegetarian or vegan diet. They also contain dietary fiber, aiding in digestion and promoting gut health.

Calcium and Bone Health: Sesame seeds are particularly high in calcium, a mineral that plays a key role in maintaining strong bones and teeth. This makes sesame an important food for those on plant-based diets, who might not consume dairy products. Sesame seeds also contain magnesium and phosphorus, further supporting bone density.

Antioxidants and Anti-Inflammatory Properties: Sesame seeds are loaded with antioxidants such as sesamin and sesamol, compounds that help fight oxidative stress and inflammation in the body. These antioxidants support cellular health and may reduce the risk of chronic conditions like heart disease and cancer.

Rich in B Vitamins and Minerals: Sesame seeds are packed with essential vitamins, especially B vitamins like thiamin, niacin, and B6, which play a role in energy production and brain function. Additionally, sesame seeds provide minerals like zinc, iron, and copper, supporting immune function and metabolic health.

In Buddhist cultures, particularly in China, Japan, and Korea, sesame seeds are often used in temple meals and special offerings. Their small size symbolizes humility, reminding practitioners that great things can come from the smallest of efforts, a concept linked to the Bodhisattva ideal of compassion. Sesame seeds are frequently included in Buddhist vegetarian meals, providing nourishment in a way that is in harmony with the principle of non-harming (ahimsa).

In some Buddhist traditions, sesame oil is also used for lamp lighting in rituals, symbolizing the light of wisdom and the dispelling of ignorance, aligning with the spiritual focus on enlightenment.

3: Buddhist Diet Culinary: Sesame Noodles



Ingredients:

Red chili oil

1½ cups (360 mL) vegetable oil or other neutral-flavored oil

2 Tbsp. whole Sichuan peppercorns

2 star anise pods, 1 small cinnamon stick

2 bay leaves, ½ cup (40 g) coarsely ground dried Sichuan chiles, with seeds

1 Tbsp. sesame seeds

2 Tbsp. Chinese sesame paste

1 Tbsp. soy sauce

1 tsp. Chinkiang black vinegar

½ tsp. ground Sichuan peppercorns

2 tsp Red Chili Oil with sediment

¼ tsp. ground white pepper

7 oz. (200 g) dried Chinese wheat noodles, Toasted sesame seeds.

Steps:

1. First, make the chili oil: Combine the oil, Sichuan peppercorns, star anise, cinnamon, and bay leaves in a small saucepan. Place the dried chiles and sesame seeds in a separate heatproof bowl and set aside.
2. Heat the oil over medium heat to 230°F (110°C), or until tiny bubbles rise slowly from the spices, and keep it at that temperature for about 10 minutes to infuse it with flavor. Reduce the heat if the spices appear to be darkening too quickly. When the oil has a gentle fragrance, remove it from the heat and strain out and discard all the spices.
3. Return the saucepan to medium heat and heat the oil to 320°F (160°C), or until a piece of ginger dropped in the hot oil bubbles up to the surface slowly. Pour a few tablespoons of the oil into the bowl of ground chiles and sesame seeds—the chiles will fizz and release a rich aroma. If the chiles bubble up too energetically, the oil may be too hot and could burn the chiles. Let it cool for 30 seconds, then pour again. Continue adding all the oil, stirring to the bottom, until the oil is rich red

and has a toasty aroma. If the flavor is not as fragrant as you like, return the oil to the saucepan and heat over low heat for a few more minutes to continue to infuse it. Let cool, then transfer the oil and sediment to an airtight glass jar. Store in a cool, dark place for up to 4 months, or in the refrigerator indefinitely.

4. Make the sesame sauce: Combine the sauce ingredients in a small bowl until smooth and blended.
5. Bring a pot of water to a boil. Add the noodles and cook according to package instructions to desired doneness. When the noodles are almost done, stir 1 tablespoon of the noodle cooking water into the sauce; it should be creamy and pourable, not too thick.
6. Drain the noodles in a colander and divide them between two bowls. Add a few spoonfuls of the sesame sauce to each bowl and stir to coat the noodles. Taste and add more sauce if needed. Sprinkle on some sesame seeds, and enjoy immediately.