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Topics:

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1: Dharma Talk: Religious Culture and Rituals of the Buddhist Diet

Hello everyone! Welcome to Double Saltree Meditation Center, I am Hao Liu! Today, I would like to share the Dharma Talk topic: Religious Culture and Rituals of the Buddhist Diet. The Buddhist diet is not just a daily eating habit but also a ritual full of religious symbolism and spiritual significance.

Through the rules and rituals of fasting, Buddhists not only meet their physical needs but also express gratitude and reverence for food, life, and the Dharma with every meal. The ritualized and regulated practice of fasting is particularly important in the monastic life, ensuring that practitioners can purify their minds, enhance their wisdom, and maintain the harmony of body and mind through food discipline and purity.

The Buddhist fasting ritual typically involves several steps, each carrying profound religious symbolism. First, the hand-washing ritual before eating is essential. Believers and monks alike carefully wash their hands before meals. This act is not only for physical cleanliness but also symbolizes the removal of impurities and distractions, creating a pure state of mind for the meal. The Nirvana Sutra mentions that practitioners must maintain a pure and focused mind while eating. Hand-washing is the starting point of this process, reminding practitioners to keep their minds clean in daily life as well.

After washing hands, Buddhists usually offer a brief prayer to express gratitude for the food and the providers. The prayer typically includes thanks for the food's source, respect for the Buddha's teachings, and blessings for all beings. This prayer is not only a way to thank the food but also a form of respect for the lives and labor behind it. The "Vinaya" clearly states that monks should approach every meal with a humble and thankful attitude, reminding themselves to remain grateful while enjoying the food.

The final key element of the fasting ritual is "*Dana*" — the offering of food, symbolizing compassion and sharing. Whether it is the laypeople offering food to monks or monks sharing meals with each other, Dana represents a selfless spirit, conveying the Buddhist teachings of "*letting go of ego*" and "*selflessness*." Dana is not just a material offering but also a spiritual elevation, helping practitioners detach from selfish desires and cultivate a compassionate heart.

In the practice of Buddhist fasting, time restrictions are an important rule. According to Buddhist teachings, practitioners usually follow the "*no eating after noon*" rule, meaning they do not eat from noon until the next dawn. This rule originates from the "*Vinaya*" and the *Nirvana Sutra*, aiming to remind practitioners to avoid excessive dependence on food and to focus attention on spiritual practice and inner awakening.

This "*no eating after noon*" rule is not merely a dietary taboo; it carries profound philosophical and religious meanings. Firstly, it is a form of restraint on material desires. Buddhism teaches that excessive hunger and desire can disturb a practitioner's mental state, leading to an unclear mind. Therefore, the "*no eating after noon*" rule helps practitioners avoid the over-pursuit of food, maintaining physical and mental purity and concentration.

Secondly, this rule is closely tied to the concept of the "*Middle Way*." Buddhism emphasizes that practice should avoid both indulgence and excessive austerity. The "*no eating after noon*" rule embodies this balance. By limiting the time for eating, practitioners prevent excessive indulgence in sensual pleasure, enabling them to focus more on spiritual practice and the development of inner wisdom and awareness.

The *Vinaya* is one of the most important monastic rules in Buddhism, and it has strict regulations concerning fasting. It describes in detail how monks should observe dietary rules in their daily lives to maintain order in their practice. According to the *Vinaya*, monks should eat only during the daytime, avoid overeating, and refrain from consuming luxurious food. Additionally, monks are advised to maintain a simple and moderate approach to food, not being selective or indulgent.

These regulations in the *Vinaya* reflect the Buddhist principles of "*restraint*" and "*purity*." Through careful control over food, monks can maintain balance in their body and mind, avoiding the influence of greed or temptation from food, allowing them to focus more on meditation, concentration, and the cultivation of wisdom. Furthermore, these rules help create a harmonious and orderly environment within the monastic community, preventing disruption caused by individual dietary habits.

Through ritualized fasting, Buddhists not only provide nourishment for the body but also express gratitude for life, food, and the selfless contributions of others. In the fasting ritual, practitioners elevate the simple act of eating into a spiritual practice and cultural exercise through prayer, Dana, and hand-washing. Every meal is not just for physical satisfaction, but a moment of inner purification and awakening.

The cultural significance of fasting is profound. It helps Buddhists cultivate humility and restraint, preventing them from being controlled by material desires. By honoring and being grateful for food,

practitioners not only recognize its preciousness but also become aware of the interconnectedness of all life, nurturing a deeper sense of compassion and social responsibility.

2: Buddhist Diet Health: Vegetarian Wontons

In the world of Buddhist cuisine, food is more than just sustenance—it is a path to mindfulness, compassion, and health. Among the many dishes embraced in Buddhist diets, vegetarian wontons stand out as a delightful, nutritious, and ethically aligned option. Let's explore their significance, health benefits, and how they fit into a Buddhist lifestyle.

Wontons are a type of dumpling originating from Chinese cuisine, traditionally made with a thin dough wrapper and various fillings. Vegetarian versions replace meat with plant-based ingredients such as:

Tofu: A rich source of plant protein and calcium.

Mushrooms: Provide umami flavor, fiber, and antioxidants.

Cabbage, Carrots, Spinach, Bean Sprouts: Add fiber, vitamins, and minerals.

Mild Seasonings: Ginger, soy sauce, and sesame oil enhance flavor without overwhelming the senses.

They can be steamed or boiled for a light, nutritious meal or snack. Frying is less ideal in a Buddhist dietary context due to excess oils and heavy calories.

Health Benefits of Vegetarian Wontons

Vegetarian wontons are not only ethically aligned with Buddhist principles but also offer several health advantages:

Balanced Nutrition: Combining vegetables, tofu, and wrappers provides a mix of protein, fiber, carbohydrates, and essential micronutrients.

Low in Saturated Fat: Steamed or boiled wontons are heart-healthy and easy on digestion.

Antioxidant-Rich: Vegetables like spinach, mushrooms, and cabbage help combat oxidative stress and support overall health.

Mindful Portions: Small, bite-sized dumplings encourage eating in moderation, supporting digestive health and mindfulness.

3: Buddhist Diet Culinary: Vegetarian Mushroom Wontons



Ingredients:

Fresh mushrooms (shiitake or mixed mushrooms) – 100 g

Carrot – ½ small, finely shredded

Wonton wrappers – as needed

Soy sauce – 1 tbsp

White pepper powder – ¼ tsp

Salt – to taste

Vegetable oil – 1 tsp

Vegetable broth – 3 cups

Steps:

1. Prepare the filling:

Finely chop the mushrooms and shred the carrot.

Heat a small pan with vegetable oil, and lightly sauté the mushrooms and carrot until softened.

Add soy sauce, salt, and white pepper. Mix well, then let cool slightly.

2. Wrap the wontons:

Place a small spoonful of filling in the center of each wonton wrapper.

Moisten the edges with a little water, fold diagonally into a triangle, and press to seal.

You can also fold the two corners together to create the classic “gold ingot” shape.

3. Cook the wontons:

Bring a pot of water or vegetable broth to a boil.

Drop the wontons in gently and cook for 3–5 minutes, until they float to the surface.

4. Serve:

Serve hot in a light vegetable broth, or drizzle with a touch of soy sauce and sesame oil for a dry version.