

# Eating Meditation

Bhante Bodhidhamma · Retreat Talks · 7 min read

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So now it's time to eat again. And just to spend a bit more time reflecting on this process. So remember that we have to find a way of being with pleasure and the joys of life in a way that it doesn't have this aftermath, this comeback. Frustration when you can't get it, grief when you lose it, and take out insurance just in case you do. All that is underneath. While we're enjoying stuff, it's not a problem. Nothing like it. So, food or eating, which we have to do every day, is just the opportunity to remind ourselves about how to be with pleasure in a non-attached, non-indulgent way.

And the beginning is to get the right attitude. So if there's an attitude in the mind which is going to really enjoy this food, then there's going to be a danger that it's indulging it. And what we mean by that is that we're seeking happiness in food. Real happiness, lasting happiness. It's momentary, but it doesn't deliver the ultimate that we're looking for. So, you have to put the right intention into the mind, which is to nourish the body. Food is just medicine for the body. And I do a chanting, it's more formal this lunchtime, I receive the food and then I do a chant which basically says that I'm not eating food in order to escape my problems or to add to them or to get the pleasure of it, I'm just eating the food for the purpose of keeping the body healthy so that I can live the spiritual life.

So that's important to actually when you take your food and you sit in front of it you remind yourself. So there's your attitude and this leaves you free to investigate the process around the whole action of eating.

So as you make your intention to eat, you see, and you pick up your fork or whatever you see. Really begin right at the beginning by contacting the body. So how does the metal feel? Begin right there at the sense of touch. And then as you scoop it and put it into your mouth, just that first delightful explosion on the tongue. Just stay there right with it. Keep the attention right on the tongue. And if you use a word like tasting rather than curry or whatever, then it keeps you attentive to the process that's happening. And we're just trying to find out what taste is before it fits into some conceptual pattern.

That's another problem we have, that we keep looking at things from history. We keep looking at things from a past experience. So we need to get back to a very original mind, which is a direct experience of things. And it's not that difficult to develop. It's just a case of keeping the attention very close to the sense base. So while you're tasting, tasting, tasting, your attention is right there on what's happening at the tongue, what it's doing, how you're chewing. You're just there with the mechanics of it.

And you're aware of the pleasure. That's the point. You're aware of the pleasure. The pleasure is pleasurable, right? You don't have to say to yourself, this is pleasurable taste, but it's most unpleasurable. It's pleasurable taste. It's a total openness to it, a receiving of what that sense base is giving you.

And it may be that after some time, after you've swallowed the first, you can just stop for a moment and just recognize what's happened within the heart, the emotional base. Hopefully, it is now in a state of delight. And to feel that, to get into the feel of it so that you know, well, this is also a form of energy, a form of energy, but it's not the same as the gross physical energy. And it's making that distinction, deconstructing our experience, which begins to undermine this idea of who I am. So by disconnecting, as it were, the body with its sense space, with its sensations, and the heart with its more subtle emotional feelings, we're beginning to deconstruct the event.

Then as you, before the next bite or sometime, just to hold on for a minute and just to feel that intention to eat. Make it very obvious to yourself. So that intention is coming from a natural base, it's just appetite, the body wanting some nourishment. But there's also, remember, behind it, this seeking for desire, this seeking for happiness. Just stay with it, feel it. Is that an emotion? What is it? What is that force that drives us to eat? What is it? And it's not a case of an intellectual answer. It's a case of a direct experience of it.

Normally speaking, all this is just one thing, isn't it? You go into a restaurant and eat a pizza. That's it. It's like it's one experience. But here we're trying to deconstruct the event. It's the same with the cinema. You go in the cinema or watching a DVD, it's one experience. You hear and you're seeing and you're empathizing. You're doing all sorts of things all in that one moment. But actually there's a whole load of processes going on. The hearing isn't the seeing and the seeing isn't the empathizing. So it's really just trying to investigate this.

And remember our purpose is to get to the end of suffering, or to put it more positively, is to be happy, right? We're trying to get to a decent happiness, that's what we're trying to get to. So this process isn't just a nice little exercise we're doing, we're actually trying to get to a point where we're happy, heaven's sake.

So, we've made these three distinctions now, there's the body, there's the heart with its, of course we've got the mind, the mind's, we're using the mind to keep the attention steady, so it's down to one word, so it's not thinking about anything. See, that's our greatest hindrance, to think about something. And then we've got this process of the will, right? The will, intention.

And hopefully there'll come a part of the meal where you get this feedback from the body saying enough. And it's hanging on there with that and just feeling the override and just knowing that that's the old greed. Now, normally speaking what we would do is just keep eating till even the greed was satisfied. That's when the body signals back that it's getting sick. And at that point you might say it's a point of gratification. So we feel gratified, and we have a little rest period, and then the old desire rises again.

However, if we stay with the desire and not feed it, we put our attention just on the desire, that wanting, wanting, and just wait for that to fade out, we get to something which feels like gratification, but it's better called contentment, because this is the mind without desire. Now to know the distinction between being gratified and being contented is crucial. Because one leads you towards liberation and the other one towards hell. So it's worth making that distinction.

Now it may be that you've taken a little too much food and you've got this food left and your body's telling you actually you've had enough. So now you've got a choice. You can either stuff it into your body knowing it's not going to do the body any good or throw it away and feel guilty. Because all these people, especially these days, are having a shortage of food in some areas. So now, what I would suggest you do is that you throw it away and feel guilty. And the reason for that is that as you contact your guilt and really feel it, that then becomes your guardian. Because the next time you approach food, you'll say to yourself, now I don't want to feel that guilt again. That's horrible. So you take a little less and there's always a chance of getting some more food afterwards. Yeah? So, even though that's not PC, that's what I would suggest you do. And feel the guilt.

Then, when it comes to the end of the meal, just stop for a minute and just recollect. What was it you've experienced? This recollection is important because it makes you revisit those places. And by doing that, it becomes a habit in the mind, a moment of reflection. It's one of the things the Buddha constantly goes on about. *Yoniso manasikāra*, it means right attention, right reflection, to think about things properly.

Now, after the meal, there's a little break there, and what is good to practice there is this quiet abiding. So there's these three factors that lead to enlightenment. The calmness, calmness of the body, calmness of the heart. Even if you feel agitated or the heart's very troubled or whatever, you can still, as it were, take it for a walk. Just relax around it. Steadiness of attention that's always there so you have to keep the noting going or else the mind will just wander and this attitude of just receiving just receiving not doing anything about anything and just dropping for a while the inquiry, the inquiry as an actual intention.

You'd be surprised that in those receptive moments insights arise naturally, because although we make a distinction between awareness and this intuitive intelligence, they're two sides of the same coin. One is passive, receiving, and one is active in insight. So it's the same, when something goes wrong, I don't know, you can't find something or something goes wrong with your car or something, you open the bonnet. First you look. Look, that's the receiving. And then you see, the engine's gone. It's like there's always that listening and then understanding, hearing and then listening, understanding. So there's always this flick from the passive to the active.

So after lunch, if you want to take a walk around the paddock or whatever, then just practice that. You can practice walking up and down in meditation, but with the attitude of just relaxing into the present moment, wide awake. And then, by all means, feel free to take a rest.

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