

Recipe for Cottleston Pie



Our Dharma talk this week was given by Shanti Soule. Shanti has practiced Vipassana since the mid-1970s. She became a teacher under the guidance of Ruth Denison in the Burmese lineage of U Bha Khin.

In a Zen Monastery, the position of cook is reserved for senior monks. In the thirteenth century, Zen Master Dogen wrote a book called *Instructions for the Cook*, or *Tenzo Kyokun*.

"From ancient times, in communities practicing the Buddha's Way, there have been six offices established to oversee the affairs of the community. The monks holding each office are all disciples of the Buddha and they all carry out the activities of a Buddha through their respective offices. Among these officers is the tenzo, who carries the responsibility of preparing the community's meals."

"It is written in The Regulations for a Zen Monastery, that the 'function of the tenzo is to manage meals for the monks.'

"This work has always been carried out by teachers settled in the Way and by others who have aroused the Bodhisattva spirit within themselves. Such a practice requires exhausting all your energies."

What is it about being a community cook that is so special? In a Dharma talk on *Tenzo Kyokun*, (<http://www.intrex.net/chzg/mell1.htm>) Sojun Mel Weitsman Roshi explains:

Anyone working in the kitchen long hours needs to find a rhythm for their work. This way they can find their ease within the work itself. This is true of all our activities. It is certainly true of zazen. Usually we work hard, then rest; then work hard again, then rest again. But when you engage in a continuous activity over a long period, you have to find your rest and your ease within the activity itself. Otherwise you can't sustain yourself. This is the koan of work. It is also the koan of zazen.

When we sit sesshin all day, we put out a lot of effort. We have to find our ease within that effort. We are totally engaged in hard effort, but, at the same time, there is a letting go of the tensions and anxiety that build up, a letting go of thinking ahead too much. The practice of the Tenzo—or of anyone working in the kitchen, or anyone sitting zazen—is how to be present, fully present, moment by moment, without being caught by either past or future, or like or dislike.

Working in the kitchen and sitting zazen are not different things. When someone cooks all day for the Sangha, this is kitchen sesshin. It's not just cooking. It's just cooking. It's not just turning out meals, it's non-dual practice, the practice of big mind.

Looking at a recipe, it is easy to form the opinion that cooking is a sequential process and very linear – just follow the steps, and a delicious dish will ensue.

I imagine someone entertaining guests, and preparing a simple meal consisting of a roast, mashed potatoes, string beans, and a salad. The guests arrive. Following the recipes to the letter, the cook puts the roast in the oven, and rejoins the guests while the roast cooks. When the roast is nearly done, boil the potatoes. When the roast has been in the oven the allotted time, pull it out of the oven, and set it aside. Mash the potatoes, and put them in a serving bowl. Steam the string beans. When everything is ready, toss the salad and serve.

The roast, which continues to cook for 20 minutes from its internal heat after leaving the oven, is overdone by the time it is served. The mashed potatoes become lukewarm while the beans are steaming. By the time the salad is tossed and served, the beans are room temperature. The salad, however, is perfect. (*Note from Dave: you may laugh, but I know someone who cooks like this, and I have eaten this meal.*)

Shanti states that preparing a meal is not linear. Neither is it haphazard. Like the Buddha crossing the flood in *Ogha-tarana Sutta* (<http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn01/sn01.001.than.html>), the cook cannot move forward and may not stand still. Instead, a meal must be approached as a dance. The cook must be in harmony with the meal, attending to each part as its nature dictates. The cook or Tenzo would be akin the choreographer.

Perhaps the choreography may go like this: Be mindful at all times. Put the roast in the oven. While the roast is cooking, boil the potatoes, keeping the timing in harmony with the meal. Make the salad, leave off the dressing, and put it in the refrigerator. Mash the potatoes. The roast is done just as the potatoes are finished. Pull the roast out of the oven, and let it sit for a few minutes. Start the string beans. Take the salad out of the refrigerator, put the dressing on it and serve. Put the mashed potatoes in a serving bowl. While everyone is eating the salad, bring out the roast and potatoes. Take the beans off the stove, and serve them still steaming, as the salads are being finished.

Shanti explained that working in a kitchen, everyone has a part, yet anyone can step in and help anyone else. We honor and respect everyone in the kitchen. We honor our differences, and respect each other for what they can give. Cooking is like a flower: opening, closing, opening, closing, Cooking is like breathing: in, out, inhale, exhale, expand, contract. The focus is constantly in motion yet steady with whatever is true whether chaotic or freeflowing. At times the focus will be narrow on just stirring the pot and at other times there will be a wide focus expanding to include all the people, tasks, timing and moods. Cooking is a dance, and in it, everyone is focusing on their activity.

Knowing who you are is the Cottleston Pie Principle. Rev. Dr. George Kimmich Beach gives a wonderful sermon on this principle (<http://www.ucsummit.org/Sermons/GKB/20000305.html>).

These are three key questions for each of us as individuals... Who are you? What have you got to work with? What do you seek and hope for? ...

There is a song that names precisely these three questions, in A.A. Milne's classic storybook, "Winnie the Pooh." This song is sung by "the bear of little brain," Winnie the Pooh himself:

*How can you get very far,
If you don't know Who You Are?
How can you do what you ought,
If you don't know What You've Got?
And if you don't know Which to Do
Of all the things in front of you,
Then what you'll have when you are through
Is just a mess without a clue
Of all the best that can come true
If you know What and Which and Who.*

No, that's not the Cottleston Pie song, but it just may hold the key to un-riddling the song and discovering the Cottleston Pie Principle (so called by Benjamin Hoff, if not A.A. Milne). To coin a phrase: If the Cottleston Pie Principle is the answer, what are the questions? They are the capitalized phrases in this nameless song: Who Are You? What You've Got? And Which to Do -- of "all the things in front of you."

Before I read "The Tao of Pooh," I had forgotten my Winnie the Pooh lore, and I hadn't known that A.A. Milne's "bear of little brain" was actually a new incarnation of Lao-Tsu, the ancient Chinese sage from whom Taoism first arose. But Benjamin Hoff's book makes it quite clear: "Eeyore frets, and Piglet hesitates, and Rabbit calculates, and Owl pontificates. Pooh just is." Pooh doesn't fret or hesitate or calculate or pontificate: He is blessed with an indefinable something, a grace that gets him past all the anxiety-driven craziness of those about him. He is what Edwin Freedman called "a non-anxious presence in an anxious situation" -- if only because he doesn't think very far ahead, maybe not beyond breakfast. He redeems every situation. He lives in the present. He goes for the sweet stuff, the honey. Blessed are those who go and do likewise.

Pooh's nonsense songs are songs of uncommon sense, though it may seem hard to get at, like the honey in the very bottom of the honey pot. The songs are spiritual riddles... Benjamin Hoff gives us a "Tao of Pooh" interpretation of the three riddles in the song...

*Cottleston, Cottleston, Cottleston Pie,
A fly can't bird, but a bird can fly.
Ask me a riddle and I reply ...*

*Cottleston, Cottleston, Cottleston Pie,
A fish can't whistle and neither can I,
Ask me a riddle and I reply ...
Cottleston, Cottleston, Cottleston Pie,
Why does a chicken, I don't know why.
Ask me a riddle and I reply,
Cottleston, Cottleston, ..."*

First riddle: "A fly can't bird, but a bird can fly." Nonsense or uncommon sense? People are forever striving to be what they are not because they ignore "the clear reality of Things As They Are." The Cottleston Pie Principle says: Know your Inner Nature. Do not be alienated from yourself, forever in tension, trying to make yourself into something you are not. Accept that you are acceptable at the deepest level of your being. Come as you are. Cherish your integrity. Be attentive to your spiritual life. Seek your center, the place where your freedom resides. Take time, at regular intervals, to relax into yourself and appreciate your Inner Nature.

As yourself, when you need reminding, How could I ever have not known that "a fly can't bird but a bird can fly"? Let yourself laugh at yourself sometimes. And you'll begin to enjoy other people more, too. You'll know that they have Inner Natures of their own, and you'll enjoy the differences between you rather than being distressed by them. Let go of control sometimes. Rather than joining in Rabbit's clever scheme to drive Kanga and Roo out of the forest because they are different, you'll join in creating a community of mutual respect and enjoyment -- and compassion for the thorn-pierced foot.

Second riddle: "A fish can't whistle and neither can I." According to Benjamin Hoff, "Coming from a wise mind, such a statement would mean, 'I have certain limitations, and I know what they are.' ... There's nothing wrong with not being able to whistle, especially if you are a fish. But much is wrong with blindly trying to do what you aren't designed for."

In "Winnie the Pooh," Tigger and Roo are walking through the forest one morning and Tigger is talking about all the things Tiggers can do: " 'Can they fly?' asked Roo. 'Yes,' said Tigger, 'they're very good fliers, Tiggers are, 'stronry good flyers.' 'Oo!' said Roo. 'Can they fly as well as Owl?' 'Yes,' said Tigger. 'Only they don't want to.' " A little later, Christopher Robin and his friends have to rescue Tigger from the limb of a tree onto which he has climbed, letting him drop into a blanker, ker-plop!

Maybe you have known people like that. Or maybe you've had to be rescued from a limb or two you've climbed out on yourself. I know I have, and I have been rescued from perilous perches more than once. People who cared cushioned my fall. Here's another way the personal side of life is linked to the community: We are forever bumping up against our limitations in unexpected ways; but with the caring concern of others, we can learn from these bumps. Knowing that "a fish can't whistle and neither can I" does not deny the possibility of learning and growth; owning your limitations is the basis of spiritual learning and growth.

Pooh's third Cottleston Pie riddle asks: "Why does a chicken, I don't know why." Why did the chicken cross the road? To get to the other side. Why does he want to get to the other side, or wherever a chicken might want to go? We don't know, and I suppose the chicken doesn't fully understand it, either. Instinct is the scientific-sounding answer; but appeal to instinct really means: We don't know, and probably nobody else does, either. We could as well say: The chicken is acting in accord with its Inner Nature and its Limitations. But then we'd need to add: Even these do not determine what it will do, for the chicken does what it wants to do, we know not why. In the end it is unlimited, at liberty. And so are we who live within the Unlimited, a reality that is mysterious and transcends us absolutely. Lao-Tsu calls it the Tao. The freedom to choose what we will do and what we would become is our clearest link to ultimate reality; we may even call it the image of God.

The very first practice the Buddha taught followers was *dana*, or generosity. In Buddhist countries, *dana* is taught early. A grandparent will hold an infant, and allow the child to pick up grains of rice to feed monastics. There is a muscle in the forearm, that when gently squeezed, causes the hand to open. The grandparent will squeeze this muscle, and the infant drops the food into the bowl and giggles. This is great fun! Over and over, the child picks up the treat and drops it, laughing. From this early teaching, the child associates joy with giving and letting go.

Practicing *metta* and *dana* can be great medicine. Shanti suggests that when you are stressed or depressed, or experiencing fear, do something simple for someone – be kind, be generous. *Dana* does not have to be a material gift or money – it can be a kindness.

Shanti was at her local bank the other day during lunch time, and only a single teller was on duty. The teller's time was being taken up by a customer who wanted to go into things in great detail and talk about all kinds of subjects. (I am sure I get behind this same person at the store at least every other week.) As the customer was happily chatting away, the teller noted the growing line of customers and began getting anxious, sure that the other customers were getting impatient or angry. When Shanti got to the head of the line, she joked about it with the teller, connecting with both her and the customer alleviating, taking the uptightness and stress away. What a wonderful gift!

When you see a chance to do something nice for someone – letting go ahead of you in line, holding the door open – do it. Both you and the recipient will feel better for it. Remember that *dana* is in the intention, not the expectation of reward. Do something just out of kindness.

Dana helps us learn to let go, and opens us up for truth. It is when we are open for truth that we can become who we are, be true to ourselves and speak from the heart to appreciate our true nature and to honor all races, cultures and beings.

When she was four years old, Shanti's parents divorced, and they moved to a poorer neighborhood that was predominately black. In her class of about 40 there were a few Mexican and Asian children and about 30 African American children. There was only one other white child, a boy which Shanti had nothing in common with. She bonded with Rosalie, they were the shortest two in their class. At that age, children don't see race the way older children and adults do, much less racism. They do have a community identity, often expressed in how they act and

speak. A few years later Shanti moved again and went to another school where the students were all white. She had a hard time fitting in because by then she had developed a strong black & Chicano accent and the other white kids didn't accept her, she was different.

In living in different communities, there is a tendency to want to fit in, and to take a layer of the community identity on which is a blessing. However, with time, these layers may result in covering up the true self, so that it can no longer be found or is challenging to rediscover. Society too provides us with layers of padding and disguises. Growing up, we may be taught gender roles and "acceptable sexual identities" -- 'girls don't do that, that's for boys!' Remember the talking Barbie doll that would say "Math is *hard!*"? We've heard "Marriage is only between a man and a woman." Beyond this there are layers and layers which can become laws to exclude people by race, religion, sexual identity, physical and mental abilities, age, etc. These laws, identities and customs can cause much personal and worldly problems like we experience today.

In trying to fit in, we may lose ourselves, our culture, who we really are, yet we also have the opportunity to include and respect all life. Trying to be someone we are not is *dukkha*. The Dharma allows us to open to what we know is true, fully accepting diversity and inclusiveness. We honor our differences, respect who we really are, and what we have to give. We are gifts to one another.

Sharing of merit: May all beings, in all directions, in all walks of life and all realms of time be happy, healthy and live in peace. And in this way may we all embrace our true nature and live in harmony.

May I be free from inner and outer harm
May I be happy and peaceful
May I be healthy and accepting of mind and body
May I care for myself with joy and ease.