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1: Dharma talk: Buddha's Nirvana

Welcome to Double Saltree Meditation Center, everyone! Buddha's Nirvana refers to the ultimate spiritual goal in Buddhism, the state of liberation from the cycle of birth, death, and suffering (samsara). It is the profound realization of truth and the cessation of all desires, attachments, and ignorance. The Buddha himself attained Nirvana after achieving enlightenment under the Bodhi tree, and his teachings guide others toward this state of liberation. There are two key stages of Nirvana:

1. Nirvana with Remainder (Sopadhisesa-Nirvana)

This refers to the state of Nirvana that the Buddha experienced after attaining enlightenment but while still alive. In this stage, the Buddha had transcended the mental and emotional suffering caused by craving and attachment, but his physical body remained subject to natural conditions like aging and physical discomfort. Though free from the internal causes of suffering, he still experienced the external conditions of human life until his death.

In this state:

The Buddha was free from greed, hatred, and delusion.

He remained compassionate, teaching others how to end suffering.

He lived with awareness of the ultimate truth, but the physical form remained, continuing to experience the inevitable changes of life.

2. Parinirvana (Final Nirvana or Nirvana without Remainder)

This is the complete and final state of Nirvana that the Buddha entered upon his death. In this stage, all aspects of the cycle of rebirth and suffering come to an end, including the dissolution of the physical body. Parinirvana represents total liberation, where there is no longer any connection to the worldly cycle of samsara.

No rebirth: Upon entering Parinirvana, there is no further rebirth or existence in any realm.

Complete cessation: It marks the cessation of all mental and physical processes. The Buddha is no longer subject to any form of suffering.

Ultimate peace: Parinirvana is often described as a state of ultimate peace and tranquility, beyond all human comprehension or description.

Key Aspects of Nirvana:

End of Dukkha (Suffering): Nirvana signifies the end of all forms of suffering. This is achieved by eliminating desire (tanha), attachment (upadana), and ignorance (avijja), which are the root causes of dukkha.

Freedom from Samsara: Nirvana marks freedom from samsara, the endless cycle of birth, death, and rebirth, which is driven by karmic forces.

In Nirvana, concepts like self and non-self, existence and non-existence, cease to apply. It is a state beyond all dualities and conceptual understanding.

Peace and Liberation: It is described as a state of profound peace (the absence of craving and aversion), complete contentment, and spiritual liberation.

Nirvana is not a place or a heavenly realm. It is a state of being, a condition of freedom from the suffering that arises from attachment, aversion, and ignorance.

While Nirvana involves the cessation of the illusion of self, it is not the destruction of consciousness or a nihilistic end. It is the realization of the ultimate truth, where one transcends the delusions of ego and separate identity.

The Buddha's Nirvana is the ultimate expression of his teachings and the goal of the Buddhist path. It represents the culmination of wisdom, ethical living, and meditative practice that leads to the realization of the impermanent, selfless nature of all things. This realization brings liberation from suffering and the attainment of unshakable peace.

2: Buddhist Diet Health: Tofu skin

In the context of the Buddhist diet, tofu skin (also known as yuba or beancurd skin) is a highly nutritious and versatile food that aligns well with the dietary and health principles of Buddhism, especially in vegetarian and vegan practices. Here's how tofu skin fits into a Buddhist diet and contributes to overall health:

1. Plant-Based Protein Source

A key component of many Buddhist diets, particularly in Mahayana and Zen traditions, is the avoidance of animal products. Tofu skin provides a high-quality source of plant-based protein, which is essential for maintaining muscle mass, tissue repair, and overall bodily function. This makes it an excellent alternative to meat, fitting seamlessly into a vegetarian or vegan lifestyle.

Protein Content: Tofu skin is rich in protein, offering about 50-60 grams of protein per 100 grams when dried, making it more concentrated than regular tofu.

Complete Protein: Like other soy products, tofu skin contains all the essential amino acids, making it a complete protein, which is particularly beneficial in a plant-based diet.

2. Rich in Nutrients

Tofu skin is a nutrient-dense food, meaning it provides essential vitamins and minerals while being relatively low in calories. Key nutrients include:

Calcium: Important for bone health, tofu skin is a good source of calcium, particularly when made with calcium salts during the tofu-making process.

Iron: Tofu skin contains iron, which is crucial for red blood cell production and oxygen transport in the body.

B Vitamins: These vitamins, especially B2 (riboflavin), play a role in energy metabolism and the maintenance of healthy skin and eyes.

3. Low in Fat and Cholesterol-Free

In accordance with Buddhist principles of moderation and simplicity, tofu skin is low in saturated fat and contains no cholesterol, making it heart-healthy. Diets low in cholesterol and saturated fat can help reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease, a key aspect of maintaining physical well-being.

Healthy Fats: The fats in tofu skin are primarily unsaturated, promoting good heart health by helping to maintain healthy cholesterol levels and reducing inflammation.

4. Easily Digestible

Buddhist diets often emphasize foods that are gentle on the digestive system, as heavy, hard-to-digest foods can disrupt meditation and mindfulness practices. Tofu skin is easily digestible, especially when cooked or rehydrated, making it a light and soothing food for the stomach.

Light yet Nutritious: It's a food that can provide energy and nutrients without causing a heavy feeling, which is particularly important for those engaging in spiritual practices or meditation.

5. Versatility in Cooking

Tofu skin is highly versatile and can be used in a variety of dishes, from stir-fries to soups, which fits with the Buddhist principle of minimizing waste and making the most out of available ingredients. Its texture and ability to absorb flavors make it a great ingredient for creating wholesome, satisfying meals.

Adaptable for Flavor: Tofu skin can take on the flavors of various seasonings and sauces, allowing for creative yet simple cooking that adheres to Buddhist principles of non-indulgence and balance.

6. Supports a Balanced and Mindful Diet

In Buddhist dietary practice, balance and mindfulness are key. Foods like tofu skin allow practitioners to maintain a nutritionally balanced diet without relying on meat or overly processed foods. Its simplicity and nourishment promote mindfulness in eating, encouraging awareness of the food's source, preparation, and its effects on the body.

7. Environmental Sustainability

Many Buddhists practice a vegetarian or vegan diet not only for spiritual reasons but also to minimize harm to sentient beings and reduce environmental impact. Tofu skin, being a soy product, is a more sustainable protein source compared to animal-based foods, as producing soybeans requires fewer natural resources like water and land.

Tofu skin is an excellent fit for a Buddhist diet due to its high protein content, essential nutrients, and versatility in plant-based cooking.

It is low in fat, easily digestible, and promotes heart health, making it an ideal food for maintaining physical well-being while adhering to spiritual principles.

It supports a balanced, mindful approach to eating, aligning with the values of simplicity, non-harm (ahimsa), and moderation central to Buddhist practice.

Incorporating tofu skin into a Buddhist diet not only nourishes the body but also fosters a mindful, compassionate approach to food and life.

3: Buddhist Diet Culinary: Stir-fried tofu skin with tomatoes



Ingredients:

150g (5 oz) dried tofu skin (also called yuba or beancurd sheets)

2 medium tomatoes, chopped

1 tablespoon soy sauce

1 tablespoon vegetable oil (or any neutral oil)

1 teaspoon sugar (optional, to balance acidity)

1 teaspoon salt (to taste)

1/2 teaspoon sesame oil (optional, for added flavor)

1/4 cup water or vegetable broth

Steps:

1. Prepare the Tofu Skin

Soak the tofu skin: If you're using dried tofu skin, soak it in warm water for about 20-30 minutes until it becomes soft and pliable. Once rehydrated, drain the water and gently squeeze out any excess liquid.

Cut the tofu skin into bite-sized pieces.

2. Stir-Fry

Heat the oil: Heat a wok or a large skillet over medium heat. Add the vegetable oil.

Add tomatoes: Add the chopped tomatoes and stir-fry for another 3-4 minutes until the tomatoes start to soften and release their juices.

Add tofu skin: Add the tofu skin pieces into the wok. Stir to combine the ingredients well.

Season: Add the soy sauce, sugar (if using), and salt. Stir well to coat the tofu skin with the sauce.

3. Simmer: Pour in 1/4 cup of water or vegetable broth to help soften the tofu skin further and allow the flavors to meld. Let it simmer for about 3-5 minutes until the tofu skin absorbs the flavors and the sauce thickens slightly.

4. Final Touches

Add sesame oil (optional): For an extra layer of flavor, drizzle in a bit of sesame oil before turning off the heat.