



Water Wheel

Being one with all Buddhas, I turn the water wheel of compassion.

— Gate of Sweet Nectar

Have You Eaten?

by Katherine Senshin Griffith



Tanka asked a monk, "Where have you come from?"

The monk replied, "From the foot of the mountain."

Tanka said, "Have you eaten yet?"

The monk said, "I have."

Tanka said, "Was the person who brought the rice, gave it to you, and had you eat it, open-eyed?"

The monk could make no reply.

Later, Chokei asked Hofuku, "To give food to others is surely worthy. How could he fail to be open-eyed?"

Hofuku said, "Both giver and receiver are blind."

Chokei said, "If they used all their potential, would they still be blind?"

Hofuku said, "Can you call me blind?"

— Blue Cliff Record, Case 76

In Zen Practice, many meals are offered. Not just the food we eat together but the Supreme Meal of the Awakened Mind.

The above Zen dialogue reflects both aspects of the one reality. Tanka is asking the newcomer, "Have you had your dinner, or do you need us to provide you with some nourishment?" He is also asking, "Have you had your spiritual food? Have you awakened?" Was the monk saying he had eaten or that he was awake? Either way, he was stumped when asked, "Was the person who brought the rice, gave it to you, and had you eat it, open-eyed?"

This issue of the Water Wheel is a feast devoted to exploring the tenzo sphere, the practice of preparing meals for the Sangha. Tenzo is the title of the head chef at a Zen monastery and means "seat of ceremony," in Japanese. Similar to our term "master of ceremonies," the tenzo office has been held by awakened or senior practitioners who oversee with reverence the Sangha's meals, with the intention of rousing the Bodhi-Mind. At ZCLA, the tenzo position is held by various members who step up to serve.

Besides the role of head cook, we are all called to assist in cooking, shopping, and clean-up.

In a remote monastery setting, monks would be trained to give a wholehearted "yes," to whatever assignment they were given, including all kitchen and clean-up duties. In our contemporary urban lay practice, it's easy to fall into picking and choosing. True, we have to meet the demands of our householder lives, but how do we make seamless the boundaries of our practice? How do we help meet Zen Center needs, given the varied conditions of our individual lives, without falling into "not here, not now, not me." How can we raise the Bodhi-Mind wherever we are and with whatever we are doing? As with all our activities, it's crucial to know with what mind we prepare, serve, and receive our meals. No job is too menial. Before he became the Sixth Zen Ancestor, Hui-Neng pounded rice.

This is so much more than just being mindful in the kitchen.

A necessity for life, the realm of food is already rich and extensive. Eating is one of life's greatest pleasures. We humans have invented myriad delicious ways of preparing our sustenance, making it sometimes irresistible. We eat not just to survive but to celebrate being alive. Communal meals are a form of deep connection with each other, often central to marking major milestones. Since ancient times, feasts have been held to acknowledge the bounty of the harvest. In concentration camps, sharing a meager morsel was a way of retaining your humanity. Hunger

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HAVE YOU EATEN? (Continued from page 1)



Wrapped oryoki bowls set out for sesshin.

strikes have been undertaken to fight for key human rights. In Zen, we eat to serve all beings.

This year for sesshins, we have returned to our oryoki meals, which had been curtailed due to the pandemic. In this three-bowl ritual practice, we take just enough and stay in sync with everyone else by not lingering in our eating. We unify our minds and close the gap between giver, receiver, and gift.

Later, Chokei asked Hofuku, "To give food to others is surely worthy. How could he fail to be open-eyed?" Hofuku said, "Both giver and receiver are blind."

What is this blindness? According to Yatsutani Roshi, there are five kinds of Zen blindness. 1) The blindness of the ordinary unenlightened one who has no eye at all for the Dharma. 2) "Obstruction blindness" which includes all deluded thoughts, philosophies and distinctions which prevent us from seeing things as they really are. 3) The blindness of the sincere practitioner who is still missing something. 4) "Authentic blindness" where we encounter the essential world and can see nothing because there is nothing to see. 5) "True blindness" where even the eye of satori is blind and we become completely ordinary. This is "the eye of the Buddhas of the Three Worlds."

With what eye do you greet all the elements of your life? How are you blind? Have you eaten? If you used all your potential, would you still be blind? Does Buddha recognize Buddha? Or are you still hungry and unsatisfied?

Most Sundays, in the Gate of Sweet Nectar service, we invite all Hungry Spirits throughout space and time, filling the smallest particle to the largest space, to join us for the Supreme Meal. We too have hungry ghosts inside us, where nothing satisfies, and thirsts can't be quenched. We also bring food for the local food bank and place it on the altar. In this ritual feeding, we acknowledge both the physical and the spiritual aspects of life. By raising the Bodhi

Mind, we realize we are already completely fed, completely Buddha, just as we are. Open-eyed, we see both giver and receiver are blind, because there is nothing to see.

I am very grateful to all who have prepared and served me wonderful meals throughout my life, especially all who have served as tenzos. I am not a good cook by any means, but I have appreciated and grown when I have been asked to contribute to Sangha meals. I'm also grateful for all the Dharma teachings I have digested. This feeling of gratitude drives me to give my all to this precious life I've been given and serve in the best way I can. I want to be totally used up when I die. I've often declared that I want my



Dharma Holder Jitsujo feeding the Hungry Ghosts.

corpse to be left out for the buzzards to eat, but I'm not sure I can get Sensei Myoho to go along with that wish.

The instruction to this Case, reads:

It is as fine as rice powder, it is as cold as ice and frost. It completely fills the universe, leaving bright and transcending dark. If you look at it when it is very low, there is something extra. If you level it when it is very high, it is not enough. Holding fast and letting go... all are within his reach. Is there, however, a place to completely reveal the body or not?

The one body is revealed right here, right now. If you can, stretch yourself and offer to help cook and clean-up for a Sangha meal. Offer to take on a service position, as we serve the Supreme Meal. Let's all close the gap, uniting with our Bodhi-Mind, finer than the finest rice powder, that fills every particle of this Boundless Universe.

May all creations throughout space and time, receive our offerings and be thoroughly satisfied.

Have you eaten?

Sensei Senshin is the ZCLA Head Teacher.

Inspired by Dogen Zenji's *Instruction for the Tenzo*

by Jonathan Kaigen Levy



Let us reflect on the efforts that brought us this food and consider how it comes to us. Reflect on our virtue and practice, and whether we are worthy of this offering. Regard greed as the obstacle to freedom of mind. Regard this meal as medicine to sustain our life. For the sake of enlightenment, we now receive this food ...

Thus begins the meal gatha, an inspiration to us all to take time to reflect on the many efforts that have gone into making our life possible. It's also the jumping off point for a story of how I became a tenzo, a zen temple cook.

In 2009, I got a call from my doctor asking me and my wife to meet with him in his office. What happened next changed the course of my life. A recent scan revealed a very aggressive form of prostate cancer that had already spread; and that with medication, I might possibly live for a few more years. The news struck like a bolt; we were dazed.

Fifteen years later, he obviously got it wrong. But at the time, I didn't know what to do, or where to turn, I just knew I needed help. And help came quickly. Friends told me about a group of fellow cancer patients who used guided meditation to relax and gain equilibrium in facing their cancers. Sitting with them was a blessing.

Earlier in my life, I had read a few books on Zen and sat zazen while training in karate. So, I was intrigued when a group member just out of the blue suggested that I go see Roshi Egyoku at the Zen Center of Los Angeles. In hindsight, I realize a dharma gate opened, and life took a turn. The following week I entered through the gate of Buddha Essence Temple and sensed that I had arrived home.

During my first meeting with Roshi, she caught me by surprise with what turned out to be my first koan: "You probably don't even know who you are." That single phrase has guided me throughout my years of practice, encouraging me to never let up questioning the very core of my being.

I sat zazen, attended services, participated in numerous sesshin, and began thinking about how to deepen my practice through service to the Sangha. Since I had always enjoyed cooking, why not cook? I started preparing and serving Sunday lunches at the Zen Center, and that was how my training as a tenzo began.

And, once I discovered Dogen Zenji's *Tenzo kyokun*; *Instructions for the Tenzo*, it became my bible, opening my eyes to the spiritual aspect of training as a tenzo, and guiding me through my years of service.

Tenzo kyokun actually derives from *The Chanyuan Qinggui*, *Rules of Purity in the Chan Monastery*, compiled in 1103, and states:

Put your awakened mind to work, that will enable everyone to practice with their bodies and minds with the least hindrance.

Master Dogen added: *Although the work is just that of preparing meals, it is in spirit different from the work of an ordinary cook or kitchen helper. The tenzo prepares meals for the Three Treasures.*

The difference is that tenzo practice, according to Master Dogen, demands the utmost attention to detail, and requires a mind that is in tune with practice:

Get the rice, vegetables, and other ingredients; he must handle them as carefully as if they were his own eyes. The tenzo should handle all food he receives with respect, as if it were to be used in a meal for the emperor. Do not be absent-minded in your activities, cultivate a spirit which strives to increase the source of goodness upon the mountain of goodness. Those who have come before us have said, "The Way-Seeking Mind of a tenzo is actualized by rolling up your sleeves."

I took Dogen Zenji's words to heart and threw myself into tenzo practice like my life depended on it. I cooked for every sesshin, planning the menus, doing the shopping, and as time passed, I discovered that I really enjoyed preparing oryoki style meals. The ritual, the chanting, the meticulous attention to detail, all combined into what was a profound centering experience.

Once the meal was ready to serve, we did nine bows during our kitchen service, then rang the Umpan, or "cloud plate", signaling that it was time to come and eat. The tenzo serves delicious vegetarian meals, so that participants will have all the nutrition and energy they need to keep going, especially while sitting through long sesshins.

The tenzo works closely with an assistant, and I have worked with what I consider some of the best. Starting with Taikan, who easily surpassed being "just an assistant" and became a real tenzo partner, I also worked with Kaizen, Enduring-Vow, and many others to prepare meals. I am so grateful to them all. It was a totally joyful collaboration.

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INSPIRED BY DOGEN *(Continued from page 3)*

As tenzo, you must keep a steady hand, and an uncluttered concentration. Even though you try your hardest to make sure all the details are in place, you must always expect the unexpected at the most inconvenient times.

Dogen Zenji reminds us: *When you have finished washing the rice, put it into the cooking pot. Take special care, lest a mouse accidentally falls into it. Under no circumstances allow anyone who happens to be drifting through the kitchen to poke his fingers around or look into the pot.*

We never had a mouse, but occasionally someone would try to peak in the pot. I remember the time we fell a little behind schedule. We were still cooking the food when we happened to glance up to see that the sesshin participants had finished zazen and were already starting to enter the dining hall for lunch. Oy... you can't imagine the panic!

Maybe they heard our commotion, and maybe they didn't, but once we recovered our composure, and calmly walked in with the meal, no one batted an eye; they just ate lunch with gusto.

In the *Tenzo kyokun*, Master Dogen reminds us of what he calls "the three minds of the tenzo," joyful mind, parental mind, and magnanimous mind:

How fortunate we are to have been born as human beings given the opportunity to prepare meals for the Three Treasures. Our attitude should truly be one of joy and gratefulness. To view all things with this attitude is called Kishin (Joyful Mind).

In the same way that a parent cares for an only child, keep the Three Treasures in your mind. A parent, irrespective of poverty or difficult circumstances, loves and raises a child with care. In this same manner, when you handle water, rice, or anything else, you must have the affectionate and caring concern of a parent raising a child. This is the mind of Rōshin (Parental Mind).

Daishin (Magnanimous Mind) is like a mountain; stable and impartial. Exemplifying the ocean, it is tolerant and views everything from the broadest perspective. The many rivers which flow into the ocean become the one taste of the ocean; when they flow into the pure ocean of the dharma there are no such distinctions as delicacies or plain food, there is just one taste, and it is the Buddha dharma. In cultivating the germ of aspiration to live out the Way, as well as in practicing the Dharma, delicious and ordinary tastes are the same and not two. There is an old saying, "The mouth of a monk is like an oven." Remember this well.

Our meal gatha ends: *Thus, we eat this food with everyone. We eat to stop all evil, to practice good, to liberate all beings, and to accomplish the Buddha Way.*

My story ends here, but I would like to encourage you all to take up the practice of tenzo. Zazen doesn't just take

place in the zendo. It carries on in the kitchen, the toilet, and throughout the entire universe, with no separation anywhere.

Please remember the words of Master Hyakujō: "A day without work, is a day without food." So, don the apron, sharpen a knife, and wash the rice; get to work serving the Three Treasures. Work hard as a tenzo, just like Dongshan and Guishan did; then you too will realize how to cook your life.

Please try my favorite fall soup recipe!

Butternut Squash and Cashew Soup

Warm water for desired final quantity.

Butternut squash, peeled and chopped.

Cashews soaked in water for 2 hours.

Miso paste: Chopped green onion - Minced garlic clove

- Lemon juice - Nutmeg - Pepper - Minced Parsley.

Blend soaked cashews with 1/4 cup water until smooth.

Add warm water and squash. Heat and blend.

Add the rest. Sprinkle with herbs.

Enjoy!

Sensei Kaigen served on the ZCLA Tenzo Circle for many years.

Corner of Disorder

Eating Practice



Middle Way:
Hara Hachi Bu -
stop when 80% full

Big Middle Way: Hara
Paunchy Boo Boo
- eat 80% more
after being full



*by Sunshine
(aka Senshin)*

Reflecting on Tenzoing and Being Tenzoed

by Betty Jiei Cole



The first time I walked into the Zen Center kitchen I was 30 years old, fresh from an exciting introductory summer with Aitken Roshi in Hawaii. I presented myself to the woman heading the kitchen full of zeal, ready to let her know that I would be ready for anything. I asked, “What do you need me to do?” Without the slightest clue that there was anything extraordinary about

her request, she said, “we need 150 eggs separated.” I felt like I’d stepped into a world of fairy tales, like Rumpelstiltskin—the demand for the maiden to accomplish the impossible task of spinning a room of straw into gold! Nonetheless, I set to the task in quiet and learned what could be done without commotion or stress. Just doing and being what was needed. That was my first experience with Tenzo Jitsujo (an earlier Jitsujo).

I learned a lot from Jitsujo. She was almost unruffled in any situation, a great cook. She also loved to bake. The only time I recall an over-the-top choice on her part was at Zen Mountain Center. She decided to bake a particularly elaborate layered chocolate cookie for the end-of-ango tea in the zendo. There we all sat, being served our tea and Grayston Bakery sweets in formal oryoki style. Everyone began eating with great relish—amazing! Delicious! But very soon we slowed in dismay. The cookies were too rich and too big, to keep at very long. A sense of quiet desperation arose. Finally, Maezumi Roshi laughed and said, “It’s okay to wrap them up and take them home for later!” That’s when I learned the importance of thoroughly imagining the context of the eating!

My whole Zen journey is richly populated by the tenzos I’ve assisted and the people who have assisted me. Judith, who loved her family’s Italian foods and mixed giant batches of pasta with bare well-scrubbed arms buried almost to her elbows. Ensho, before he was Ensho was Raul—a wildly enthusiastic follower of Dogen’s *Instructions to the Cook*, insisted on our making tofu from scratch and finding endless ways of incorporating leftovers into future meals. Broccoli bits eyed with some suspicion in fresh baked bread come to mind. With him I learned fearlessness and good humor as well as innovation. I learned as much about myself as an assistant that summer as that proverbial snake in Buddha’s time who learned her side-winding nature by being instructed to go through a straight and narrow log! Accepting direction from someone less experienced than me? Really? More recently my sangha

world is full of Taikan and Seiren, Kaizen and Ben, Sotetsu and Jusen and Mats. I’ve had to learn when circumstances were beyond what I could cope with as planned and accept help gratefully, and so I’ve gotten to know the generosity of Yudo and Jotai, Myoki and Robert in ways that I would not have known otherwise. Working together in the kitchen for me has been the richest stream for knowing and appreciating my fellow practitioners.

Being the tenzo is a living exercise in extending my imagination and skills to meet the circumstances at hand. For example, creating a menu in Los Angeles allows for much easier variety than in Hawaii or Mountain Center: here we have the blessing of Armenian and Greek markets, Asian markets, budget markets near at hand. If we run short of something, a quick run to a nearby store is not so difficult. Always, the tenzo needs to consider how the food will be eaten, right down to how it will fit on spoons and work with chopsticks, the special needs of those eating and in the particular setting. It invites us to imagine the whole field from where our ingredients come from and cost to how the eating and clean up will go. And of course, it invites us to consider the everyday ordinary: that food becomes new practice, insight, and life right there in the altar of the kitchen.

For me, one of the most obviously helpful insights from our tradition has been the observation that we are endlessly co-creators, co-creating each other and being co-created in our moments of interaction, whether we know it or not. For me it’s a realization practice that frequently reminds me not to imagine other or myself as fixed entities, to look under the words to the heart and the layers of another’s becoming and my own, to be as kind and patient as possible for someone of my rather high-energy feistiness and hyper-sensitivity to be in the moment. Cooking with the sangha and for the sangha in a Zen kitchen brings this dynamic to the forefront constantly. How the tenzo receives the food and the helpers in the kitchen, how we cope with things and each other when things go amiss, ovens fail, the menu turns out to be too ambitious, or the food doesn’t live up to our hopes—all of it teaches and co-creates. I give thanks to all those folks and kitchen ingredients that have co-created me.

With all of its challenges, I love being a tenzo. It calls on my skills as a cook, my love of creating and serving, and now, more and more, as a teacher, passing these on to new people as I get older and see an end in sight for my life in the kitchen. Thank you.

A Zen student since 1979, Jiei is a frequent tenzo at ZCLA.

ZCLA Tenzos Share Experiences & Insights



Bonnie Myosen Nadzam,
multi-time Sesshin tenzo at
ZCLA and Great Plains Zen
Center.

I remember chopping and preparing some soups for sesshin better than I remember, like, this morning. That whole kitchen is alive with eyeballs and hands and when I'm in it, everything is ringing and singing in the silence. I have this wonderful memory of doing a deep cleaning in the kitchen with Sensei Koan Janka, and we'd pulled the piece of counter beneath the cookbooks out of place so we could scrub what ended up being a really filthy patch of floor beneath it. I said to Sensei Koan: "Doesn't that just feel so good, finding a hidden spot like that and cleaning it totally?" and Sensei said to me with a smile: "No! It makes me wonder what else am I missing!"

Once, I was making a peanut stew, and I burned the peanut butter. It's a horrifying smell. I was ahead of schedule, though, and had time to remake the recipe. I literally ran down the street to Jon's for fresh peanut butter, and I threw away the burnt batch. I'm not sure exactly how to articulate the lesson here—the new batch was fine, but I have never forgotten that moment of dumping the burnt batch into the garbage. It was a quick, no-win choice to do it. Somewhere in the process of cooking, I'd stopped paying attention, or got distracted, or was moving too fast or doing too many things at once, and created this situation in which I had to decide whether to serve the burnt stew, or waste it and start over. I don't know, still, what the "right" choice would have been, and I did the best I could in the moment, but I still ask myself from time to time, in various situations, whether I'm preparing a burnt peanut stew, and how to avoid that outcome.

My grandmother used to always emphasize a "pretty plate"—by which she meant colorful. I'm always thinking of menus and meals according to color—and she was right, it's a great way to make sure you're incorporating a variety of nutrients. Something red, something bright green (add the greens at the very last moment to cooked dishes so they're really bright green!), something blue, something purple or yellow and orange. (I was at a different sesshin once where everything we were fed was beige—tasty, sure, but gosh, I was worried that after several days of it, I would never poop again.)

I felt powerfully, mysteriously, weirdly completely at home right away in the ZCLA kitchen, and having some-

thing tangible to offer sangha members when I couldn't really otherwise be dishing out wisdom in any non-soup form, that felt really good, and meaningful. I knew, too, from having been a sesshin participant in chilly December just how medicinal and wonderful hot tea and cocoa and porridge and soup could be between long stretches of zazen. I loved finding ZCLA persimmons in our breakfasts, and the first time I was slicing those up myself, I thought, now I'm really here.



Diane True-Joy Fazio, tenzo
for Sunday lunches, zazenkai,
sesshin assistant tenzo, and
former Tenzo Circle member.

I remember fretting over a dish during sesshin, only to forget completely that I'd made it when it was being served. It was powerful lesson in "giver and gift."

Avoid the urge to overcomplicate and know that everything takes longer when cooking for larger numbers. I once ran out of eggs for a morning scramble and had to add every vegetable in the fridge to stretch what we had. Working in the kitchen is different than cooking at home. Conversely, working in the kitchen is a practice that can follow you home into "normal life."

Being a tenzo is a great way to get to know people and chat when so much of what we do is in silence. Your effort is appreciated and there is a lot of help if you need it. I fondly recall people popping in on Sunday for 10 minutes to help or chat.



Gemma Sōji Cubero del Barrio,
assistant tenzo, co-tenzo and
head tenzo for Sunday lunches,
zazenkai, and a sesshin.

In Zen practice, there is always an opportunity to integrate all you do in life. Being a tenzo integrates the zazen mind into the action of the kitchen and nurturing sphere.

I remember being an assistant tenzo for Rohatsu sesshin in 2017 with Kaigen Levy who was very particular about the meals being vegan and all. As Rohatsu was getting to the end, I thought it would be fun to offer chocolate chip cookies as a surprise treat. I love surprises that

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TENZO EXPERIENCES *(Continued from page 6)*

give pleasure. I asked Kaigen if we could do it and he said “no.” But towards the end of the sesshin when he needed to go to a doctor’s appointment. I asked again and he was okay with it. Since I didn’t have a lot of experience making cookies, I asked Meiho Bryan who was then a resident if she would help me. We made really delicious Mexican chocolate chip cookies, and it was a moment of joy to pass them around that day.

I also enjoyed being co-tenzo with Bonnie Nadzam one time a million years ago and cooking with Jitsujo for a sesshin in 2018. We shared a lot of sympathetic joy and creativity while cooking and feeding everyone.

It is a beautiful practice. A wonderful opportunity to learn to cook and practice and then use it in your life with your friends and loved ones whenever you shop, cook or clean. I learned more than 30 years ago from Thich Nhat Hanh that when we do the dishes, we are bathing the baby Buddha. I have never forgotten that, and it has made me love doing the dishes. In teaching and practicing the tenzo positions, we have an opportunity to soften the heart.

So, take the tenzo practice as Zen practice. Offer inspiration while you are training others, like sharing quotes or readings. Embody the role which used to be and is a leadership role in the temple. Don’t take it like it is a power trip. Train others with a loving mind. And also, sit zazen while you are in the kitchen when you can. I have seen tenzos who hardly sat, and it showed in their demeanors.

When I cooked for Sensei Mukei’s teacher transmission week, it was just him and his jisha, Dharma-Joy. It was a wonderful experience. I was the only cook and I put a lot of love and creativity into it.



Jessica Oetsu Page, assistant tenzo for many sesshins. Tenzo for one short sesshin, a zazen-kai, and Sunday lunches.

I love kitchen practice. I remember how happy it made me when I served rice with pine nuts. The combination was something I just thought up and it seemed to work really well.

I respected the food and the people who farmed the food and the people who were going to be eating the food as I was in the kitchen. I was so happy to assist because I learn a lot about cooking and I was exposed to new ingredients. Another fond memory is baking the cookies at the end of the Autumn Wind Sesshin a few times, as Kaizen was the tenzo and he could not be near flour. There was a lot of excitement about the cookies.

Dharma lessons I learned is the deepening of the emptiness of giver, receiver, and gift. The growing of the ingredients, the transportation, then the care of handling, then digestion, and then waste. It is all revolving. I learned patience with the kitchen services. I felt they were rushed through too quickly. I could also see the practicality of running through it. I had to exercise patience to accept that the service was performed as it was.

I think being in the kitchen was a good way to get to know people. I jumped into being tenzo assistant as soon as I came to ZCLA. I had also served as tenzo assistant at Clouds in Water and Hokyoji.

My advice is to cook some meals with Purple Carrot. My husband and I have been having Purple Carrot meals lately and it has opened a new door to good vegan cooking. Of course, you do not need to be vegan at ZCLA, but it helps since some people are vegan.

Near the end of a seven-day sesshin, in the kitchen, I could become fascinated with little things, like the color of peas and carrots. The food could become mesmerizing. I encourage all to love the ingredients of their food and their lives.



Nan Reishin Merritt, main Tenzo, assistant Tenzo, fill-in/emergency Tenzo for lunch, sesshin, and several special occasions for about 10 years.

My first ever Tenzo experience was a four-day sesshin. I was the main Tenzo with an assistant. It was terrifying, exhausting and exhilarating when it was finally over.

A key Dharma lesson is to keep Beginner's Mind, and open-hearted optimism; to give way to bearing witness to all there is (the mess and possible chaos in the kitchen); and finally, loving action where the meal is prepared, disasters averted (or not), and served with love to the Sangha.

We made a lovely English tea for Sensei Shingetsu Guzy when she retired. I sliced open my thumb; we got behind on the millions of tea sandwiches, but then several Sangha members pitched in and saved the day.

Being a Tenzo helped integrate me especially in the early days. I wanted to get to know the Sangha members that I would not ordinarily have a chance to meet. I hope others have courage and enthusiasm about cooking.

Tips: Plan for every eventuality, prep ahead if you can, don't trust the ovens, and jump in and have fun. It's really a question of logistics and the Sangha is a pretty forgiving bunch.

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Service in the Kitchen

by Jitsujo Gauthier



*Strong in body
Free from greed
Without anger
Always serene
With a handful of brown rice a day
Miso and a small amount of vegetables
suffice
Whatever happens
Consider yourself last, always put
others first*
—excerpt from “Unbeaten by
Rain” by Buddhist poet Kenji
Miyazawa

This is the spirit of a *tenzo*, or Zen cook. Not cooking because you are good at it, but because people need to eat, and because we need community to awaken, and the best way to create community is eating meals together.

Cooking for others may cause fear to arise, pressure to make something fancy, original, a meal that draws compliments. But this is not the point of Zen practice. The spirit of *tenzo* is to cook meals that support the body-mind of those sitting meditation. This is done by preparing very simple meals that look and taste authentic. Daily meals don't have to be vastly different. In fact, it's better to keep consistency so you can use any leftovers in the next meal. Sitting meditation before preparing each meal will help keep the mind focused and clear.

Dogen Zenji says that meals include six tastes—bitter, sour, sweet, spicy, salty, and plain. Focusing on meals that are salty, spicy, and sweet can be easy. However, plain, sour, or bitter dishes are also important for meditation. Heavy ingredients like dairy, gluten, and sugar can inadvertently affect the constitution of meditators. The people who assist a *tenzo* are ingredients too; they have skills to offer the meal.

Roshi Glassman's *Instructions to the Cook* are: “Most of us think we have to become experts before we can do anything. The Zen cook's approach to learning is very different. It is not the way of an expert but the way of the beginner.” It is a responsibility to plan a menu, shop for food, organize assistants, and cook sesshin meals, but this is also a service, an act of caretaking, and an opportunity to bring simplicity, joyful ease, and beginner's mind to the kitchen.

Dharma Holder Jitsujo is a ZCLA resident and priest.

Thursday Morning Breakfast

by Sacha Joshin Greenfield

Since spring, we have held Thursday Morning Breakfast every Thursday at 7:45 a.m., after zazen and service. We were inspired by Betty Jiei Cole's example in the 2022 Fall Practice Period, when she made a similar weekly breakfast offering. Those who attended found there was magic when Sangha members could gather after dawn zazen and service. The gathering was quieter and more intimate than Sunday lunches, and provided much-needed social bonding and community-building time. Fellow resident Ben Ehrlich and I wanted to create a similar ongoing container for the Sangha.

The breakfasts were initially funded out of our own pockets and were attended only by residents. However, it became clear that the event was an important bonding opportunity for all members, and we were encouraged to fill out a project proposal form to make the breakfast an official Zen Center event. We received funding of \$25 per week, the event was put on the calendar, and Thursday Morning Breakfast (TMB) was born.

TMB is simple fare—a porridge (typically rice porridge or steel cut oats), hard-boiled eggs, fruit salad, and yogurt are served. We try to keep things simple and prioritize community time over having fancy food. This has allowed us to keep preparation and clean-up to a minimum and hold the breakfasts reliably.

Pulling several tables together, we created a big circle that includes everyone who wishes to come. Conversation topics range from the wild—such as tales from a Zen Center member's time in an improv comedy troupe—to the mundane—like the refrigeration requirements of eggs. More important than any verbal exchange, is our exchange of mutual support as we begin the day. I encourage everyone—commuting members and residents, newcomers and old-timers—to join us in appreciating rice, tasty conversation, and the start of the day in each others' company.



Joshin is a ZCLA resident and a graduate student at USC.

My Changing Relationship with Food

by Bill Ware



My practice sometimes emerges from the most extraordinary circumstances. My Japanese tea ceremony teacher once said, “the most difficult thing to master is simplicity.” In the beginningless and endless struggle, the most profound discoveries are found when peeling away the “extra.”

And so it is with my evolving relationship with food.

Mortality

I have a family with a history of heart disease, diabetes, and other ailments, exacerbated by dubious eating habits. My past experience with food was primarily one of comfort. When my father suddenly died, aged 46, of heart failure in 1981, an enduring takeaway was the fragility of my mortality, that my longevity is inextricably tied to altering food habits.

When I hit 46 in 2009, henceforth outliving my father on “borrowed time,” I just generally became more mindful of what I took in. Then, earlier this year, I did a casual check of my blood pressure. It registered 178/111. High. Mortality. High. Go to the hospital now. High.

Toward a New Relationship with Food

Nothing quite like a health scare to shake you into action. Fortuitously, my dire financial situation inhibited eating out, so I turned to eating at home. Not good when you absolutely detest food preparation and cleanup. I suffered culinary trauma after taking a seemingly simple mango smoothie prep and turned the kitchen into a crime scene – unaware that mango fruit couldn’t be simply pulled away from the seed.

Ironically, my first act in this transition was to stop eating altogether and just consume liquids. This resulted in maximized depression not extraordinary minimalism. Starvation, obviously, isn’t the long-term relationship that was envisioned.

I previously purchased personal sized cast iron cookware, more for aesthetic pleasure than utility. The compact dutch ovens, for example, strikingly exudes the oryoki meal experience. But the addition of a compact Breville smart oven/air fryer would reveal the cookware as an unforeseen godsend in my transition.

Governed by great aversion to time consuming meal prep and painstaking cleanup, I integrated storable food-stuffs and simplistic meal plans that skewed very healthy and made prep/cleanup insanely easier. For a quickie meal of, say, slow cooked veggies, rice and chai, several utensils, and a prep-cook-eat-clean time of about an hour gets it done. Add another hour for lentil/legume dishes.

Indian Cuisine and the “Extra”

My guilty pleasure is Indian cuisine. But it does prove expensive when salving this urge requires frequent visits to my favorite Indian restaurant. More incentive to bring a piece of Indian cooking home with my newfound culinary awakening.

That meant navigating an endless array of spices, few whose names I could barely pronounce. No worries. Garam masala, a mix of various spices easily found at the local Indian grocer, disabuses me of having to deal with all those “extra” spices.

Also, the nightmare of peeling, cutting and grating onions and garlic – then storing the “extra” leftover. Again, no worries. Onion and garlic powders, while not the choice at Michelin rated Indian restaurants, works just fine at Chez Me.

The Possibilities are Endless

The mindful application, as expressed above, doesn’t stop there. Endless possibilities, I’ve learned. And a renewed sense of enjoyment with food. Constantly experimenting with dishes in an effort to produce a simpler, yet enjoyable version. Found a way to make oatmeal – a dish I absolutely detested in the past – where it is at least tolerable. More to come.

Bill is a ZCLA member who has also cooked some Sangha lunches.



Precautions for Tenzos and Assistants

Tenzo kyokun Slogans

- No But, Just Rice and Sand.
- Don't get stuck in one view.
- And, and, and, and....
- Embody selfless doing.
- Embody selfless action.
- Equal Worth, different function.
- Lead by example.
- No separation in action.
- Practice the Buddha way.
- Carry out the activity of a Buddha.
- How does a Buddha work?
- Maintain a caring mind.
- This, too, is Buddha's work.
- Many offices, one community.
- My activities support the life of all.
- I am responsible.
- Carry responsibility for each other.
- Offer nourishment to all.
- This, too, is Buddha.
- All are disciples of Buddha.
- Settle in the way.
- Do what needs to be done.
- In the midst of all activity, raise the
- Arouse the Bodhisattva spirit.
- Don't hold back.
- Put love into the food.
- Plunge! Engage!
- The Bodhisattva spirit and action a
- Put the Bodhisattva spirit to work.
- Manifest the Bodhisattva spirit.
- Are these actions a Way-seeking mi

10 Key Tips for the Sesshin Tenzo

by Tim Taikan Zamora



1) Organize your menu

Use the method that best suits you to keep your menu plan organized. I use a spreadsheet to list the dates of the sesshin and then each of the three meals for each day. Finally, I divide each meal into what goes into each bowl. Once you have your menu planned it's time to determine how much to prepare. Look at the serving size for your recipes

and compare it to how many participants will be served. The easiest rule of thumb for a beginner is to simply multiply the serving size by the number of participants for each meal. For example, if you select a recipe that serves five and you have 20 participants multiply it by four, plus half of your product to account for seconds ($5 \times 4 = 20 + 10$ for a total of 30 servings).

2) Gathering your ingredients

Once you've determined the amount of each ingredient in your menu, it's time to go shopping. Before you go to the supermarket, check the ZCLA kitchen to see what we already have. If you don't live nearby, you can ask the Tenzo Steward to check for you. For staples, like olive oil, rice, salt, pepper, and many spices, there is a good chance we have them. Please stay within budget!

3) Keep things simple

Aim for simplicity. For example, instead of preparing everything from scratch, use prepared ingredients such as sauces, stocks, baked goods and frozen fruits and vegetables. There seems to be a belief that using prepared ingredients isn't as healthy or is cheating. Not so, especially if you are just learning. As you get more skilled you can focus on homemade dishes. Also, preparing stir-fries, rice dishes, soups and vegetable stews are an excellent way to prepare simple and healthy meals that serve many people.

4) It's all timing and rhythm

Beyond cooking ability, being tenzo involves a good sense of timing and rhythm. You are on a schedule after all. The kitchen is part of the sesshin container and a good tenzo must tap into its rhythm. Things will change so be flexible and try to avoid getting flustered when this happens. Use your practice to accept and adapt to changes.

5) The importance of the Sangha

Trying to work alone can be challenging. It is important to remember we are here to practice as a Sangha. Given this, learn to work well with your assistants. Also

remember to tap into the kitchen wisdom that your samu helpers have. I believe it helps us as tenzos when we develop trust in our assistants. When cooking for a sesshin, if I sense an assistant is skilled, I'll turn over the preparation of an entire dish. This can take some pressure off you and creates an environment of shared practice and inclusiveness.

6) Know your bowls

A grain always goes in the Buddha Bowl. This can be oatmeal, pasta, rice, or even potatoes. The general rule is if it's a starchy component it almost always qualifies. The Middle Bowl is usually reserved for things like soups, salads, fruit and perhaps even bread. The Small Bowl is almost always the drink, although for the Medicine Meal (supper), I've seen bread served in it if soup is served in the Middle Bowl. Remember, that we don't use the Buddha Bowl for the Medicine Meal!

7) Simplicity #2

Don't make being tenzo so complicated that you exhaust yourself. It's preferred that the tenzo and assistant get to sit and go to face-to-face. Doing this depends on how well you organize yourself. Always be mindful of simplicity. We are not required to show off our fancy cooking skills. The most important thing is that everyone eats so that we can sit. Remember, the words from the meal gatha, "this food is medicine to sustain our life," and I'd add "our sesshin practice." Make simplicity a pillar of tenzo practice.

8) You'll never make everyone happy

Trying to cook to satisfy everyone's tastes is difficult, if not impossible. Although we try to honor food sensitivities and restrictions, focusing your tenzo practice on the likes and dislikes of others can be extremely frustrating, and perhaps we do this only to satisfy our own ego.

9) Learn from your mistakes

Like all parts of our practice, we are going to make mistakes in the kitchen. Mistakes are how we all learn and improve. Food will go bad, things will burn, the oven will stop working, the ingredient you need can't be found anywhere. You may not have enough portions for seconds. This is fine if your practice is sincere. Learn to let go and move on to preparing the next meal.

10) It's all about serving

Ultimately, we make the offering as tenzo to serve others!

Taikan is the ZCLA Tenzo Steward and was the 2022-23 Head Trainee.

TENZOS SHARE (Continued from page 7)



**Conrad Butsugen Romo,
assistant tenzo for lunches
and sesshins.**

I was one of the early tenzo's once Shared Stewardship was introduced and was responsible for Sunday lunch. Not knowing how others went about recruiting others to prepare Sunday lunch, I called people from our members list. I had no idea who I was talking to or their prior history at

ZCLA and managed to get a few to say yes. Not knowing who to call and who not to call served me well. When I couldn't find someone, I kept it simple with bagels, fruit and juices.

I noticed that the kitchen was in need of a deep clean and organized the first all hands thorough clean up. Since then, it's become a regular sangha event called *fushinzamu*, working together.

Working with Chris Genzan Hackman, I was struck by how comfortable he appeared, particularly when he admitted he was cooking several recipes for the first time. His fearlessness and well-balanced approach made an impression on me.

Once a visitor from another sangha stepped in to help wash dishes and wound up cutting himself from a knife left in a sink. I hadn't left it but when he saw me again with a bandage on his hand he was upset and partly wanted to blame someone so he told me that I should be more careful about leaving knives in a sink, and then justified his comment with, "for your practice." For the rest of the weekend, I and a few others enjoyed helpful criticism with each other always ending with "for your practice."

Washing dishes is also an aspect of practice. Paying attention to how much water is wasted by not being efficient, using the appropriate time and energy to wash a bowl, observing where things go, and how things work. Years ago, we used cafeteria type trays with multiple ridged compartments. They simply wasted time, energy, and water resources to wash. We used bowls during sesshin, but it was difficult moving away from the trays. Washing dishes is simple and doesn't have to be an overly time-consuming task if hustle is brought into the practice.

The old lesson of when I'm being of service, I'm not thinking of me and when I'm not thinking of me a greater connection happens. And partnering up with others is a good way to bond. The appreciation you will receive will be heartfelt.



**DeWayne Gojitsu Snodgrass,
tenzo on numerous Sunday
lunches and special occasions.**

My most memorable experience as a tenzo was serving 150 people years ago on Buddha's birthday where we had invited Zen Center's neighbors and their children along with the children of Zen Center members. I was the first to serve a "kid-friendly" menu of veggie burgers, french

fries, birthday cake with ice cream, and sodas.

It has taught me what it means to be completely selfless in service of others. Nothing can be more satisfying than nourishing people with a meal that you've cooked for the Sangha.

Tips: Have everything in place BEFORE you begin cooking. You don't want to be doing any kind of prep while you are in the middle of cooking a meal. Food safety is important. I wrote an article on food safety and sanitation from a lesson plan I learned when I went to culinary school at UCLA.

A Heartfelt "Thank You!"

To all those who have served
in the ZCLA kitchen
cooking, shopping, cleaning
past, present, and future.



*This Quarter's Thank You's and Rites of Passage
will appear in our next issue.*

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