

Eating as a Meditation: Working Through Compulsion and Elevating Satisfaction
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Each time you take a bite, taste sensations spread over the palate, tongue, cheeks and throat and smell spreads into your nose. If the tastes are pleasant, it will cause a rippling of pleasant sensation throughout your body. An analogy may be helpful. When a pebble is tossed into a pond, it causes a splash where it lands and from that splash ripples spread through the whole pond. The morsel of food is like the pebble; your body is like the pond. The explosion of tastes in your mouth is the splash and the associated reaction of your whole body is the rippling. This global reaction may be subtle but remember, when it comes to working with feeling, "subtle is significant." If you can detect the ripples and let them come and go without clenching you will greatly deepen your sense of satisfaction.

Eating meditation is an example of spiritual purification through experiencing pleasure with mindfulness and equanimity. Through it your baseline of fulfillment in daily life can be permanently elevated. Since it involves a tangible pleasant object of concentration, it makes a good compliment to sitting meditation where unpleasant sensations are sometimes present.

Of course, sometimes unpleasant sensations may arise during eating. For example, if you eat something that you dislike, waves of tension, aversion and cringing may spread through the body. Although it is not necessary to seek such an unpleasant experience, it is helpful to remember that by bringing mindfulness and equanimity to those sensations, deep psychological blockages such as separation, fear and alienation are being broken up.

Eating slowly and mindfully may also cause one to become impatient and driven to gobble. If this should happen be happy! It represents a significant opportunity to work through the drivenness and achieve more ease in daily life.

If during the eating process you feel impatient and driven, try to detect this in terms of tangible "driver sensations" throughout your body. What is true of the ripples of pleasant sensation that bring satisfaction is also true of the tensions and pressures that produce drivenness: they may be subtle and cover much or all of your body.

Observe them with precision and acceptance. In this way drivenness, not only around eating, but in all aspects of your life, will get worked through. Life becomes lighter and easier. Your actions become dynamic and zestful, arising from a fundamental inner peace, as opposed to being driven by subliminal suffering.

When approaching eating as a form of meditation it is useful to pay attention to your posture. Try to keep your spine straight while at the same time allowing the whole body to "settle in." Rather than "meditating while eating", try to get the sense that you are in a deep meditation sit during which you just happen to be eating.

Eating slowly will help you focus and also perhaps bring up driver sensations. In order to deepen your state, you may want to occasionally pause, put down your utensils and close your eyes for a period of time. After you have completed your meal, it is instructive to sit for a while and savor the delicate vibrations of satisfaction that suffuse your body after pleasant experiences. In daily life we seldom have an opportunity to contact this significant phenomenon.

You may find that a rhythm develops as you eat. You are aware of the tactile sensations in your hand and arm as you reach for the food, then the flavor qualities and texture sensations in different parts of your mouth and the smells going up to your nose, then your whole body reacting to the tastes and smells and finally the gradual subsiding of taste, smell and body reaction. Then the cycle begins again. Drivenness and impatience may arise just before a bite, or as the flavor and pleasure subsides after a bite, or throughout the whole process. Try to "love your impatience to death" by patiently observing it.

Two sources of distraction during eating meditation are thinking and preoccupation with what's happening around you. Remember: your defined object of meditation is taste, smell and body sensations. As soon as you feel the tug outward into the sights and sounds around you, gently return to taste, smell and body sensations. As soon as you feel the tug inward to planning, judging, fantasizing and memory...lovingly return to taste, smell and body sensations.

If you are willing to put in some effort, you can enter a kind of slow motion - an "eternal present" - while eating. The simplest fare then becomes a celestial samadhi (spiritual experience)!