

partake in the happiness around her.

Alas, the well-known Zen parable about the difference between hell and heaven illustrates this very point, and not surprisingly, eating features centrally in it. A young person asks the sage what was the difference between hell and heaven, whereupon the sage opens a door to a room called Hell. Here, people sit at a huge banquet overflowing with delicious food, but they are emaciated, distressed and deeply unhappy. The problem is that they only have extremely long spoons, which make it impossible to get the food into their own mouths, so they end up hungry as they try to eat. The sage then opens the door to the room with a sign that says Heaven. We encounter the exact same scenario, except the people are joyful and happy. The difference? They use the long spoons not to feed themselves but to feed each other across the banquet table!

“Why do you eat every day?” It took some years for me

to attain this teaching, but once I did, it is hard to imagine a better, more correct answer, because it beautifully captures the eternal truth of our irrefutable interdependence, of the fact that none of us is adequately equipped to survive on their own. More important, the teaching not only points to the normative direction of our existence but also contains what makes our life worth living: if it weren't this way, how could I survive, not merely in a physical sense, but live a life of *meaning*? If life is fundamentally suffering, then what makes this life worth living, if it weren't for other sentient beings? And the great love that surrounds us? ♦

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Eating Is the Most Important.

Kong Tan, under the guidance of Gye Mun Sunim JDPS

There is a saying from the Three Kingdoms period in China: “To the king, his people are heaven. To the people, food is heaven.” In the preface of the Diamond Sutra, at mealtime, the World-Honored One (that is, the Buddha) would get dressed to seek alms together with his disciples. Once the alms-round was completed, he returned, finished eating, put the *sanghati* (kasa) and bowl back in place, washed his feet, and, without further ado, arranged the seat to sit in samadhi.

Only the Elder Subhuti saw through the dharma intention of the World-Honored One as he carried out this concerted mundane routine with his disciples. The Elder Subhuti was in awe of the silent dharma of this mundane routine. He exclaimed: “How rare you are! The World-Honored One. The Buddha supports and cares for all bodhisattvas with kindness, entrusts and beseeches all bodhisattvas with kindness.” Then he proceeded to invite the dharma on behalf of the assembly by asking two questions, which gave rise to the Diamond Sutra. The Elder Subhuti asked, “The benevolent men, benevolent women with aspiration and resolution to attain the Anuttara Samyak Sambodhi mind, how should they dwell? How to subdue their own minds?” The World-Honored One said, they “should just like this dwell, just like this subdue their own minds.”

The Just-Come One (that is, the Buddha), who came from the true way, carried himself as one of the common people. He silently taught the sangha by being a role model. Every day at mealtime, he would get dressed, walk, look for food, eat, tidy up, sit in meditation, and help all beings who had affinity with him. Every day since his complete and

perfect enlightenment, he was like this, just like this, until he entered parinirvana. He did this to benefit others. That is no-self form. The sublime prajna dharma can flow with ease even from trivial routine forms. That is no-dharma form. With no doer and nothing to be done. Food is not so important to the Buddha anymore, yet he looked for food and ate together with everyone. That is the inclusiveness of together action; that is teaching without words and speech. Support, care, entrust, and beseech all who have aspired and resolved to the great mind, and that is no non-dharma form. This is sublime existence in emptiness.

As the Buddhist saying goes: “Borrow from this illusory existence to see true emptiness.” For survival, from primitive to modern humans, all go out to look for food every day. Instead of being affected by the sixth and seventh consciousnesses, how wonderful it would be if all of us aspire and resolve to follow our role model, the World-Honored One. After work, eat; after eating, immediately return to quieten down in order to contemplatively reflect on original mind. We are grateful to the Buddha for demonstrating how to live every day in active dharma of the three practices (precepts, meditation, and wisdom). To use the tangible body of the human being to realize the foremost truth of emptiness, neither grasp nor eradicate. Use the tangible body of a human being to attain our original self, do our original job, help all beings from suffering. ♦

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