

Zoom Zazen 10 April 2021

Today, Master Keizan's recommendations deal with a central question for each of us - food. We could talk about this for hours.

Master Keizan's recommendations are simple. They draw on the teachings of the Vinaya - the behavioural code of nuns and monks.

"One must eat nothing which is living, hard or spoiled - impure food which can cause fermentation in your stomach, and can create fever or illness of the body and mind. And this can make zazen practice difficult. So, don't be tempted by food which is too rich. Not only because it's bad for the health of the body and the mind, and the stability, but also because it's a sign of greed."

There are in this advice several of the *paramitas* - the virtues of the perfection of practice - which Master Keizan is drawing upon and that we often forget to practise: moderation, discernment, contentment, to be happy with that which one has received whatever it is.

Food allows us to practise the Way, and it must be in harmony with the truth of the Dharma. The words of Master Keizan are more significant than they first appear. And each meal we take gives us an opportunity to deeply re-think and to adjust our own behaviour.

In the third section of the Mealtime Sutra, we're reminded that we must think of the origin of this food, and all that it happened to benefit from it. We must feel gratitude for the miracle of Nature; for all the activity and the energy that have come together to produce this food. What we receive is not our due; but rather the result of cosmic creation. And so it's essential to be aware of this when we're eating.

We also observe our preferences and aversions. We can correct our feelings of greed, aversion, indifference, and intimately express our recognition. We read in the Lankavatara Sutra a chapter in which the Buddha talks against the eating of meat. This

could be the subject of a teisho, but not today.

The Buddha also speaks of what we should eat to be in harmony with all beings. This is what he says, speaking to a disciple, Mahamati:

"Mahamati, you must know that rice, millet, barley, wheat, lentils, ghee (clarified butter) and sugar-candy are good and pure foodstuffs. All foods of this kind are recommended by the past buddhas, and I eat them myself."

"Those who are guided by a pure faith, who have for a long time put down of goodness and who are not attached to their body, their life, their well-being, love all beings as if they were themselves. The Bodhisattva - Mahasattva considers each being as life like themselves. How could they eat flesh?"

Someone who meditates on benevolence, should not eat the flesh of beings, and should have compassion for them. Everyone decides for themselves what they put on their plate, in their bowl. But, it's important to consider when we nourish our body that we honour all beings.

Master Keizan continues, *"Take just enough food to promote and serve life. Don't be attached to its taste. If you practise zazen after eating too much then you'll feel ill. And, whether our meal is large or small, don't sit zazen straight after. wait for a little bit. Monks should learn to be moderate in their eating. Limit be content with a portion that's about two-thirds of what one can eat. And abandon the other third."*

All healthy foods should be prioritised. You should have what is essential for harmonising body and mind.

Debates and advice on food is an endless subject. In our intentions, in our food options, it's important to remember these word of the Buddha:

"The one who tastes the sweetness of the inner life, the one who lives in contemplation, such a one lives according to the Law of the Universe - free of fear and suffering."
