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Location: Double Saltree Meditation Center

Teacher: Hao Liu

Topics:

1: Dharma Talk: Śīla arises from the mind, No-Self, Non-Action, and Being Like Water

2: Buddhist Diet Health: Water Spinach

3: Buddhist Diet Culinary: Stir-Fried Water Spinach

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: Śīla arises from the mind, No-Self, Non-Action, and Being Like Water.

Buddhism has a saying: “Everything is created by the mind.” Only when we reach the later stages of life do we gradually come to understand that what truly changes our destiny is not merely the external environment, but the heart with which we face every circumstance. The same rain may make one person feel that the road has become muddy, while another sees it as a blessing that nourishes all things. The same loss may leave one person filled with resentment, while another comes to see impermanence through it. The same adversity may defeat one person, while another finds wisdom within it. The circumstances have not changed; what has changed is the mind. Therefore, the Way need not be sought somewhere far away.

The Way arises from the heart. And when the heart truly moves toward purity, it gradually moves from “self” toward “no-self,” from “forcing” toward “non-action,” from “striving” toward “non-contention,” and ultimately becomes like water—soft, clear, and able to flow with circumstances without losing its essential nature. This is a profound form of cultivation.

Suffering begins with “self”; freedom begins with “no-self.” In this life, the one word we are most easily attached to is “I.” My interests. My dignity. My opinions. My grievances. My gains and losses. My accomplishments. My relationships. When others praise me, I am happy. When others deny me, I suffer. When others hurt me, I hold a grudge. When others surpass me, I become jealous. Why? Because within the heart there is an extremely solid sense of “I.”

In many of his teachings, the Buddha guided his disciples to observe the impermanence and selflessness of the five aggregates, allowing them to see that the “self” we believe to be unshakable is, in fact, merely a collection of physical and mental phenomena arising from causes and conditions and constantly changing.

The Diamond Sutra says: “If a bodhisattva has the notions of self, person, sentient being, and lifespan, he is not a bodhisattva.” Here, “no-self” does not mean that a person does not exist, nor does it ask us to deny ourselves. Rather, it teaches us to gradually see that we should not mistake a temporary identity for an eternal self; we should not regard a momentary gain or loss as the entire meaning of life; we should not treat our own opinions as absolute truth; and we should not take other people’s judgments of us as the measure of our worth. When the “I” becomes less heavy, many things naturally become less

heavy as well. When someone says something about you, you do not have to prove yourself. When someone misunderstands you, you do not have to rush to make everyone understand you. When things do not happen according to plan, you do not have to fall into unbearable suffering. Because you begin to understand that, many times, it is not the event itself that hurts us, but the “I” within us clinging tightly to the event. Let go of a little of the “I,” and you gain a little more freedom.

There is a famous parable in Buddhist scriptures known as the “Parable of the Poisoned Arrow.” A man is struck by a poisoned arrow, yet instead of having it removed immediately, he keeps asking: Who shot it? What was his name? Where did he come from? What kind of bow did he use? What was the arrow made of? If he cannot get answers to these questions, he refuses to receive treatment.

Through this parable, the Buddha reminded his disciples that what matters most in life is to recognize suffering, face suffering, and be free from suffering, rather than becoming consumed by questions that cannot directly resolve it. This story is especially relevant to people today. Why did that person treat me this way? Why does he not understand me? Why did this happen to me? Why is fate so unfair to me? Why do other people have better lives than I do? We spend enormous amounts of time asking these questions. Yet the more we ask, the more firmly the “I” within us becomes established.

Buddhism, however, brings us back to ourselves: first, look at your own mind. Why am I so angry? Why can I not let go? Why must others approve of me? Why am I so afraid of losing? When we begin to observe our own minds, true cultivation begins. Because ultimately, Buddhism does not ask us to turn the entire world into what we want it to be. Rather, it teaches us not to be dragged around by our own afflictions.

When we speak of “non-action,” many people easily misunderstand it. Non-action does not mean laziness. It does not mean passivity. It does not mean escape, nor does it mean neglecting everything in life. Buddhist “non-action” is not exactly the same as the Daoist concept of wu wei; within the context of Buddhist practice, it is more appropriate to understand it as not being driven by greed, anger, delusion, or attachment, and not creating actions out of intense self-grasping.

What needs to be done is still done. The responsibilities that need to be carried are still carried. Those who need help are still helped. The difference is simply that there is less of the thought, “It must happen according to my wishes.” There is less of the thought, “If I give, I must receive something in return.” There is less of the thought, “Others must acknowledge me.” At this point, action itself becomes freer.

The Diamond Sutra expresses a very important idea when discussing generosity: “One should give without abiding in anything.” Do good without clinging to the thought, “I am doing good.” Help others without turning merit into a means of displaying yourself. Give without constantly calculating how much others owe you. This is a form of action grounded in “no-self.” To act without clinging, to practice without attachment. At this point, the action remains, but the “I” that tightly grasps at credit, reward, and results gradually fades.

Laozi’s Tao Te Ching says: “The highest good is like water. Water benefits all things and does not contend. It dwells in places that others disdain, and therefore it is close to the Way.” Although these words come from Daoism rather than Buddhism, they share many points of resonance with Buddhist ideas of compassion, selflessness, acceptance of conditions, and gentleness. Water possesses a very special kind of wisdom. It nourishes all things without demanding their gratitude. It flows toward low places without feeling inferior. When it encounters a mountain, it simply flows around it. When it

encounters a stone, it passes beside it. When the path changes, it changes its form. When the container changes, it takes on a different shape. Yet no matter what container it enters, it remains water.

This is what is truly admirable about water: it is gentle, yet not weak; it follows circumstances, yet does not abandon its principles; it does not contend, yet it never stops moving forward. Water never competes with a mountain over height. Nor does it compete with a stone over hardness. It simply travels quietly along its own path. Over time, even solid rock can be changed by it. Therefore, true strength does not always come from meeting force with force. Sometimes, it comes from gentleness.

To become like water does not mean losing yourself; it means no longer clinging to yourself. Many people understand “going with the flow” to mean that whatever others do is acceptable, that nothing matters, and that whatever happens in life should simply be accepted. But that is not it. True acceptance of circumstances means doing your best and then accepting the results brought about by causes and conditions. True letting go means that once you see something cannot be changed, you no longer allow your heart to consume itself over and over again. True no-self does not mean having no self; it means no longer placing “I” at the center of the world at every moment.

Why is water free? Because it does not need to prove itself. When it flows into a river, it is water. When it enters the ocean, it is still water. When it becomes a cloud, it does not cling to the idea that “I must remain water.” When it becomes rain, it does not complain that it has lost its former form. It follows circumstances, yet always maintains its essential nature. This is a profound kind of wisdom.

Human beings are the same. When we are young, we are always eager to prove ourselves. To prove that we are right. To prove that we matter. To prove that others owe us something. To prove that we are better than others. Only after experiencing more of life do we gradually understand that true strength is not making everyone acknowledge you. It is being able to remain at peace within yourself even when there is no applause. Not contending does not mean having no strength. No-self does not mean having no self. Non-action does not mean doing nothing. Rather, it means doing things without being bound by them. Loving someone without turning love into possession. Helping others without demanding anything in return. Cherishing what we have while we have it, and accepting it when it is gone.

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The Buddha’s compassion is also like water. After attaining enlightenment, the Buddha could have remained in his own peace and liberation. Yet he chose to enter the human world. He traveled from place to place, teaching different people the Dharma. He taught the wealthy. He taught the poor. He taught those of high status. He also taught those who were looked down upon by society. The Buddha did not alter his compassion according to another person’s social status. Just like water.

Water does not ask, “Who are you? Only then will I nourish you.” It simply flows across the earth. It nourishes plants and trees. It washes away dust. It creates the conditions for all things to grow. This is the most beautiful form of compassion: not being compassionate because others are worthy of it, but

being willing to show compassion because your heart has already become gentle. When a person's compassion is no longer based on whether others will repay them, they begin to approach genuine selflessness.

Let the heart be like water. Let life be like water. Let yourself, little by little, become water. Then you will discover that the highest form of freedom is not possessing the entire world, but finally no longer needing to hold on to the entire world.

2: Buddhist Diet Health: Water Spinach

Water Spinach, juicy, and crisp, water spinach is a fresh and naturally wholesome vegetable often enjoyed in traditional plant-based cuisine. Rich in water and containing dietary fiber, vitamins, and minerals, it pairs well with beans, mushrooms, and other vegetables, adding variety and plant-based nutrition to everyday meals.

Nutritional Value of Water Spinach

Refreshing and Hydrating — Naturally Low in Calories

Water spinach has a high water content and is relatively low in calories, with a light and refreshing texture. As part of a balanced meal, it can increase the proportion of vegetables on the plate and contribute to a more varied and balanced diet.

A Source of Dietary Fiber

Water spinach contains dietary fiber. When enjoyed together with beans, whole grains, and other vegetables, it can contribute to daily fiber intake and support a more diverse plant-based diet.

A Variety of Vitamins and Minerals

Water spinach provides nutrients such as vitamin A, vitamin C, and folate, as well as minerals including potassium, calcium, and iron. Different nutrients serve different roles in the body, so combining a variety of vegetables can provide a broader range of nutrients than relying on a single food.

Light Cooking — Preserving Natural Flavor

Water spinach is naturally tender and crisp and does not require heavy seasoning. Simple cooking methods such as stir-frying, blanching, steaming, or boiling can help limit added oils and strong seasonings while preserving its fresh color, texture, and natural flavor.

Vegetarian cuisine is not only about choosing certain ingredients; it also reflects the principles of purity, moderation, gratitude, and respect for food. Though water spinach may seem like a simple everyday

vegetable, it carries the fresh vitality of nature. Through simple preparation and gentle seasoning, its natural flavor can shine, reflecting the humble wisdom of plant-based cuisine: less excess, greater appreciation, and contentment with what nature provides.

3: Buddhist Diet Culinary: Stir-Fried Water Spinach



Ingredients:

400 g (about 14 oz) water spinach
3–4 slices fresh ginger, cut into thin strips
1 tbsp cooking oil
About ½ tsp salt, or to taste
A pinch of white pepper
1–2 tbsp water

Steps:

1. Prepare the water spinach

Remove any tough stems and yellow leaves. Wash thoroughly and cut into pieces about 5–6 cm (2–2½ inches) long.

2. Prepare the ginger

Slice the ginger into thin strips. For a strict Buddhist vegetarian version, the ginger can be omitted and the water spinach can be

3. stir-fried on its own.

Heat the wok

Heat a wok over high heat. Add the cooking oil and briefly stir-fry the ginger until fragrant.

4. Add the water spinach

Add the water spinach and stir-fry quickly over high heat. Because water spinach naturally contains plenty of moisture, very little additional water is needed.

5. Season lightly

Add the salt and a pinch of white pepper. Stir-fry for about 1–2 minutes. For a more tender texture, add 1–2 tablespoons of water around the edge of the wok and toss quickly.

6. Serve immediately

Turn off the heat as soon as the water spinach is just tender while still bright green and crisp. Transfer to a serving dish immediately.