

## How to Use Cooking in the Path

The initial reason why people come to a Dharma center is not for the food but for the teachings and meditations; they are a little bored with the lives they have and are looking for something new. However the conditions at the center, and especially the food, are a very important support for the teachings and meditations. Sometimes in the past, for example, when I would teach on impermanence, the hells and the eight worldly dharmas people would get scared and leave; but if the food was good they would stay. That's one way to keep them!

So I've been thinking for many days to come to the kitchen and explain a short meditation to the cooks. There is a short morning motivation I have put together with a direct meditation on the graduated path to the peerless happiness of full enlightenment followed by some verses explaining how precious and kind sentient beings are. Most of the time in English we use the expression "fully enlightened" but in Tibetan it is "sang gye;" 'sang' means that all the obscurations, gross and subtle have been purified, and 'gye' that all the realizations have been fully developed and there is nothing more to achieve. "Fully enlightened" has a different meaning, it's better to say "fully omniscient mind."

Every single sentient being is most precious, dear and wishfulfilling, fulfilling all your wishes for the happiness of future lives, liberation and enlightenment. Every hell being, hungry ghost, animal, insect, ant, mosquito, bird, goat, human being, sura and asura does this. That is because all our beginningless past lives' happiness, present happiness and future happiness comes from good karma and that good karma comes from your mind, from mental intention. Buddha's enlightened activity is of two types; one comes from Buddha's holy mind and one from your mind. Buddhas come from bodhisattvas, bodhisattvas come from bodhicitta and bodhicitta comes from great compassion. Great compassion comes from every single obscured suffering sentient being. There is no way to generate great compassion without depending on every single suffering sentient being. Therefore there is no bodhicitta, no bodhisattva, no Buddha and no way to create good karma, the cause of happiness, without them. In other words, every single happiness and comfort comes from sentient beings, even a cool breeze or a drink of water when you are thirsty. Without sentient beings there is no way to experience happiness in this life, future lives, liberation or enlightenment. All our happiness comes from every single sentient being.

For example, all my happiness comes from every one of you and from all the rest of the sentient beings; every hell being, hungry ghost, animal, human, sura and asura. All my past, present and future happiness comes from everyone because Buddha, Dharma and Sangha in whom I take refuge and with whom I purify every single negative karma and achieve the peerless happiness of full enlightenment come from everyone. That is why sentient beings are most kind, dear, precious and wishfulfilling.

Sentient beings are more precious than a wishfulfilling jewel because you can't practice morality, purify negative karma and achieve a higher rebirth with a wishfulfilling jewel. Nor can you practice the three higher trainings and achieve the ultimate happiness of liberation or generate great compassion and achieve enlightenment with a wishgranting jewel, but you can with sentient beings. If you pray to a wishgranting jewel you can get a house, car, swimming pool and so on, but not higher rebirths, liberation and enlightenment. That's why sentient beings are most unbelievably precious. Which one is

more precious—skies of wishgranting jewels or sentient beings? Sentient beings are more precious!

Therefore dedicating your life to others and helping them is the best, most exciting thing you can do. Serving them in any way you can and giving them whatever help you can give is what brings the most happiness. For example, helping an old man carrying a very heavy load or giving your seat to somebody in a bus, train or car. Doing whatever it is that sentient beings need, whether big or small, is the most satisfying, exciting thing you can do.

That's why making delicious food and offering it to the people who come here is a really great opportunity. Wow, wow, wow, wow. It is a way of offering comfort and happiness to sentient beings who are most wishfulfilling. That's what brings the most happiness and excitement. It's the real Dharma. Dharma is something that protects your life, protects you from suffering and guides you to happiness. Therefore there is a great deal to rejoice in that you have this very precious opportunity to offer food to sentient beings who are most precious, dear, kind and wishfulfilling.

### **Practicing Bodhicitta Mindfulness In The Kitchen**

Here are some ways to think while you are preparing and cooking the food:

When you are **cutting anything**, for example onions, think:

I am cutting the root of all sentient beings' suffering which comes from ignorance and the self-cherishing thought, with the knife of the wisdom realizing emptiness (*shunyata*) and bodhicitta.

When you are **washing pots** and so on think:

I am washing away all the obscurations and negative karmas from all sentient beings minds.

You can think that you are washing away your own obscurations and negative karmas but most important is to think you are washing away those of all sentient beings. And you can think the water is nectar coming from Vajrasattva, the Guru, His Holiness the Dalai Lama, or Guru Shakyamuni Buddha. There is always a lot of washing up to do in the kitchen and you can use the opportunity to purify all sentient beings' obscurations. It's very good if you can sincerely think this way because all the washing up becomes Dharma practice purifying your negative karma and defilements and collecting merits. In India even the beggars keep their pots very clean!

When you are **sweeping the floor** think that the broom is the whole path to enlightenment, especially wisdom and bodhicitta, and that the dust is all sentient beings' obscurations:

I am sweeping away the dust of all sentient beings' obscurations with the broom of the path to enlightenment and especially wisdom and bodhicitta.

If you sincerely think this while you are cleaning it becomes real Dharma practice that benefits all sentient beings. In the lam rim it says to think that you are abandoning the dust of the three poisonous minds—anger, attachment and ignorance—which are the

gross obscurations and also the stains of the three poisonous minds, the subtle obscurations.

When you are **kneading dough** so that it can be made into any shape think:

I am taming all sentient beings' minds by softening them with my two hands of the wisdom realizing emptiness and bodhicitta.

When you are making momos or shapalep—rolling out pastry and filling it with cheese, potato and vegetables—think:

I am filling all sentient beings' minds with the realizations of the path from Guru devotion up to enlightenment so that they can actualize all the qualities of a Buddha.

When you are cooking soup or other food you can think that the fire is the Six Yogas' *tummo* fire that causes the *kundalini* to melt. Do the same meditation that is used to bless the inner offering in Highest Yoga Tantra. Or you can think that the fire is the wisdom realizing emptiness and the uncooked food is the unsubdued mind. By cooking the food all the gross and even the subtle delusions are purified and all the realizations of Buddha are achieved.

These are some ways of thinking as you are working in the kitchen. You can think in a similar way with other kitchen activities.

*Colophon: Lama Zopa Rinpoche gave this advice at Tushita Meditation Centre, Dharamsala, India. Typed and edited by Ven Sarah Thresher at Tushita, Dharamsala, 17 June 2013. Lightly edited by Claire Isitt, FPMT International Office, Oct 2013.*