

BEFORE BREAKFAST DAY TWO

FOOD REFLECTION AND EATING INSTRUCTION

Within the Buddhist training of Mental Development and Meditation practice, Food Reflection is another technique which we can use to help develop the mind in beneficial mental qualities. It is taught that after we have our food in front of us and before eating, it is beneficial to consider certain factors that concern our food and our relationship to our food.

There are traditional methods that are found within the Buddhist scriptures and we have a variation of these which I will explain to you. As I mention the aspects of this reflection, please look at your food and try to consider and reflect upon what I will be talking about.

This reflection has three main parts. The first part is to consider to ourselves, "Why do we eat?" The basic reason why all of us eat is to keep our body alive and healthy. To alleviate dis-ease and to enable us to continue on with our inner development.

Probably most of the food that we eat tastes pleasant. Some of the food will be unpleasant. But whether the food is pleasant or unpleasant, the main basic reason for eating remains the same: to keep our body alive and healthy. If we can keep this reality in mind, then the unpleasant foods will not bother us as much as they used to. Pleasant foods are not always a problem, but for those of you who do have a problem in getting carried away with wanting pleasant foods, then this reflection can also help. To see our food as basically to keep our body alive and healthy, trying not to have unbeneficial reactions which can disturb our Peace of Mind.

The second part of our reflection is to reflect upon just how fortunate we are to have so much food at a time when many, many people around the world are starving. This, too, will help to balance any excessive overconcern as to whether, in our opinion, the food tastes pleasant or unpleasant. This is a type of reflection that many of us were told by our parents when we were children when we did not want to eat our food. As children, perhaps we could not understand what our parents were trying to tell us. But now we are adults, and we all have a deeper understanding about the rest of the world and the millions of people who are starving to death. Just to have clean, fresh, drinking water, and as much as you want. Just that in itself indicates how fortunate you are.

We can use this reflection to help us to be more peaceful, more content with whatever food we have, whether pleasant or unpleasant, knowing how very fortunate we are and that there are many in the world with far less than we have.

The third part of our reflection is to consider the difficulties in getting our food to us. Even whether or not we are a vegetarian, there are numerous beings that are dying so that we may eat. When the fields are plowed for planting rice or vegetables, many, many animals and insects are killed. The growing and producing of nearly all foods causes the deaths of other beings.

As well, to reflect upon the hardships of the farmers, transport people, store owners, and all of the people who have helped get this food to us, all the way to the people who are cooking and preparing the food for us. In this way we can see how interrelated we are with the rest of the world. We like to recommend here, in particular, some extra special reflection toward those preparing our food. For each retreat that we have had here at this Wat, special foods have been prepared for us and we can be very thankful for this kindness.

After you have done a food reflection while looking at your food, try to use mindfulness while you are eating. Try to be right there with the actual process of eating. Often when we eat our food, when it is pleasant, we may taste the first mouthful and actually know that it is pleasant. But then, many times, our mind starts to think "about" the food, and "off" it goes. And we can be eating, and we can be eating, and we may never taste any of the rest of our food. So even though the food is pleasant,

we may not even be aware of the pleasantness. Trying to use mindfulness while you are eating will help you to be more present with the actual experience that is happening at that moment.

Try to observe the process of your body movements. The hand grabbing the spoon, dipping into the food, raising the spoon to your mouth, opening the mouth, placing of the food, closing the mouth, pulling the spoon out, chewing the food, tasting the flavors, swallowing the food. If you wish you can possibly aid your concentration and awareness with mental noting, such as; grabbing, dipping, raising, opening, placing, closing, pulling, chewing, tasting, swallowing. Try to be right there with the actual process of eating. If the food tastes pleasant, O.K., just try to realize that it tastes pleasant. If it tastes unpleasant, O.K., just try to realize that it tastes unpleasant. Try not to have unbeneficial reactions toward your food no matter how it tastes. Try to be mindful, try to be aware. Try to see if you can let go of thoughts "about" the food, as well let go of future thoughts, past thoughts, worries, fears and such. Try to find a peace and a balance which can exist just in the simple action of eating your food.

So please try to reflect about your food and your relationship towards your food each time before you eat. The reflections that I have just mentioned include considering, "Why do we eat?"; basically to keep our body alive and healthy. As well, how fortunate we are to have so much food when others in the world have so little. And thirdly, considering the difficulties in getting our food to us.