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Location: Double Saltree Meditation Center

Teacher: Hao Liu

Topics:

1: Dharma Talk: The Joy of the Middle Way — Transcending Extremes to Realize True Happiness.

2: Buddhist Diet Health: Licorice Root

3: Buddhist Diet Culinary: Traditional Sour Plum Drink (Suan Mei Tang)

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: The Joy of the Middle Way — Transcending Extremes to Realize True Happiness. This topic may seem simple, yet its meaning is profound. If one gains even a small measure of insight into this teaching, afflictions will naturally lessen, the body and mind will settle, and the joy of the Dharma will gradually arise.

All people in the world seek happiness. Yet the happiness they pursue often falls into two extremes: indulgence in sensual pleasures, or rigid self-mortification. The former leads to attachment and craving; the latter to repression and rigidity. Though these appear different, their essence is the same—clinging. Where there is clinging, there is suffering; where there is suffering, there can be no true and lasting joy.

Before his enlightenment, Shakyamuni Buddha lived as a prince, surrounded by luxury and comfort. Music filled the palace day and night; exquisite foods were always available; attendants served his every need. Yet he did not find peace within. Why? Because his wisdom had begun to awaken. He saw that all sensual pleasures are impermanent—though they appear delightful in the moment, they inevitably decay.

When he ventured beyond the palace gates, he encountered the realities of old age, sickness, and death, and also saw the serene composure of a renunciant. He realized deeply that all conditioned existence is marked by suffering. Thus, he gave rise to a great aspiration, renounced his royal life, and set out in search of the ultimate truth.

After leaving home, he studied meditation under renowned teachers and attained profound states of concentration. Yet he recognized these were not the final liberation. He then practiced severe asceticism with five companions, eating only a grain or two a day, sometimes fasting entirely. His body became emaciated—bones protruding, strength nearly gone.

Scriptures describe that when he touched his abdomen, he could feel his spine; he was so weak he could barely walk. Yet despite such extreme austerity, his inner afflictions remained unresolved. The cycle of birth and death was not ended. At this crucial turning point, he realized: this path is not the way to liberation.

This insight is of great importance.

To cling to suffering as a path is to fall into the extreme of asceticism. To cling to pleasure is to fall into indulgence. Both are deviations from the true path.

Thus, he abandoned extreme austerities, accepted nourishment from a village girl, and restored his strength. The five ascetics, misunderstanding his actions, believed he had given up and left him. Yet he remained unmoved by others' judgments, abiding firmly in mindfulness. Sitting beneath the Bodhi tree, he made a great vow: "If I do not attain enlightenment, I shall not rise from this seat."

Upon seeing the morning star, he awakened fully and realized supreme, perfect enlightenment.

After his awakening, he went to the Deer Park and delivered his first teaching, revealing the Middle Way. He said: "There are two extremes that one who has gone forth should not follow: indulgence in sensual pleasure, which is low and unprofitable; and self-mortification, which is painful and not noble. Avoiding these two extremes, the Tathāgata has realized the Middle Way, which gives rise to vision, to wisdom, and leads to peace and Nirvana."

Thus, the Middle Way is not a compromise between extremes, but a complete transcendence of them.

Let us reflect: what are these two extremes?

One is craving—pursuing pleasure, believing that more acquisition brings more happiness. Yet desire is like fire: the more it burns, the more it consumes. What is gained soon becomes tiresome; what is not yet gained becomes an object of longing. In this endless cycle, the mind never finds rest.

The other is suppression—denying desires, rejecting the body, and equating suffering with progress. Yet such practice often gives rise to subtle pride: "I can endure more than others," which only deepens attachment.

Therefore, through his own experience, the Buddha taught that both extremes fail to bring liberation.

He illustrated this with the analogy of a lute: if the string is too tight, it will snap; if too loose, it will not produce sound. Only when properly tuned can it create beautiful music. So it is with spiritual practice.

If the mind is too tense, it becomes anxious and rigid;

if too lax, it becomes dull and scattered.

Only through balance and harmony can wisdom and joy arise.

"Joy arises from the mind," and the key lies in this balance.

If the mind follows external conditions, joy and sorrow alternate endlessly;

if the mind abides in the Middle Way, unmoved by coming and going, joy remains constant.

This joy is not ordinary happiness.

It does not arise from gaining, and thus carries no fear of loss;

it does not depend on stimulation, and thus brings no exhaustion;

it is not born of comparison, and thus is free from jealousy.

It is the joy of stillness, the joy of equanimity, the joy of inner realization.

There was once a disciple named Subhadda, who encountered the Buddha late in life and sought the path to liberation. The Buddha taught him the Noble Eightfold Path—the practical expression of the Middle Way. Practicing diligently, Subhadda soon attained liberation.

This shows that the Middle Way is not merely a concept, but a path to be lived.

On another occasion, a monk struggled in practice due to excessive effort. The Buddha asked him, “Were you skilled in playing the lute before ordaining?” The monk replied yes. The Buddha asked, “What happens if the string is too tight?” “It breaks,” the monk answered. “And if too loose?” “It makes no sound.” The Buddha said, “Practice is the same.”

Upon hearing this, the monk understood how to balance his effort.

Reflect now on our own lives: do we not often fall into these extremes?

At work, we may overexert ourselves, driven by anxiety and pressure;

in rest, we may indulge excessively, losing clarity and discipline.

In relationships, we may cling too tightly, fearing loss;

or withdraw too much, becoming distant and cold.

These are not the Middle Way.

The Middle Way is grounded in mindfulness and right view.

Mindfulness means being aware in each moment, not carried away by conditions.

Right view means seeing reality as it is—impermanent, unsatisfactory, and without a fixed self.

When mindfulness is present, thoughts arise and are known, but do not bind us.

When right view is stable, gain and loss no longer disturb the heart.

The mind then becomes like still water—though winds may arise, the surface soon returns to calm.

With sustained practice, a state of lightness and ease emerges. The body becomes relaxed, the breath steady, and the mind clear and bright. This is known as the joy of the Dharma.

This joy differs from sensory pleasure. It does not depend on external conditions, nor does it diminish over time. Rather, it deepens through practice.

How then shall we cultivate the Middle Way in daily life?

First, regulate the body.

Maintain moderation in food and rest. Avoid both excess and deprivation. Let the body support practice, not hinder it.

Second, regulate the mind.

Be aware as thoughts arise. Do not suppress them, nor follow them. When greed arises, know it as greed; when anger arises, know it as anger. With awareness, the mind naturally settles.

Third, regulate conduct.

Act with balance and integrity. Do not cling rigidly to personal views, nor drift aimlessly with circumstances. Live in the world, yet remain unstained by it.

Further still:

In favorable conditions, practice non-attachment;

in adverse conditions, practice non-aversion;

in all situations, cultivate equanimity.

Over time, the mind expands, and clinging diminishes.

There was once a lay practitioner of modest means who lived in poverty yet always appeared peaceful and content. When asked why, he replied, "I do not contend with circumstances." This simple statement embodies the essence of the Middle Way.

Not contending does not mean passivity—it means non-clinging.

Without clinging to gain, one is at ease in gain and loss;

without clinging to fame, one remains steady in honor and disgrace;

without clinging to relationships, one accepts coming and going with equanimity.

Such a mind finds peace everywhere.

In conclusion:

The Middle Way is the path of releasing attachment;

releasing attachment is the cause of peace;

peace is the ground from which joy arises.

"Joy arises from the mind." When the mind leans to extremes, joy cannot endure; when the mind abides in balance, joy remains.

May we all follow the teachings of the Buddha, abandon the pull of extremes, and dwell in the Middle Way. In all postures—walking, standing, sitting, and lying down—may we gradually cultivate a gentle body, a calm mind, and a lightened heart.

When the mind no longer wavers,

that quiet clarity and uncontrived peace

is the truest and most ultimate joy.

—A joy silent yet profound, formless yet ever-present.

May we encourage one another in this practice.

2: Buddhist Diet Health: Licorice Root

In a Buddhist vegetarian or temple-style diet, ingredients are often chosen not just for nutrition but also for how they affect the body's balance and the mind's clarity. Licorice root plays an interesting role in that context.

Licorice root (commonly used in Chinese herbal cooking and drinks like sour plum soup) is valued for its harmonizing properties. In traditional East Asian dietary philosophy, it's often used to "balance" other ingredients.

1. Digestive Support

Licorice root is traditionally believed to:

Soothe the stomach

Reduce acidity

Help with mild digestive discomfort

2. Harmonizing Ingredient

In many herbal recipes, licorice is known as a "mediator":

It softens strong or harsh flavors

Helps different herbs work together more smoothly

That's why it appears in drinks like sour plum tea—it balances the sourness.

3. Energy & Balance

In traditional Chinese medicine concepts:

Licorice is considered mildly warming

It may support energy (Qi) and reduce fatigue

Moderation is key—Buddhist dietary traditions also emphasize restraint and balance.

3: Buddhist Diet Culinary: Traditional Sour Plum Drink (Suan Mei Tang)



Ingredients:

30g smoked plums (wu mei)

20g hawthorn berries

5g dried tangerine peel

3g licorice root

Rock sugar (to taste)

1500 ml water

(Optional: a small amount of osmanthus flowers for extra aroma)

Steps:

1. Rinse the ingredients

Lightly rinse the smoked plums, hawthorn, dried tangerine peel, and licorice root to remove any impurities.

2. Soak

Place all the ingredients into a pot, add water, and let them soak for about 30 minutes (this helps release the flavors).

3. Boil

Bring to a boil over high heat, then reduce to low heat and simmer for 30–40 minutes.

4. Sweeten

Add rock sugar and stir until fully dissolved. Adjust sweetness to your taste.

5. Strain

Turn off the heat, let it cool slightly, then strain out the solids, keeping only the liquid.

6. Chill

Refrigerate before serving for the best flavor. Optionally, add a bit of osmanthus for fragrance.