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Location: Double Saltree Meditation Center

Teacher: Hao Liu

Topics:

1: Dharma Talk: Joy Arises from the Mind — Entering “Inner Joy” through the Four Noble Truths.

2: Buddhist Diet Health: Fermented tofu

3: Buddhist Diet Culinary: Stir-fried water spinach with fermented tofu

Main content:

1: Dharma Talk:

Hello everyone! Welcome to Double Saltree Meditation Center, I am Hao Liu! Today, I would like to share the Dharma Talk topic: Joy Arises from the Mind — Entering “Inner Joy” through the Four Noble Truths. In this world, people universally seek happiness. Yet most chase after it outwardly, seldom turning inward to observe their own minds. Thus, when they gain something, they rejoice; when they lose it, they grieve. In favorable conditions, they feel pleasure; in adversity, they suffer. In this way, they can never attain true, stable peace and happiness.

In the time before his enlightenment, Shakyamuni Buddha was born a prince, enjoying the greatest worldly luxuries. Yet his heart was not at ease. Why was this so? Because he personally witnessed aging, sickness, and death, and realized that all pleasures are impermanent and inevitably subject to decay. Thus, he renounced palace life and set out in search of the supreme path.

After attaining enlightenment, the Buddha delivered his first teaching at the Deer Park, expounding the Four Noble Truths—suffering, its origin, its cessation, and the path. These form the very foundation of all Buddhist teachings. To understand that “joy arises from the mind,” one must first understand the truth of suffering.

What is suffering? It is not only physical or mental pain. All that is impermanent and subject to change is, in essence, suffering. People often mistake pleasure for true happiness, yet pleasure does not endure. When it fades, suffering arises—this is known as the suffering of change. Moreover, the constant flux of all conditioned phenomena is itself a subtle form of suffering.

We should reflect deeply: if we do not understand suffering, how can we transcend it? And if we cannot transcend suffering, how can genuine joy arise?

There is a well-known story: a woman, grieving the loss of her child, was overwhelmed with sorrow and begged the Buddha to bring the child back to life. The Buddha said to her, “Go into the city and find a household where no one has ever died. Bring me a handful of mustard seeds from that home, and I will help you.” She searched everywhere but found no such household. In time, she came to understand that death is universal. Her mind gradually transformed—from clinging to wisdom, from grief to acceptance.

This illustrates the Buddha's skillful means: guiding beings to see suffering clearly so that right understanding may arise.

When we cling to the thought, "Things must go my way," suffering is already present. But when we understand that all things arise and pass according to conditions, and cannot be forced, the mind begins to relax. When the mind relaxes, joy naturally appears.

Thus, "joy arises from the mind," not from external circumstances. Conditions are ever-changing; if joy depends on them, it cannot last. Only by relying on right understanding—knowing suffering, abandoning its causes, realizing its cessation, and practicing the path—can one attain unshakable joy.

How, then, should we practice?

First, contemplate impermanence. Seeing that all phenomena arise and pass away, we cease clinging and attachment.

Second, cultivate mindfulness. In walking, standing, sitting, and lying down, remain aware of the present moment, without being carried away by wandering thoughts.

Third, practice contentment with few desires. As desires lessen, afflictions naturally diminish.

Over time, the mind is no longer driven by external conditions. Even while living in the world, one abides in inner peace. Within this peace arises a pure and serene joy.

May we all take refuge in the Buddha's teachings: to see suffering without despair, to understand it and transcend it. When suffering is truly relinquished, joy does not need to be sought—it arises naturally from within.

2: Buddhist Diet Health: Fermented tofu

In many forms of Buddhist cuisine, meals are plant-based and emphasize simplicity, balance, and mindfulness. Fermented tofu is sometimes used in moderation as a flavoring ingredient. Its rich, umami taste helps enhance otherwise lightly seasoned dishes, allowing cooks to avoid heavier sauces while keeping food satisfying.

Fermented tofu offers several nutritional benefits when eaten in appropriate amounts:

Plant-based protein: Derived from soybeans, it supports muscle maintenance and overall nutrition in vegetarian diets.

Fermentation benefits: The fermentation process can improve digestibility and may contribute beneficial compounds associated with gut health.

Minerals: It can provide calcium, iron, and other micronutrients depending on preparation.

From a Buddhist dietary perspective, food is not only about nutrition but also about moderation, clarity, and harmony. Fermented tofu fits into this approach as:

A condiment rather than a main dish

A way to balance flavor without excess

Part of a mindful eating practice that avoids overindulgence

Fermented tofu in Buddhist temple cuisine reflects a balance between flavor, nutrition, and mindful living. While it contributes protein and fermented food benefits, its role is carefully moderated to align with the broader principles of health and simplicity in Buddhist dietary traditions.

3: Buddhist Diet Culinary: Stir-fried water spinach with fermented tofu



Ingredients:

Water spinach (about 300g)

Fermented tofu (2 cubes, with a little of the sauce)

Cooking oil (as needed)

Salt (a small amount, optional)

Sugar (a pinch, for flavor)

Water (a small amount)

Steps:

1. Prepare the water spinach

Wash thoroughly and cut into sections. Separate the stems and leaves if possible (the stems take longer to cook).

2. Make the fermented tofu sauce

Put the fermented tofu in a small bowl, mash it with a spoon, and mix with a little water to form a sauce.

3. Sauté, Cook the stems first

Heat oil in a pan, cook over low heat until fragrant (be careful not to burn it). Add the stems and stir-fry over high heat for about 30 seconds.

4. Add the leaves

Add the leaves and quickly stir-fry until they soften.

5. Season

Pour in the fermented tofu sauce and mix well. Add a pinch of sugar to enhance the flavor. Taste before adding salt, since the tofu is already salty.

6. Serve

Stir-fry over high heat for 1–2 minutes total, then remove from the pan. This keeps the texture crisp and tender.