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Location: Double Saltree Meditation Center

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Topics:

1: Dharma Talk: Virtue Arises from the Mind — A Single Wholesome Thought Is the Beginning of Practice.

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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: Virtue Arises from the Mind — A Single Wholesome Thought Is the Beginning of Practice.

Why do we learn and practice Buddhism?

Some people say, “I pray for peace and safety.”

Others say, “I hope to cultivate blessings and good fortune.”

Some pray for their family’s health, or for success in their work and career.

There is nothing wrong with such wishes. Life is indeed filled with difficulties and suffering. When we come before the Buddha, it is natural to hope for comfort, protection, and something we can rely upon.

But Buddhism teaches us something deeper:

What truly transforms our lives is not merely what we pray for outwardly, but the mind we cultivate within.

When the mind changes, our words change.

When our words change, our actions change.

When our actions change, our habits change.

And when our habits change, our lives gradually change as well.

This is why Buddhist practice begins not with changing outward appearances, but with cultivating and transforming our own minds.

In the Avataṃsaka Sūtra, there is a well-known teaching:

“If one wishes to understand all Buddhas of the three periods of time, one should contemplate the nature of the Dharma realm: everything is created by the mind.”

The “mind” spoken of here is not simply our emotions. It refers to our every thought and intention, our attachments and discriminations, our choices between wholesome and unwholesome, and the karma created through our body, speech, and mind.

The very same situation can produce completely different results when met with different states of mind.

When one person receives a little benefit, they think,

“How can I use this to help others?”

Another person, receiving the same benefit, thinks,

“How can I take even more for myself?”

When someone receives a word of criticism, one person may think,

“Perhaps they are reminding me of something I still need to improve.”

Another may immediately become angry and think,

“Who are they to speak to me like that?”

The situation itself may not have changed.

But when the mind changes, the world we experience changes with it.

This is one of the profound teachings of Buddhism:

The way we experience our circumstances is shaped by the mind; virtue arises from the mind.

Let us reflect on the story of the Buddha before his enlightenment.

Before becoming the Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama underwent many years of spiritual seeking and practice. He did not enter this world already known as “the Buddha.” He was once a prince. After witnessing the realities of birth, aging, sickness, and death, he began to ask a profound question:

Why do sentient beings long for happiness, yet continue to create so much suffering?

Eventually, Siddhartha left the life of the palace and embarked on the path of seeking liberation.

For years, he practiced severe asceticism, even bringing his body to a state of extreme weakness. But he eventually realized that merely tormenting the body could not lead to true liberation.

He therefore abandoned the extremes of ascetic practice, accepted an offering of nourishing food, and regained his strength. Sitting beneath the Bodhi tree, he settled and purified his body and mind.

Ultimately, he awakened to the truth and became the Buddha.

This story teaches us something important:

Spiritual practice is not about making ourselves suffer. It is about making the mind clear, awakened, and free.

There is a fundamental teaching in Buddhism:

“Do not commit any evil; cultivate all that is wholesome; purify your own mind. This is the teaching of all Buddhas.”

“Do not commit any evil” means refraining from actions that cause harm.

“Cultivate all that is wholesome” means actively bringing benefit and goodness to others.

And “purify your own mind” points to an even deeper level of practice—to gradually free the mind from greed, anger, ignorance, attachment, and delusion.

Why does the teaching emphasize the purification of the mind?

Because true goodness is not merely about performing a good deed.

It is about cultivating a heart that naturally wishes to do good.

Today, we may help one person, and tomorrow, perhaps another. But if there is no genuine kindness within us, even a good deed may sometimes be performed simply for praise or recognition.

True virtue is not measured by what others see.

It is revealed by what we are willing to do when no one is watching.

We often ask:

“How can I cultivate virtue and accumulate merit?”

In truth, the answer can be found in our everyday lives.

Speaking a warm and encouraging word—that is virtue.

Reaching out to help someone in difficulty—that is virtue.

Seeing another person’s strengths and sincerely rejoicing in them—that is virtue.

When we feel hurt, choosing not to retaliate—that is virtue.

Remaining humble when we have ability and success—that is virtue.

Doing what is right even when no one is watching—that is virtue.

And when someone makes a mistake, being willing to give them an opportunity to correct themselves—that too is virtue.

Virtue is not something distant or unreachable.

Virtue begins with a single thought.

When we are about to say something hurtful, but pause and choose not to—that moment of restraint is virtue.

When anger arises, but we take a breath and choose patience and compassion—that moment is virtue.

When we see someone in difficulty and think, “Perhaps I can help,” that compassionate thought is virtue.

A wholesome thought may seem very small, but it is like a seed.

When wholesome seeds are planted again and again, they become habits.

When those habits are cultivated over time, they shape our character.

And as our character matures, it becomes our virtue and our way of life.

So when we come before the Buddha today, perhaps we should not only ask the Buddha and the Bodhisattvas to change our circumstances or our destiny.

The Buddha is not far away.

Virtue is not somewhere else.

The Dharma is present in every thought that arises within us.

May we learn, day by day, to guard and cultivate this precious mind.

May every thought move toward goodness.

May every word carry compassion.

May every action bring benefit to others.

In this way, thought by thought, we cultivate the wholesome.

Wholesome thoughts become wholesome actions.

Wholesome actions become virtue.

And virtue, cultivated throughout our lives, becomes one of the most precious treasures we can possess.

May we all walk this path with a compassionate and awakened heart.

Amitabha Buddha.

2: Buddhist Diet Health: Lotus Leaf

In temple vegetarian cuisine, the lotus leaf is not only a natural food wrapper but also an ingredient that represents the principles of “clean, pure, light, and elegant” in healthy eating. With its delicate fragrance, lotus leaves are often used for steaming rice, steaming vegetables, making porridge, and brewing tea. They help preserve the natural flavors of ingredients while adding a refreshing and gentle aroma.

From the perspective of traditional wellness practices, the main benefits of lotus leaves can be highlighted in the following areas:

1. Clearing Summer Heat and Supporting Moisture Balance — A Seasonal Wellness Food. One of the most recognized traditional wellness qualities of lotus leaves is their ability to clear summer heat and support the body’s balance of moisture. During hot summer weather, people may experience discomfort related to heat and humidity.

In temple vegetarian cuisine, lotus leaves are often paired with ingredients such as mung beans, lotus seeds, and barley to create dishes like:

Lotus Leaf Lotus Seed Porridge

Lotus Leaf Mung Bean Soup

Lotus Leaf Tea

These light and natural preparations are traditionally enjoyed as a way to support seasonal wellness.

2. Fragrant and Appetite-Enhancing — Reducing the Feeling of Heaviness

Lotus leaves have a unique natural aroma that enhances the flavor of food. Even with less oil and salt, vegetarian dishes can remain flavorful and satisfying.

3. Supporting Digestive Wellness — A Match for a Light Eating Philosophy

Traditional wellness practices emphasize that the digestive system benefits from simple, balanced foods and may be burdened by overly rich or greasy meals. Lotus leaves are often combined with ingredients traditionally considered nourishing and gentle:

Lotus Leaf + Lotus Seeds

Delicate and mild in flavor

Suitable for porridge and nourishing dishes

Lotus Leaf + Chinese Yam

Light and refreshing

Suitable for everyday wellness meals

Lotus Leaf + Barley

A traditional pairing often used during humid seasons

These combinations reflect the temple dietary principle of “eating according to the seasons and supporting digestive balance.”

4. Lightness and Purity — Reflecting the Spirit of Vegetarian Wellness

Temple vegetarian cuisine emphasizes:

Avoiding overly strong flavors

Limiting excessive seasonings

Preserving the natural qualities of ingredients

With its gentle fragrance and elegant character, lotus leaf pairs beautifully with mushrooms, tofu, grains, and vegetables. It reduces the heaviness of a meal and creates a lighter, more balanced dining experience.

3: Buddhist Diet Culinary: Lotus Leaf Vegetarian Treasure Parcels



Ingredients:

Lotus Leaf Wrapping:

3 dried lotus leaves (or 6 small fresh lotus leaves)

250 g glutinous rice

50 g regular rice (optional, to make the texture less sticky)

1 tablespoon cooking oil

Vegetarian Filling:

6 dried shiitake mushrooms

1 king oyster mushroom (about 150 g)

10 g dried wood ear mushrooms

½ carrot

2 pieces firm tofu or dried tofu (about 100 g)

50 g edamame beans or green peas

50 g corn kernels

1 small handful glass noodles (optional)

Seasonings:

2 tablespoons light soy sauce

½ teaspoon dark soy sauce (optional, for color)

¼ teaspoon white pepper powder

¼ teaspoon five-spice powder

Salt to taste

1 teaspoon sesame oil

1 teaspoon minced ginger

Steps:

1. Prepare the Lotus Leaves

Soak dried lotus leaves in warm water for 30–60 minutes until softened.

Wash them thoroughly to remove any dirt.

Blanch the leaves in boiling water for about 1 minute to reduce bitterness and make them more flexible.

Drain and set aside.

2. Prepare the Rice

Mix the glutinous rice and regular rice together and soak for at least 4 hours.

Drain the rice and steam for about 25 minutes until about 80% cooked.

Let the steamed rice cool slightly before mixing.

3. Make the Vegetarian Filling

Soak the shiitake mushrooms and wood ear mushrooms until softened. Dice them.

Dice the king oyster mushroom, carrot, and tofu.

Soak the glass noodles until soft, then cut into shorter pieces.

Heat a pan and add a little oil:

Stir-fry the minced ginger until fragrant.

Add shiitake mushrooms and king oyster mushrooms; cook until aromatic.

Add tofu, wood ear mushrooms, carrot, corn, and edamame. Stir-fry well.

Add soy sauce, five-spice powder, white pepper, and salt.

Add the glass noodles and mix well.

Turn off the heat and add sesame oil for extra fragrance.

4. Combine the Filling

Mix the cooked vegetarian filling with the steamed rice.

Taste and adjust the seasoning.

The mixture should taste slightly stronger than normal because steaming inside the lotus leaf will mellow the flavor.

5. Wrap the Lotus Leaf Parcels

Cut lotus leaves into pieces about 20 cm wide.

Place a generous spoonful of the rice filling in the center.

Fold the edges inward to form a rectangular parcel.

Tie lightly with kitchen string if needed to keep the parcel secure.

6. Steam the Parcels

Place the parcels in a steamer once the water is boiling.

Steam over high heat for 25–30 minutes.

Turn off the heat and let them rest for 5 minutes before opening.