

Satipanya Porridge

Noirin Sheahan · Noirin's Essays · 2 min read

The spoon is raised, the head leans forward, mouth opens and warm, velvety porridge pours onto the tongue, eclipsing all other experience. After a while the jaws start moving and raisins are torn open and nudged around the mouth. A smile settles into my face as I relax and enjoy the first spoonful of porridge.

Savouring a raisin I am struck by the contrast between its soft juiciness and the hard sharpness of the teeth tearing into its flesh, destroying it. A TV image of an old bull being eaten by lions comes to mind. The bull moaning, the lions feasting. My sympathies were all for the bull when I watched the TV program, but now, although I feel for the vulnerability of the raisin, my tongue demands its sweetness and my teeth tear into it without mercy.

I recognise in myself both bull and lion, predator and prey. Revulsion follows, not wanting any part in this contorted human nature, and pinching, bitter sensations fill my head and chest. After a while, although I'm writhing inwardly, I am not above noticing that the fairly neutral sensations of porridge feel much, much nicer than the bitterness in my own flesh. There is some humiliation that the uninteresting taste of porridge (by now it's even cold) calls attention more than my anguish at the dilemma of suffering! In dismay I try to resist the comfort of cold porridge, but luckily I don't seem to be in charge of this show! After another few spoons there is only gratitude for the kindness of *anicca* (the transience of all experience) which brings all suffering to an end. I notice again the sweetness of raisins and there is a sad appreciation of their ready giving way to the reality of sharp teeth and grinding jaws. I dedicate the merit of breakfast to the welfare of the moaning bull and of all suffering beings.

Now another bowl of porridge is almost empty, and I notice I have become disinterested in the business of eating. My mind recedes from the situation. I also notice however that the porridge feels just as velvety as at the first spoonful, the raisins taste just as sweet, the jaw and tongue movements are as vivid as ever. It's only my attachment to the activity which is dying away. This gives me a foretaste of my own death, and the knowledge that everything except myself will survive this unscathed. I shiver with fear and excitement at my growing acquaintance with a consciousness which does not mourn my passing. But this notion seems too much for me to handle, and instead a bitter-sweet acknowledgement of my share in the cycle of life and death settles into my heart.

After breakfast, washing the bowl and spoon, the mood changes to appreciation for warm water, the colours of suds and hands and sleeves and bowl and sink, the gentle movements

of lifting and rubbing. I am relieved at the mood change, but sense something missing, something being held back, dammed up. For a moment I'm puzzled but then the dam busts and goodwill quietly floods the scene, loving each moment of the immensely rich interaction process we call washing the dishes. Another smile settles on my face and I am thankful again for this meditation practice which has no favourites, finding each experience equally worthy of full attention.

And so the day evolves from moment to moment, each self-made drama succumbing to the simple abundance of the present moment. Just this is enough I hear myself say, feeling the softness of the dish-cloth, the weight of the bowl, a sigh of contentment. Just this is enough.

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