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# The Spirituality of Food and Nutrition: A Critique of The United States' Food Practices Through an Analysis of Three Asian Religions and Philosophies

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# The Spirituality of Food and Nutrition:

A Critique of the United States' Food Practices Through an Analysis of Three Asian Religions and Philosophies

*A Senior Thesis Presented by*  
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*To*  
The Trinity College Department of International Studies

*Supervised by*  
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*In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Major in*  
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## **Abstract**

*Title:* The Spirituality of Food and Nutrition: a critique of the United States' food practices through an analysis of three Asian religions and philosophies

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There is no question that the United States is a country that is currently faced with serious health epidemics, such as hypertension and diabetes, associated with being overweight and obese. It has been the assumption of the government and the public that the large food corporations are to blame for the country's poor health. However, it is too simplistic to believe that tighter regulations upon corporations would alone lead to improved health. There needs to be a change at the individual level, and of the practices of most of the country's citizens. Through an analysis of three Asian religions (Hindu Ayurveda, Daoism and Zen Buddhism), this thesis will explore the ways in which the founding principles and philosophies of each of these religions serve to promote longer, healthier, and happier lives among the respective practitioners. This study is in no way promoting a shift in people's religious beliefs, but explains how the philosophies and concepts that lie at the center of these religions can be employed in any person's daily life and overall ethos to improve health, both through nutritional changes and a accepting a more spiritual mindset. The United States is at a critical moment as it pertains to the country's health, as the rates of these nutrition-based epidemics continue to rise. If these philosophies can be adopted on the individual level, the country will see a much healthier relationship to both food and nature.

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## **Introduction**

When I fall asleep at night, there is truly only one place my dreams take me to: a world of perfectly al dente spaghetti, a lush garden bursting with plump red tomatoes, crisp and vibrantly green basil, cilantro, spinach, and a rainbow of chard. I imagine myself frolicking through a kitchen perfectly stocked with endless spices and flavorings, and a pan atop the stove just begging to be enlisted in the creation of an intricate and complex yet harmoniously balanced dish. Suffice it to say, food and cuisine are passions rooted in the deepest parts of my soul. Since my very first EasyBake Oven when I was a young girl, I knew that food and cooking were going to shape a large part of my life. I have never been so grasped by an activity, as well as the process that follows: eating. As I grew up and started having the privilege of traveling worldwide, my passion for food only grew, and my interest took a more specified track. I have become devoutly interested in nutrition and healthy living as I have grown up and seen the undeniable nutrition-based epidemics facing the United States, with ailments such as Type 2 Diabetes, cardiovascular disease, high cholesterol and staggering rates of obesity, affecting up to two-thirds of the population,<sup>i</sup> staring me in the face every day.

Why is it that the United States is so deeply afflicted by these issues when other countries around the world—who, thanks to the globalization of the food industry have access to many of the same foodstuffs as the United States—don't seem to suffer the extreme rates of disease as my home country? One obvious factor is the capitalistic nature of all aspects of our country's economy and society in recent times, and, as Michele Simon calls it, our current extreme "appetite for profit." Large corporations have only one goal in mind, and that is to make money and thrive in way that keeps that company ahead of any competitors. About ten years ago, these major corporations, including companies like Coca-Cola, PepsiCo, Kraft Foods, General Mills, McDonald's and the like<sup>ii</sup>, have been called into the public forum and blamed for their aggressive marketing strategies geared towards susceptible demographic groups. Experts have done extensive research and feel that they have been able to deduce that "our 'toxic food environment', [is] caused in large part by overzealous corporate marketing strategies."<sup>iii</sup> This public shame hasn't caused these companies to sit still, but to act, but unfortunately not in a way that is conducive to improving public health. While food makers have reacted in various ways, the motivation behind each respective response is the same: another marketing and public relations campaign promising to be a part of the solution, in other words, a campaign to keep the company's image afloat.<sup>iv</sup>

At the end of the day, what we must realize is that a corporation is exactly that—a business. It is not one person or a group of people collectively making what society has labeled as "amoral decisions" to keep peddling unhealthy food. A corporation is a legally contracted business structure, and it is the duty of each

person contractually employed by the company to do whatever it takes to create more profit for the shareholders.<sup>v</sup>

Too many people—including nutrition advocates and lawmakers—think that solving the nation’s diet-related health problems is simply a matter of persuading food manufacturers to change their behavior. They mistakenly believe somewhere deep within their souls, corporations have a “conscience” and can “do the right thing” (e.g., provide “healthier products” or stop marketing to children), even if that means a loss of profit. But in fact, we really cannot expect food companies to be the guardians of public health.<sup>vi</sup>

So, if we cannot rely on the corporations, lawmakers or lobbyists in Washington to safeguard the health of people in our country, what can we do? Throughout my global travels, I have seen societies in which there are barely any governmental regulations or interventions to safeguard people’s health, because from a dietary standpoint (and dare I personally say, a mental-health standpoint given the peoples’ overall light-hearted, carefree and thoughtful demeanor), the people are healthy, balanced individuals. They do not exhibit diseases and conditions that manifest as a result of poor diet, and their bodies are more physically fit. This makes it clear to me that it is possible for the United States to achieve this, but how?

The call to action now needs to be upon the individual. As Dr. Daniel R. Fishel explains, “Only people have moral obligations.”<sup>vii</sup> In this way, I have examined three cultures in which there is a deeply personalized, spiritual and conscious relationship with food, nature, and the greater universe, as it naturally exists. India, China and Japan are three countries in which food, diet and health are all uniquely related and guided by these countries’ respective religions and country-wide philosophical beliefs. Ayurveda, a Hindu practice in India, the ancient religion of Daoism in China, and Zen Buddhism in Japan, all preach the importance of the individual and how to

best keep one not only internally balanced, healthy, and happy, but to keep the individual balanced and centered with the greater process of the universe and the macrocosm in which we all live. This means to have a respect for natural ingredients, and to know how to utilize the gifts of nature to nourish the body, mind, and spirit and to continue a natural flow and interrelationship between the people and the environment. In the United States, there is no nationwide employment or belief in a religion, philosophy, or spiritual attitude that brings each person together to live in harmony with the universe. Instead the culture in the United States is intricately focused on the unique and individual physical and mental constitution of each person.

How can we in the United States expect corporations to be able to simply produce healthier food, when the process of food purveying is a business of transforming the natural world and bringing something into a market as a manufactured good? Food companies inherently “refashion nourishment into industrial products bearing little resemblance to anything humans were designed to eat.”<sup>viii</sup> The answer is: we can’t. The responsibility needs to be upon the individual to know how to take care of their own body with what is naturally provided, concepts that are inherent to each of these three Asian religions. Each of these religions regards food in such a spiritual and individualized way that the people of these countries intrinsically know how to eat better for their own bodies and how to use what nature provides for nourishment. By highlighting the powerful connection between person and universe, these religions create healthier beings.



Ayurveda is a tradition strongly rooted in the health of the physical and mental bodily entities. Ayurveda addresses three bodily humors and details the ways in which each humor is diagnosed and cared for. Food is essential “medicine” in Ayurveda both for treating as well as maintaining a healthy body, mind, and lifestyle. Daoism is an ancient religion that developed in China and is based on the provision of a long life. It addresses the many ways in which a person can extend his or her life and the quality thereof, by making food and nutrition central to this process. Finally, Zen Buddhism is a sect of Buddhism that arose in Japan and, like the other sects of this religion, is based on the Buddha’s philosophy of the “middle way.” Mindfulness and rationality is a critical component of Buddhism, and these precepts are entirely interrelated with the country’s food practices. Zen Buddhism in particular focuses on meditation and the ways in which the teachings of the Buddha can be physically carried out; and the acts of cooking and eating (both of which are forms of manual labor) are two critical ways in which Buddhists can physically practice and embody these ideals. In this way, food and cooking are used as meditation tools and both become very mindful, sensual experiences.

The dominant religions in the United States, namely the Judeo-Christian traditions, aren’t understood in a way that focuses deeply on the individuals’ relationship to the environment and universe. This lack of this type of spirituality, coupled with the inculpable and uncontrollable capitalistic economy when it comes to food has led to extreme dietary health problems in the United States. There is no question that it is a country riddled with health issues ranging, for example, from obesity and cardiovascular diseases to diabetes. For such a developed and advanced

country, there has to be a reason for why our country has yet to find a reasonable cure for these epidemics, and that reason is the country's lack of a spiritual attitude towards food, nature, and the greater universe as exists in the Asian countries of India, China and Japan. This study analyzes three Asian traditions, and will attempt to show how the United States can adopt the practical nature of the relationships to food within each, and attempt to offer some hope for the our country and our nation's health as we move forward. It is clear that this is an issue of grand proportion, and cannot be left to flounder. Something must be done.

**Notes:**

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<sup>i</sup> Simon, Michele. xiv.

<sup>ii</sup> Simon, Michele. xx.

<sup>iii</sup> Simon, Michele. 1.

<sup>iv</sup> Simon, Michele. 1.

<sup>v</sup> Simon, Michele. 5-7.

<sup>vi</sup> Simon, Michele. 1-2.

<sup>vii</sup> Simon, Michele. 3.

<sup>viii</sup> Simon, Michele. 6.

## Chapter 1: India and Ayurveda

India has long been considered a country known for its intricate and unique food practices. It is a land that is rich with natural resources available for nourishment. It is also well endowed with unique spices and herbs that have given rise not only to a flavorful cuisine, but one that uses these special ingredients for a wide array of purposes. One of the most prominent of these intentions is the cultivation of a long, healthy and happy life. These spices were sought after and plundered by Western explorers and conquerors such as Alexander the Great<sup>i</sup>, but were not utilized or regarded in the same way that the native population did. Food has played an important role in the Hindu population of India for quite some time. This is demonstrated through the common greeting: “Have you eaten?” A question asked in the same way that other countries may inquire: “How are you doing?”<sup>ii</sup> A brief historical overview of the rise of various traditions in India will serve to show the rise of one particular practice that has become prevalent throughout the Indian subcontinent: the medico-spiritual practice of Ayurveda. The principles that lie at the heart of the Ayurvedic tradition serve to prolong life, achieve optimum bodily, mental and spiritual health, and the marriage of the concepts and prescriptions

outlined by the practice have helped keep Indians in better nutritional and bodily health.

The India that is known today was formed through an essential melting pot of various traditions and cultures of peoples who migrated into and settled along the lush and agriculturally viable land of the Indus Valley in the northern areas of the subcontinent, near the Ganges River. As far back as 6000 BCE, historians and archaeologists have found proof of widespread civilizations that have no doubt given rise to the traditions and populations of today's India. One of the most notable is the Harappan civilization which spread along the Indus River. Archaeologists have unearthed many materials that suggest a more advanced food system in comparison to the simplicity of civilizations at this time as well as to the resources available. Fruits, grains, fowl, fish and game were all consumed and stored, and crops were raised in some of the earliest known ploughed fields, showing a great desire for the cultivation of food.<sup>iii</sup> Not only was there an abundance of food locally, but the Harappans stored and shipped these commodities throughout the world to places like Afghanistan, Mesopotamia with some evidence showing trade routes reaching as far as Egypt. The Harappan civilization was advanced and spread throughout much of northern India. As it spread, the central ideas began to decline and shift with the movement. The next large movement of people to spread into India, and one that would last for years to come, was that of the Aryans. In his historical account of the food and Indian culture, K.T. Acharya notes that,

While the cities of the Indus Valley faded away, its culture did not die...Much practical and theoretical Harappan knowledge was inherited by the Aryans. But the whole ethos changed, from the practical, mechanical and commercial

outlook that characterized the Harappan civilization to one in which trade was despised and the inner, contemplative life exalted.”<sup>iv</sup>

It is in the rise of the Aryan tradition that Ayurvedic science was developed and thrived.

Broadly speaking, the Aryan tradition followed in the footsteps of the Harappan civilizations with the major difference lying in the philosophical and sympathetic-magical rituals, in which each day specific ritual actions would create the Cosmos. After the decline of the Harappans, three major tribes came to prominence in northern India: the Aryans, the Dhaityas and the Saptasindhus. The Dhaityas practiced an early form of Brahmanism, full of magic rituals, and the Saptasindhus (meaning Seven Rivers) were a small tribe hailing from central Europe and Iran. It was the integration of these three tribes of migrants, henceforth collectively referred to as the Aryans, which gave rise to the Vedic and Hindu culture that has survived and flourished in India.<sup>v</sup> The Vedic tradition of the Aryans was agricultural, pastoral, and philosophical. Acharya notes it was “keenly alive to forces within and without that affect man’s equanimity and comfort.”<sup>vi</sup> The texts, hymns and prayers that came from this tradition laid the groundwork for the development of the Ayurvedic tradition. The Aryan belief was that food was not simply a means of bodily sustenance but it was a part of the greater cosmic and moral cycle within which all humans exist. The *Taittiriya Upanishad*, an early Vedic text, states:

From the earth sprang herbs, from herbs food, from food seed, from seed man. Man thus consists of the essence of food. From food are all creatures produced, by food do they grow. The self consists of food, of breath, of mind, of understanding, of bliss.<sup>vii</sup>

According to the cosmic cycle as believed by the Aryans, the food, the eater, and the universe all had to be in harmony with one another for a person to achieve ultimate health of the mind, body, and spirit, all of which are uniquely connected. Vedic tradition focused on the preservation of good health and it was the belief that a well-adjusted diet is the way in which this was to be achieved. “Without proper diet, medicines are of no use; with proper diet, medicines are unnecessary.” Thus, the medicinal and scientific tradition of prolonging and maintaining optimum health, that of Ayurveda, is largely focused around one’s food and diet as the “medicine” and central aspect.

Many scholars and historians consider Ayurveda to be the longest established healing system in the world. Ayurveda is a system of healing with its central knowledge based in nature and the purpose of life, which incorporates both metaphysical and physical aspects. According to Ayurveda, mind, body, and spirit are all connected in the Cosmic Consciousness that embraces all of creation, as every individual is simply a microcosm of the larger Cosmos.<sup>viii</sup> The purpose behind the medical science of Ayurveda is to heal and to maintain quality and longevity in one’s life. Its tradition evolved from practical notions (such as utilizing the available natural resources of herbs, spices, and foods), philosophies, and spiritual illuminations—all dealing with the concept of creation and each person’s unique and individual body, mind, and consciousness. As is the case with all healing systems, Ayurveda has a basic philosophical foundation that is based upon the Shad Darshan, the Six Philosophies of Life; philosophies developed from the Vedic scripts and *sutras*<sup>x</sup> from Indian antiquity.<sup>x</sup>

The Shad Darshan<sup>xi</sup> are the six systems of Indian philosophy that deal with both inner and outer visions for an individual. The six components of the Shad Darshan are Sankhya, Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Mimamsa, Yoga and Vedanta. The first three systems deal with understanding everyday experience on a physical level whereas the latter three observe inner reality and focus on inner phenomena in order to understand and make sense of the outer reality.” The six systems represent six visions of life. They are ways of orienting with reality. Therefore, we translate Shad Darshan as Six Philosophies that Ayurveda accepts for the healing of mankind.”<sup>xii</sup> Sankhya is a philosophy to both discover and understand the Truth of life. Nyaya and Vaisheshika deal with logic and the importance of concrete evidence of reality. Mimamsa analyzes and understands the Truth, proposing the existence of a higher power. The philosophy of Yoga is the discipline of the union between the lower self and the higher Self, or the union between oneself and God. The final philosophy of Vedanta requires the letting go of one’s knowledge and quest for information as it is the only way to truly understand one’s own consciousness.<sup>xiii</sup> It is in this way that it is believed happiness and well-being can be achieved.

The five elements, or *mahabutas*, are a large component of the Vaisheshika philosophy. Everything in the cosmos is a manifestation of the five elements: Ether, Air, Fire, Water and Earth. *Rishis*, the poets who wrote and recorded the Vedic hymns, theorized that when the earth was created, there existed a state of Consciousness vibrating with the “soundless sound”<sup>xiv</sup> of *Aum*, and from this ethereal substance came the Ether element. The movement of Ether created Air, and the movement of air caused a friction that produced heat and light, giving rise to

Fire. When Fire's heat liquefied and cooled, Water was created, and the solidification of the water particles created Earth.<sup>xv</sup> Since all physical bodies and organic matter comes from the Earth, and the Earth is a product of the preceding four elements, the five elements exist within all matter of the Cosmos, including in humans.

Man is a microcosm of the universe and, therefore the five basic elements present in all matter also exist within each individual. In the human body, many spaces are aspects of the Ether element...All movements involve Air as an element, because it alone moves everything...In the human body, the source of Fire is metabolism...Water is vital for the functioning of all the systems of the body... In the body, all solid structures are derived from Earth.<sup>xvi</sup>

The five elements are the basic structure for everything within the Cosmos, and a person's ability and dedication to balancing and maintaining each element is the key to a healthy mind, body and consciousness. This is done through the prescription of the three bodily humors, or the Tridosha.

While all the elements are present in all universal matter, they aren't present in equal quantities or manifestations. Ayurvedic science groups the five elements into three basic types of energy that are present in absolutely everyone and everything: the Tridosha. The Tridosha are the three components that constitute a person's nature. The Tridosha consists of *vata*, the energy of movement, *pitta*, the energy of transformation, digestion and metabolism, and *kapha*, the energy of lubrication and structure.

As long as the *doshas* are normal in quality and [balanced in] quantity, they maintain a harmonious psychophysiology. The moment they go out of balance, they corrupt or pollute or vitiate the *dhatu*s (bodily tissues) and then they become *dosha* (here meaning impurity).<sup>xvii</sup>



The central purpose of Ayurveda is to maintain balance, and it is the combined work of the mind, body, and consciousness, the facets of one's being, that provide bodily balance.

In the Tridosha, every element is present in each *dosha*, however the mobile, active and transient elements of Air, Water and Fire are the predominant features of the *doshas*. *Vatta*, *pitta* and *kapha* are at the core of the foundation of Ayurveda. The humors of the body often referenced in classical Greek medicine, those of wind, bile and phlegm, are most likely an adaptation of Ayurvedic science. *Vatta* is predominantly composed of Air and Ether, *pitta* is Fire and Water, and *kapha* is Water and Earth. *Vatta* is the subtle energy exerted by and within a body such as breathing, blinking, motion within cells, and the heartbeat. When *vatta* is balanced, one may feel creative and flexible whereas out of balance, *vatta* can produce fear, anxiety, and strange movement. *Pitta* is expressed through the body's metabolic systems and all transformations. When balanced, one will have understanding and intelligence; imbalanced, anger, hatred and jealousy can arise. *Kapha* is Earth and Water and comprises the energy that creates the bodily structures and holds all of the cells together. Balanced *kapha* is expressed as love, calmness, and forgiveness whereas imbalanced *kapha* can lead to attachment, greed, and possessiveness.<sup>xviii</sup> Each of the three *doshas* contains specific attributes which contain potential energy within one's being. This potential energy can then be manifested in actions and become kinetic energy, thus it is very important to pay close attention to the *doshas* and respective attributes within and keep them in balance to produce proper action.

*Vatta*, *pitta*, and *kapha* each have their own attributes, and the names in fact only represent the grouping of those attributes (see Figure 1). For the sake of dietary prescription and healthy eating in Indian tradition, it is important to understand the attributes of the *doshas*, as they are the foundation of an individual's ability to maintain bodily balance. *Vatta* is the collection of dry, light, cold, rough, subtle, mobile, and clear qualities. *Pitta* is somewhat similar and contains qualities such as hot, sharp, light, liquid, mobile, and oily. *Kapha* on the other hand is the collection of heavy, slow, dull, cold, oily, liquid, slimy, dense, soft, static, and sticky and cloudy qualities. Ayurveda is the science of keeping all of these attributes in proper balance to maintain optimum health.

In Ayurveda, there is a law which states that like increases like. When similar qualities come together, their quantitative expression increases...The concepts governing Ayurvedic pharmacology, therapeutics and food preparation are based on the 20 attributes. Through an understanding and application of the actions of these attributes, balance of the Tridosha can be maintained. <sup>xix</sup>

Due to the law of like increasing like, balance in Ayurveda comes from the application of opposite forces and attributes to one's *doshas*. Each person's combination and proportions of *vatta*, *pitta* and *kapha* are different and are determined by factors such as genetics, diet, and lifestyle choices of the parents at the time of conception. It is at this time that an individual's combination of the *doshas*, or *prakruti*<sup>xx</sup> is established. Although each person's makeup is unique, with proper diet and lifestyle, each person can balance the Tridosha and maintain optimum health. Ayurveda is not a one-size-fits-all approach, but it is tradition and guide by which every individual, no matter his or her constitution, can apply the

principles of proper diet, cooking methods and lifestyle to achieve the life best suited to each.

**Table 1: The 20 Attributes and Their Relationship to the Tridosha<sup>xxi</sup>**

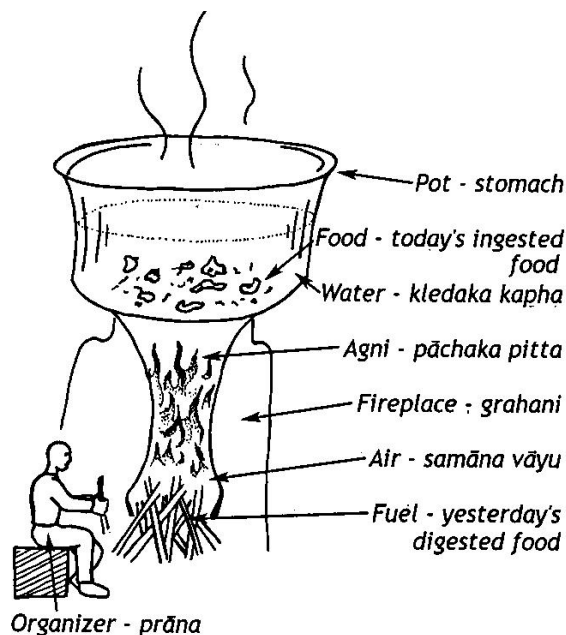
| Vata                                                       | Pitta                                             | Kapha                                                                                                                     |
|------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Dry<br>Light<br>Cold<br>Rough<br>Subtle<br>Mobile<br>Clear | Hot<br>Sharp<br>Light<br>Liquid<br>Mobile<br>Oily | Heavy<br>Slow/Dull<br>Cold<br>Oily<br>Liquid<br>Slimy/Smooth<br>Dense<br>Soft<br>Static<br>Sticky/Cloudy<br>Hard<br>Gross |
| Elements of the Tridosha                                   |                                                   |                                                                                                                           |
| Space & Air                                                | Fire & Water                                      | Water & Earth                                                                                                             |

In regards to nutrition and bodily health, one of the most critical elements to pay attention to within the body is Agni, the Fire element. *Agnideva* is a mythical deity from Vedic antiquity. He is represented as having three legs: one being the physical body, the second is the mental body and the third represents consciousness. From this deity it is known that Agni is the critical component to unifying and balancing energies and structures.<sup>xxii</sup> Agni governs all acts of transformation including digestion, absorption, assimilation and the transformation of food into energy. “Agni is the main source of life...In Ayurveda, we say a man is as old as his Agni...When the metabolic fire is robust, a person can live a long, healthy life. When Agni becomes slow, the person’s health deteriorates.”<sup>xxiii</sup> Ayurveda is the science pertaining to longevity which can only be maintained through health, and

that means an acute awareness of Agni. Ayurvedic medicine and dietary prescriptions center around the quality and status of one's internal Agni. Food represents life energy that can only be developed and utilized through the digestive fire of Agni. Agni is the element that performs all types of transformations and can be related to the process of cooking itself. Whereas cooking is an external transition for food, the same transition occurs within the body due to Agni. It is when Agni is out of balance that health and digestive problems will arise.

Many factors, such as detrimental lifestyle, diet, bad food combining, and repressed emotions can cause the bodily doshas to become aggravated. This soon disturbs Agni, with the result that food cannot be properly digested. The undigested food turns into a morbid, toxic sticky substance, called *ama*. *Ama* is the root cause of many diseases...Because of the critical importance of Agni in maintaining health, it is important to have balanced Agni. <sup>xxiv</sup>

Ultimately, Agni is the foremost principle that activates the digestive process and transforms the life contained within food into sensation and consciousness within a being.



**Figure 1<sup>xxv</sup>: Digestion (Agni) as preparing and cooking food**

The actual food that is consumed, as well as its quality, has an immediate and profound effect on one's *doshas* and therefore Agni. *Rasa* is the taste associated with the experience of consuming food. There are six main tastes, which are all permutations of the elements. Each taste, as with all things in the Cosmos, contain all of the elements, however like the *doshas*, the combination and predominance of various elements determines the nature of the taste. The six tastes are sweet, sour, salty, pungent, bitter, and astringent. The tastes that are dominant in the Fire, Air, and Ether elements are light and tend to move the doshic energies upwards in the body thus producing lightness. The tastes containing the Earth and Water elements are heavier and tend to move downwards producing heaviness in the lower parts of the body. Sweet and sour tastes tend to be heavier, salty is more balanced in the middle, whereas pungent, bitter and astringent tastes are lighter and will affect the *doshas* in the upper body *more* predominantly.

Every substance's unique combination of attributes will influence its actions in the body. Taste can have a longstanding effect on the doshas, creating either therapeutic or unbalancing actions on body and mind. Each taste has a psychological component, creating positive or negative influence, which becomes apparent with frequent usage.<sup>xxvi</sup>

According to Ayurvedic prescriptions, each taste is used either collectively or individually within a body to bring about a balance of all the bodily systems. When the tastes are employed properly in one's body according to their respective doshic makeup, happiness and good health will result; if used improperly or abused, harmful consequences will develop. Cravings for particular flavors or tastes are frequently experienced in those individuals who have imbalanced *doshas* and the presence of *ama*.<sup>xxvii</sup> A critical component of Ayurveda, stemming from the ancient

Vedic texts, is the ability to recognize and control a craving within one’s own body and know how to counteract the effects. According to *The Caraka Samhita*, one of the early Vedic texts<sup>xxviii</sup>,

Someone who desires what is good for him here and here and hereafter should suppress the urges towards impetuous and dishonourable deeds of mind, speech or body...An intelligent man should give up a bad habit...and adopt a good habit one step at a time.”<sup>xxix</sup>

In this case, the bad habit or the craving is for a taste that causes imbalance to one’s *doshas*, which can lead to impetuous or dishonorable actions and feelings.

**Table 2: Taste and the Five Elements<sup>xxx</sup>**

| Taste                | Predominant Elements |
|----------------------|----------------------|
| Sweet (madhura)      | Earth & Water        |
| Sour (amla)          | Earth & Fire         |
| Salty (lavana)       | Water & Fire         |
| Pungent (katu)       | Air & Fire           |
| Bitter (tikta)       | Air & Ether          |
| Astringent (kashaya) | Air & Earth          |

**Table 3: Effects of Tastes on the Doshas<sup>xxxi</sup>**

| Taste      | Effects <sup>a</sup> |     |     |
|------------|----------------------|-----|-----|
| Sweet      | V ↓                  | P ↓ | K ↑ |
| Sour       | V ↓                  | P ↑ | K ↑ |
| Salty      | V ↓                  | P ↑ | K ↑ |
| Pungent    | V ↑                  | P ↑ | K ↓ |
| Bitter     | V ↑                  | P ↓ | K ↓ |
| Astringent | V ↑                  | P ↓ | K ↓ |

a. ↑ = increases and may lead to aggravation, ↓ = decreases and calms

Ayurveda regards food and its role in daily life and bodily, mental and conscious health in an intricate manner. In the same way that the *doshas* have unique attributes such as dry, hot or heavy, so too does each kind of food. The qualities in a particular person combine with the qualities inherent in the different types of food. This determines how an individual's body will receive, process and reflect the food. Sometimes it will be through acceptance, when the food balances the *doshas*, and other times it will be rejected, causing imbalanced *doshas* and negative mental or bodily consequences.

Ayurveda offers a logical approach for determining a correct diet based upon an individual's constitution. This approach is quite different from the current Western definition of a balanced diet, based on eating proportionately from various food groups. Ayurveda believes that understanding the individual is key to finding a truly balanced diet. It teaches that Agni in the digestive tract is the main gate through which nutrients enter the tissues and then pass along to individual cells, maintaining the life functions.<sup>xxxii</sup>

The Ayurvedic approach to health and nutrition deals with each individual person's constitution, as every person is unique. The dietary needs of one person will not necessarily match that of another, thus the prescription of a healthy diet for each individual is different. There are general guidelines and a logical approach that each practitioner can follow and apply to his or her exclusive doshic makeup. Generally speaking, when the qualities of a particular food and are similar to the qualities of a *dosha*, the food will exacerbate that *dosha*. It is opposite attributes that are balancing. This is the fundamental principle upon which food is chosen and prescribed in Ayurveda. Ayurvedic doctors use the process of food combining and prescription of a proper diet for one's constitution to combat many of the ailments that are common in the West. "Food combining and inappropriate diet for the

constitution are of special importance. It is no surprise to see on the market today so many digestive aids, along with pills for gas and indigestion. Most of these conditions begin with poor food combining.”<sup>xxxiii</sup> Incompatible food combinations not only disturb digestive Agni and the *doshas*, but also can lead to many different ailments. It is very common in Ayurveda to combine foods with opposite attributes during the cooking process and on the plate so that the meal starts as balanced before even being consumed. For instance, often cooling cilantro is added to a hot, spicy food to balance the *doshas* and help with proper digestion balance. Antidotes can be implemented, such as adding black pepper to potatoes to alleviate some of the negative doshic effects associated with the latter. <sup>xxxiv</sup> When it is known that the ultimate fate of one’s food is to be transformed into personal harmony of the body and soul, a great attention to quality and propriety is applied.

The setup of the typical Indian kitchen and the regard and respect given to the cook is an additional aspect that combines with the outline of Ayurveda and highlights food as something to be revered. The kitchen is a very humble but sacred place. Often nothing but a few simple culinary tools will adorn a kitchen, for the emphasis is on the individual and the quality of the actual ingredients. This unique attention to the kitchen and the cook is written about in *The Susruta Samhita*.<sup>xxxv</sup>

Someone who has most of the same virtues as a doctor should be appointed as supervisor [of the kitchen and food]...Living beings depend on food, so the doctor should be very conscientious where the kitchens are concerned. The kitchen staff, including bearers, chefs...and whoever else might be there, must all be under the strict control of the doctor.<sup>xxxvi</sup>

*Susruta* outlines just how important and critical food, nutrition and a properly respected kitchen are when he compares the kitchen and chef to the stature of a



doctor. Essentially, in Ayurveda, that is what food and cooking is. One can be his or her own doctor and prescribe themselves proper food choices to be free of ailments.

**Table 4: Examples of attributes of Certain Foods<sup>xxxvii</sup>**

| Attribute     | Food                        | Attribute     | Food                               |
|---------------|-----------------------------|---------------|------------------------------------|
| <b>Heavy</b>  | Meat, cheese, peanuts       | <b>Light</b>  | Rice, popcorn, sprouts, ginger     |
| <b>Cold</b>   | Wheat, milk, mint           | <b>Hot</b>    | Chili pepper, alcohol, eggs        |
| <b>Oily</b>   | Cheese, avocado, coconut    | <b>Dry</b>    | Millet, rye, dry cereal            |
| <b>Slow</b>   | Meat, yogurt, tofu          | <b>Sharp</b>  | Chili pepper, ginger, mustard      |
| <b>Stable</b> | Ghee, dry grains, dry beans | <b>Mobile</b> | Alcohol, sprouts, popcorn          |
| <b>Slimy</b>  | Yogurt, avocado, ghee       | <b>Rough</b>  | Salad, popcorn, raw vegetables     |
| <b>Dense</b>  | Cheese, meat, coconut       | <b>Liquid</b> | Milk, fruit juice, vegetable juice |
| <b>Soft</b>   | Ghee, avocado, oils         | <b>Hard</b>   | Coconut, almonds, sesame seeds     |
| <b>Gross</b>  | Meat, cheese, mushrooms     | <b>Subtle</b> | Ghee, honey, alcohol               |
| <b>Cloudy</b> | Yogurt, cheese, urad dal    | <b>Clear</b>  | Water, algae, veg. juice           |

Ayurveda is a tradition that places the upmost respect and importance upon proper food and nutrition standards as the means to a happy and healthy life. When a person eats the right foods for his or her *doshic* constitution, the body, mind and consciousness will be balanced. The knowledge that everything within the Cosmos is interrelated is a powerful notion and Ayurveda deals with how one can find proper truth and become balanced within nature. Ayurvedic cooking combines science with art and is highly personalized allowing each individual to use knowledge of one’s own body and knowledge of unique and wholesome ingredients to create a balanced and seductive meal.<sup>xxxviii</sup> The *sutra* of Vagbhata Sutrasthana captures the essence of Ayurveda and food consciousness in India. “That person who always eats wholesome food, enjoys a regular lifestyle, remains unattached to

the objects of the senses, gives and forgives, loves truth, and serves others, is  
without disease.”<sup>xxxix</sup>

## Ayurvedic Recipes:

### **Barley with Basil & Avocado<sup>xl</sup>**



#### **Ayurvedic notes:**

- Vata balancing meal.
- Sharp basil aids digestion.
- Barley is heavy and smooth and provokes kapha.

#### **Ingredients:**

1 cup avocado  
¼ cup barley  
1 tbsp basil  
1/8 tsp black pepper  
1/8 tsp mineral salt  
3 c water

#### **Preparation:**

1. Boil the barley with 1 tsp pepper & salt. As water comes to a boil, reduce heat and stir accordingly.
2. Peel, dice and mash avocado until green color is consistent, blended & soft.
3. Once softened, remove barley from heat and allow to cool. When cool, coarsely chop barley. Gently mix avocado & basil blend in with the grains, being careful not to mash the barley.

### **Buttery Carrot Soup<sup>xli</sup>**



#### **Ayurvedic notes:**

- Pitta balancing meal.
- Simple to digest & fatty.
- Helps to fix any imbalance.
- May aggravate kapha due to oil.

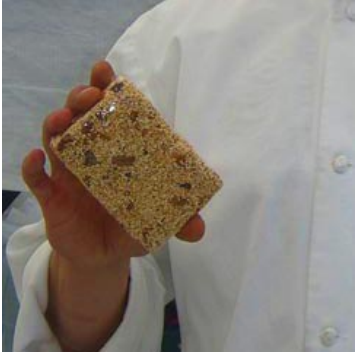
#### **Ingredients:**

1 bay leaf  
1/8 tsp black pepper  
2 tbsp butter  
4 whole carrots  
1 clove garlic  
¼ tsp mineral salt  
1 tsp fresh thyme  
4 cups water  
¼ cup yellow onion

#### **Preparation:**

1. Sauté onions in butter. Add garlic & continue to sauté until just brown.
2. Puree carrots with onions & garlic in a blender with the water.
3. Add with remaining ingredients to a pot and boil for 15 minutes.
4. Serve.

## Popped Amaranth Bar with Honey & Dried Fruit<sup>xliii</sup>



### Ayurvedic notes:

- Kapha balancing meal.
- Dense & dry, so must be chewed well for digestion.
- May aggravate Vata unless followed with water.
- Compact, light snack.

### Ingredients:

- ½ cup almonds
- 8 whole apricots (dried)
- 1 tsp cinnamon
- 8 whole dates (dried)
- ¼ cup honey
- ¼ cup amaranth

### Preparation:

1. Heat a frying pan on high for 2-3 minutes. Test a few grains of amaranth. If they pop immediately, it's ready. Put in enough amaranth to cover bottom of pan, cover, and shake. When popping slows (as with popcorn) it's finished. Pour into a mixing bowl.
2. Add all remaining ingredients to bowl and mix well. Shape into bars.

### Notes:

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<sup>i</sup> Katz, Solomon H., ed. 609.

<sup>ii</sup> Katz, Solomon H., ed. 611.

<sup>iii</sup> Achaya, K. T. 18-19.

<sup>iv</sup> Achaya, K. T. 27.

<sup>v</sup> Achaya, K. T. 28.

<sup>vi</sup> Achaya, K. T. 28.

<sup>vii</sup> Achaya, K. T. 68.

<sup>viii</sup> Lad, Vasant. 1.

<sup>ix</sup> A *sutra* is a small phrase or saying.

<sup>x</sup> Lad, Vasant. 2.

<sup>xi</sup> There are many subsets to each of the philosophies of the Shad Darshan, but for the sake of this analysis, only some of those found in the Vaisheshika philosophical outline.

<sup>xii</sup> Lad, Vasant. 4.

<sup>xiii</sup> Lad, Vasant. 5-20.

<sup>xiv</sup> Lad, Vasant. 25.

<sup>xv</sup> Lad, Vasant. 26.

<sup>xvi</sup> Lad, Vasant. 26-27.

<sup>xvii</sup> Lad, Vasant. 29.

<sup>xviii</sup> Lad, Vasant. 30.

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- xix Lad, Vasant. 30.
- xx *Prakruti* is the unique psychophysical makeup and functional habits of a person that is determined at conception.
- xxi Table 1 courtesy of: Lad, Vasant. 31.
- xxii Lad, Vasant. 82.
- xxiii Lad, Vasant. 81.
- xxiv Lad, Vasant. 90.
- xxv Image courtesy of: Vasant, Lad. 85.
- xxvi Lad, Vasant. 242.
- xxvii *Ama* is a morbid, toxic substance that develops in the body due to improper, indigestible foods within one's body. *Ama* is the cause of many diseases within a person.
- xxviii This early text is called *Caraka's Compendium*. It is the text recorded by an Indian physician and philosopher, Caraka, with which classical medicine in India really begins.
- xxix Wujastyk, Dominik. 17-18.
- xxx Table 2 courtesy of: Lad, Vasant. 241.
- xxxi Table 3 courtesy of: Lad, Vasant. 249.
- xxxii Lad, Vasant. 263.
- xxxiii Lad, Vasant. 264.
- xxxiv Lad, Vasant. 265.
- xxxv Susruta is an early Ayurvedic philosopher and scientist and his musings are compiled in this Vedic text called *Susruta's Compendium*.
- xxxvi Wujastyk, Dominik. 133.
- xxxvii Table 4 courtesy of: Lad, Vasant. 262.
- xxxviii Sahni, Julie. 3.
- xxxix Lad, Vasant. 285.
- xl Recipe and image courtesy of: Immel, John J. and TheJoyfulBelly.com
- xli Recipe and image courtesy of: Immel, John J. and TheJoyfulBelly.com
- lii Recipe and image courtesy of: Immel, John J. and TheJoyfulBelly.com

## Chapter 2: China and Daoism

There is perhaps no other country in the world that is as focused on food as China. Some cultures do not recognize that food is more than a simply a vital substance, but not the Chinese. Chinese food is not only varied, but China as a country and culture has some of the oldest historically documented food relationships and traditions. Chinese history in general is one of the most detailed and longest, recorded with texts, artifacts and other anthropological data that date back to before 7000 B.C.E., with food, health and nutrition constituting a large part of philosophical and lifestyle practices.<sup>i</sup> In Chinese thought and practice, food has always been equated to happiness and longevity. It is a culture that has, since its antiquity, been grounded in the concept that good food promotes health and wellbeing and that nothing is more essential in achieving these than proper eating. Furthermore, unlike some other traditions that developed and/or were documented later than those of China, the Chinese were the earliest to recognize the medical properties that existed in their foodstuffs and agriculture of their natural surroundings. “If there is one central theme that runs through Chinese literature on the relationship between diet and health it is the concept of ‘*Yao shi tung yuan*’, that is to say, ‘medicine and food share a common origin.’”<sup>ii</sup> With such a concept being

prevalent throughout a country's extensive history, it is no surprise that there is no culture that is as concerned and acutely aware of the quality and variety of foods to be eaten.

China is a large agricultural country whose dynastic history has experienced periods of famine, wealth, social inequity, and further more tragic circumstances resulting in massive death tolls. In the earliest years of Chinese civilization, the two main populations existed in the northern drier region as well as a separate community in the more arid southern region. Grains were the staple of the north, whereas in the more fertile lands of the south, a larger variety of foods such as vegetables, fruits and herbs were also cultivated.<sup>iii</sup> These civilizations gradually grew together producing one of the world's largest populations. As the population grew, the amount of arable land in China remained constant, roughly 11% of the total land mass.<sup>iv</sup> It is often questioned how one of the most populous countries today manages to feed its people. The answer lies in the intricate and unique food and health practices of the Chinese people that have persisted through ancient times until the present.

To the Chinese, nothing is more important than eating. That mindset, plus their understanding of their own food history, helps the Chinese know where and how food is procured, prepared and presented. They understand who eats what and why...The Chinese understand that food [is] basic and critical.<sup>v</sup>

With this grounding attitude on the importance of food coupled with a knowledge of how to make the most of natural resources, the Chinese have managed to survive great environmental hardships and to adapt to a constantly evolving food culture, yet not lose sight of the importance of health and food, as that is ultimately the key to happiness and security.

There are three traditional concepts of great importance to the Chinese and their food practices: (1) the *fan-cai* principle, (2) frugality, and (3) refraining from processing foods, or in other words, resolving to eat whole and natural provisions.<sup>vi</sup> First, the *fan-cai* principle dates back to the earliest eating traditions of the marriage between northern and southern eating practices. In the north where grains were most prevalent, the *fan* principle was developed. *Fan* foods are those staple foods in the Chinese diet such as rice, wheat, millet, and noodles. *Cai* foods are those that add flavor and experience to a meal such as vegetables, herbs and occasionally meats.<sup>vii</sup> In the Chinese belief,

To prepare a balanced meal, it must have an appropriate amount of both *fan* and *ts'ai*<sup>viii</sup>, and ingredients are radiated along both tracks...Without *fan* one cannot be full, but without *ts'ai* the meal is merely less tasteful.<sup>ix</sup>

An appropriate balance of *fan*, staple grains to fill the belly, and *cai* foods to add flavor and other nutrients is the foundation of a healthy diet.

Second, frugality also plays a large role in shaping Chinese culinary practices. Overindulgence in food stores and hoarding more than is necessary has historically been considered an offense of grand proportions. Due to the fast growing population and the lack of arable land needed to produce varied foods, rationality was a key component to the Chinese diet.

Overindulgence is a sin of such proportions that dynasties could fall on its account. At the individual level, the ideal amount for every meal, as every Chinese parent would say, is only *ch'i fen pao* ('seventy percent full').<sup>x</sup>

Although it can be concluded that China's history of poverty and famine could have led to the concept of frugality with food, another aspect that plays an important role is the sacred nature of *fan* foods, like grains, in traditional Chinese folklore.<sup>xi</sup> These



reasons, combined with an overwhelming awareness of physical health established the notion of portion control. Eating proper portions is a critical, and arguably one of the most important aspects to maintaining a healthy body. Not only do the Chinese find it important to eat smaller, more appropriate dietary portions, but the portions of *fan* and *cai* foods are always well balanced compared to each other, as well.

Third, over-processing<sup>xii</sup> of foods has long been avoided in Chinese food and health practices leading to a diet composed of whole and natural sustenance. Throughout China's dynastic periods, it is clear that there were occasions of great technological and agricultural progress, yet these processes of innovation never seemed to greatly extend into the food consumption realm. "While the Emperors of China had always been supportive of improvements in agriculture, they were much less interested in the technology of food processing."<sup>xiii</sup> Save for the proliferation of fermenting foods as a natural form of preservation, the Chinese have largely consumed fresh and simple food.

Basalla<sup>xiv</sup> plays down the role of necessity in the evolution of technology...Plants and animals are able to grow and even thrive without human intervention, and because food need not be processed before it is fit for human consumption, [technology] ha[s] devised wholly unnecessary techniques.<sup>xv</sup>

There are many cases in which the ancient Chinese encountered new technologies or potential advancements in various realms; when it came to food however, it was not to be meddled with or manipulated from its natural form. Continuing the tradition of non-meddling in food processing, the Chinese remain a very healthy people to this day.

What produced did the intense and ever-present focus on health and longevity? How is it that these concepts are so engrained in the minds of the Chinese throughout the history of their civilization? The answer lies in the philosophies and philosophers of ancient China, particularly those who comprised the Daoist Body. This “Great Body of the Ancients” founded the art of the Dao, the philosophy that has come to be known today as the Daoist religion.<sup>xvi</sup> Daoism emerged at a time when questions about the origins and meaning of humanity were being raised. “Taoism<sup>xvii</sup> originated in Ancient China at the times of the first emergence of philosophical thinking and of the general inquiry into the nature of humanity and the meaning of life.”<sup>xviii</sup> No two philosophers are credited with the proliferation of Daoist thought than Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu. While it is difficult to pinpoint the exact origin of this mysterious tradition, Lao Tzu, fondly referred to as “Old Master”, is the supposed author of the *Dao De Jing* (also known as *The Laozi*), *The Book of the Way* and its *Virtue*.<sup>xix</sup> At the heart of this philosophical manual lies the definition of the *Dao* and its principles. However, the mysterious nature of the *Dao* is that it is in itself ineffable.

By definition, the Tao is indefinable and can be apprehended only in it's infinitely multiple aspects. A principle at once transcendent and immanent, the Tao is unnameable, ineffable, yet present in all things. It is far more than a mere “principle”...the spontaneous process regulating the natural cycle of the universe.<sup>xx</sup>

During the days of the Old Master, to have prescribed a name to this philosophy and the “way” to which it refers would be intrinsically against the *Dao*, however the naming came with the proliferation of the philosophy throughout Chinese culture. Placing a constraining name and definition is inherently un-*Dao*, however with the

rise of followers, along with the transition Daoism experienced from philosophy to a more distinct religion, prescribing a name to this collection of philosophies and concepts was and is necessary for the study of how it infiltrates nearly every aspect of Chinese life.



**Figure 1<sup>xxi</sup>: Chinese character *dao*, meaning "way"**

It is important to note that while Daoism began as a philosophy and not a religion, it developed into a practiced religion, and one that allows for the study of diet, hygiene, and forms of physical activity that promote the ultimate goal of longevity. However, even in the religious form of Daoism, it is the spirituality and mindset, and the inherent lack of rigid structure and that keeps with the essence of the *Dao*.

The Tao may make whole, but is not itself the Whole...It succeeds in this not by adhering to any formula or doctrine, but by modeling itself on the Tao and its effect in the reality closest to us, in our own physical bodies. "The Tao is not far off; it is here in my body," say the sages.<sup>xxii</sup>

This absence of definition, structure and concrete explanation is the essence of Daoism that allows it to permeate all aspects of Chinese life. Each person can individually experience the *Dao* in his or her own way. One can practice Daoism in

an individual manner and follow the *Dao* without any conscious notion of religion or of being under a concrete governing authority.

Studies of ancient China have come to a single conclusion about the nature of Daoism and, while indefinable and mysterious in its nature, there is an overwhelming notion that following the *Dao* produces longevity. One should call upon a vast range of personal and philosophical practices for tending life in the quest for immortality.<sup>xxiii</sup> Relics have been unearthed from past dynasties suggesting the sacredness of immortality, such as shrouds adorned with images of “the flight of the body towards the land of bliss”, as well as funerary vases with intricate inscriptions referring to the everlasting next life.<sup>xxiv</sup> From antiquity through modern times, one of the most expressive means of following the *Dao* is through health and medical practices.

It is present in today’s China is manifold...ways. One of the major forms it is to be found is in the present widespread enthusiasm for the health and longevity practices that go under the name of *ch’i-kung* (spelled *qigong* in modern Chinese transcription)...Thus Taoism remains present, today as in former times, in the daily life of the people and maintains its highest goal: Long Life.<sup>xxv</sup>

The health practices of *qigong* promoted by Daoism bring up an essential component of the body as perceived by Daoist practitioners, the concept of the creation of the earth, humans and *qi*.

The Old Master and other early Daoist philosophers did not worship any divinities, nor did they believe in any one omnipotent supernatural power. What the *Dao* represents is the many creatures that are present in the cosmos. In the Daoist sense, soul is not equivalent to the Western notion of the soul. Soul refers to the various energies in the macrocosm of the universe. These energies are rooted in the

Daosit concept of cosmology, whereby the heavens and earth began with primordial chaos containing the entire universe, in a potential state called *qi*.<sup>xxvi</sup> At some given point, the chaotic matrices converged thus freeing the *qi* contained within. The lighter, translucent *qi* rose to the heavens and the heavier, solid *qi* fell to form the earth, and those *qi* established the polarity of the heaven and earth, and where they converge in the middle is where humans developed.<sup>xxvii</sup> Due to humans existing within the energetic field of the heavens and earth, they do not hold a unique, individual space in Daoist thought but are simply a part of the greater macrocosm of creation.

In this creation, the human being occupies no special position, except that of the most complex conglomerate, incorporating all the differentiated energies of the universe, which according to an ancient Taoist ritual formula gives him [the bodily components].<sup>xxviii</sup>

This notion explains the Daoist view of interconnectedness and unity among all beings and components of the cosmos. From one came two, and two would not have been possible without the one. The process of creation does proceeds from unity to multiplicity; the multiplicity that exists within each more complex being can be traced back to the original energetic unit. This is what the Daoists know as bipolar change. Unity and multiplicity exist because of one another, they are in a symbiotic relationship. The presence of one automatically gives rise to its opposite, and the opposite justifies and promotes a return to the original. This is how the Daoists apply the logic of infinite regress of humans to the very origin of the universe.<sup>xxix</sup> It is the responsibility of the individual to then follow the *Dao* to harness the chaos of his or her own *qi* and make sense of it.

From this theory of heavy and light *qi* come the fundamental phases of the *Dao's* action, *yin* and *yang*. *Yin* and *yang* are two distinct actions of the *Dao* as it exists in its cyclical nature and together create the two laws of Chinese cosmology, and from them stems all actions and compositions of every microcosm. *Yin* represents the metaphorical northern-facing slope of a mountain—the sunlit side. *Yang*, *contrarily*, is the southern-facing slope and the shadier side of the mountain of bliss, the mountain that represents transcendence and eternal life. *Yin* and *yang* serve to designate cold and hot, moon and sun, soft and hard, feminine and masculine, death and life. Their complementary opposition exists in everything and their alternation is the first law of Chinese cosmology: when *yin* reaches its apex, it changes into *yang*, and vice versa.<sup>xxx</sup>



**Figure 2: The Taijitu (Diagram of Ultimate Power)<sup>xxx</sup>**

This first law of Chinese cosmology shows how the transformation of energy in the cosmos is ceaseless and continuous, and explains the creation of the Five Elements or Phases, present in all things as *yin* and *yang*. Water represents *yin* and Fire *yang*. Wood and metal are the two intermediate phases and earth, the fifth element that

joins the other four together. These elements and their presence in the cosmos lead to the second law of Chinese cosmology: each element creates another, and in opposition, each can destroy the other. “Water produces Wood; Wood, Fire; Fire, Earth; Earth, Metal; Metal, Water. Opposite this productive cycle stands the destructive cycle.”<sup>xxxii</sup> The destructive cycle is similar in that Water destroys Fire; Fire destroys Metal; Metal, Wood; Wood, Earth, and Earth, Water.<sup>xxxiii</sup> If one is able to harness his or her *qi* and follow the *Dao*, just as an Ayurvedic practitioner may harness his or her Agni, the Five Elements and *yin* and *yang* will be balanced and appropriately cyclical, leading towards the goal of health, happiness and longevity.

Daoism is not exclusive and its very nature is that it exists within everything in the cosmos, making it a philosophy open to any person, and has proven to be extant in current Chinese society. The human body is naturally receptive to *yin* and *yang* and one must only turn his or her eyes within and examine the inner landscape. Through a mindful practice and the following of the *Dao*, the right path and proper health will follow for each person.

“Of all beings, the human is the most spiritual,” say the Taoist texts, for with a round head (like Heaven), square feet (like Earth), five viscera (like the planets) and so many other points of correspondence, every person has innumerable points of correlation with the surrounding universe...He or she is able to preserve this body...as well as to work towards its perfection by conscious, directed action. Thus, each person can not only live a healthy life, but also radiate energy, that is, become transcendent.<sup>xxxiv</sup>

Proper action and the following of the *Dao* is different for each person and is neither right nor wrong, just unique. One of the premier ways in which one can properly follow the *Dao* is to examine one’s own body, its inner landscape, and to care for it through proper nourishment. The body, a microcosm of the macrocosm, is meant to

reflect, in all respects, the balance of the outer world, and to reflect it properly. When one knows his or her own inner *yin-yang* constitution, it can be balanced through utilization of the natural environment in which he or she exists. This harmony is achieved through various means such as controlled breathing, intricate and pointed bodily movements, and perhaps most importantly, diet.

Diet is an essential component of following the *Dao* and of how to become long-lived or even immortal. “The proper choice food is *the way* of maintaining bodily harmony—specifically, balancing *ch’i*<sup>xxxv</sup>...by appropriate manipulation of hot or cold foods.”<sup>xxxvi</sup> Diet is a realistic and down to earth measure in which one can maintain balance and work towards transcendence. Perhaps the earliest volume to explain the importance of proper diet in Daoism dates back to 3000 B.C.E., the Yellow Emperor’s Classic of Medicine. This text explains how absolutely everything within the macrocosm is under the influence *yin and yang*, thus the qualities related to *yin* and *yang* are present within each human body, as well as within the sustenance they eat. He alluded to the notion that the Five Elements, also composed of *yin* and *yang*, constitute the various food groupings and the Five Tastes, all of which must be consumed so as to balance one’s own inner constitution with that of the outer universe.

Then and now, the Chinese believe that food relates to health and that illness is a disharmony within the body...The correct foods aid life and health and assure longevity. [The Yellow Emperor] wrote about foods, rules and ethics, and what and how to eat...He expanded upon the interplay of...*yin* and *yang*. He considered their duality important for order and harmony in the universe and in the human being.<sup>xxxvii</sup>

Related to this notion of balancing foods (such as when one consumes *yin* foods to help stabilize an increasingly *yang* constitution), there are also strengthening foods



(such as beef, tofu, and legumes)<sup>xxxviii</sup>—foods that build one’s *qi* such that the vital functions of the body can be carried out effectively and harmoniously.<sup>xxxix</sup>

The foods consumed by the Chinese as prescribed by the Daoist texts are whole, natural foods that exist within one’s own environment, typically a combination of grains, vegetables, fruits and occasionally meats, the categories that relate back to the *fan-cai* principle of food. Within the categories of *fan* and *cai*, the foods contain *yin* and *yang* qualities. *Fan* foods tend to be primarily *yin*, and *cai* foods typically add *yang* qualities to a dish. It is primarily within *cai* that the tastes are explored and implemented. The Five Tastes are bitter, sour, sweet, salty, and pungent. These tastes are associated with relevant bodily organs, elements, colors and aromas—all connected through the principles of *yin* and *yang*. Thus, food is medicinal in this sense as the constitutions of foods and their respective tastes serve to balance the constitutions of the body.

Th[e Daoist] approach of “you are what you eat” truly speaks to China’s ancient food and health traditions...The five elements are a part of everything, including nutrition, health and medicine...Each of these elements is associated with body parts and body pathways. Therefore, together these interrelationships determine not only direction but also actions of food and herbs when consumed.<sup>xl</sup>

The Daoist belief is that salty foods are cooling, sweet foods and herbs are tonifying and nutritious, pungent foods mobilize and disperse blood through the body and balance blood temperature, bitter foods are cooling and direct food downward, and finally sour foods instigate sweating. This tradition understands, too, that heating (performed by foods like raspberries and cinnamon) and cooling (performed by foods like asparagus or egg)<sup>xli</sup>, *yin* and *yang*, are both physical and philosophical principles and have an effect on one’s both physical and spiritual health.

**Table 1. Chinese Foods, Organs and Elements<sup>xlii</sup>**

| Elements    | Fire            | Wood        | Earth       | Metal           | Water    |
|-------------|-----------------|-------------|-------------|-----------------|----------|
| Yin Organs  | Heart           | Liver       | Spleen      | Lungs           | Kidney   |
| Yang Organs | Small Intestine | Gallbladder | Stomach     | Large Intestine | Bladder  |
| Colors      | Red             | Green       | Yellow      | White           | Black    |
| Aromas      | Scorched        | Rancid      | Fragrant    | Goatlike        | Putrid   |
| Animals     | Horse           | Chicken     | Cow         | Dog             | Pig      |
| Fruits      | Apricot         | Plum        | Date        | Pear            | Chestnut |
| Grains      | Sweet Rice      | Wheat       | Millet      | Rice            | Legumes  |
| Tastes      | Bitter          | Sour        | Sweet       | Pungent         | Salty    |
| Herbs       | Tangerine Peel  | Magnolia    | Orange Peel | Ginseng         | Licorice |
| Other Foods | Ginger          | Sugar       | Vinegar     | Lemon           | Salt     |

Food not only provides balance to one's inner *yin* and *yang*, but it also has a great effect on a person's *qi* and his or her inner vitality—the ability to swiftly and harmoniously move towards immortality. This is why Daoists and practitioners of traditional Chinese medicine do not separate food from medicine; its healing properties and profound effects on the very essence of a person are engrained in Chinese society. Too many heating foods with intrinsic *yang* qualities, such as carrots, leeks, eggs, chicken and red meat<sup>xliii</sup> can put a damper on *qi* and thwart it, pushing it downwards in the body and making one heavy and sluggish. Consuming too many cooling foods, those with a high content of *yin* qualities, such as watercress, seaweeds, fish and other seafood<sup>xliv</sup> can elevate and stimulate *qi* to rise too high in the body causing one to feel aloof, confused and anxious.<sup>xlv</sup> One must consume a diet that will balance his or her constitution and keep the inner *qi* harmonious with the *qi* of the cosmos.

**Table 2: Yin (cold), Yang (hot), and Neutral Foods<sup>xlvi</sup>**

| Yin (cold) Foods              | Yang (hot) Foods | Neutral Foods    |
|-------------------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Agar agar                     | Brown sugar      | Carrots          |
| Banana                        | Chicken egg      | Cauliflower      |
| Bean sprouts                  | Chicken fat      | Cherries         |
| Bitter melon                  | Garlic           | Dates            |
| Clams                         | Ginger           | Frog             |
| Crab                          | Green pepper     | Hot boiled water |
| Cucumber                      | Goose meat       | Pigeon meat      |
| Dried Chinese black mushrooms | Oyster sauce     | Pine nuts        |
| Green tea                     | Pomegranate      | Pork blood       |
| Hawthorn                      | Pork liver       | Red or black tea |
| Shrimp                        | Sesame paste     | Rice gruel       |
| Silk squash                   | Sticky rice      | Soy sauce        |
| Snake meat                    | Taro             | Tea eggs         |
| Soy bean milk                 | Walnuts          | Wheat flour      |
|                               | Wintermelon      |                  |

Beyond the concept of *yin* and *yang*, there is one other critical classification of food as it related to *qi* and maintaining bodily harmony—the principle of *bu*. *Bu* foods are those that can revitalize and stimulate floundering or unharmonious *qi*. Foods that are *bu* are easily digestible, are protein rich, and often have a variety and abundance of minerals. Most animals are *bu*, but only when cooked for a long time, either steamed or simmered very slowly and combined with herbs. The Chinese do not frequently indulge in meats. Animal meat is eaten to balance *qi* when it has become unsuitable. <sup>xlvi</sup>

The Daoist belief is that the most constant thing in the universe is change and all things are transient. That is why food is varied and consumed at particular time or during particular circumstances to keep the body in harmony with the change that occurred in the greater macrocosm. <sup>xlvi</sup> Seasonality is a critical component of the Daoist diet. When the seasons in the exterior world change, so do the qualities within one’s body, and eating seasonally appropriate food (such as heating foods in

the winter and cooling in the summer) is the way in which a person can keep him or herself balanced with natural cycles of the macrocosm.

The ancient philosophy of Daoism is one that is greatly concerned with longevity, referring to the ideal goal of life as becoming immortal. These traditional beliefs that have extended themselves and have become engrained in nearly every facet of modern Chinese culture have kept people healthy, provided them with both physical and philosophical energy and have grounded an entire nation of diverse peoples in a common spiritual nature. Through the various texts of ancient philosophers such as the Old Master Lao-tzu and the Yellow Emperor, the Chinese have learned from empirical evidence and philosophical notions on how to maintain a balanced diet and a healthy lifestyle, thus harmonizing the microcosm of the body with the macrocosm of the greater universe at large. The Daoist tradition has ensured that the people of China and those who follow the Dao enjoy good health and are able to live fully and happily to a wonderful old age.

## Daoist Recipes:

### Roasted Vegetables<sup>xlix</sup>



#### Daoist Notes:

- Combination of both starchy and non-starchy foods makes digestion easy.
- Sweetness of yams & beets is balanced by bitterness of cabbage & parsnip.
- A wide variety of colors and flavors makes this neither *yin* heavy nor *yang* heavy. It is a neutral dish.

#### Ingredients:

2 large yams  
3 medium beets  
½ head Chinese cabbage, chopped  
6 small-medium parsnips

#### Preparation:

1. Bake the yams and beets at 350 for 2 hours or until tender.
2. Let cool and peel and roughly chop.
3. Bake the parsnips at 350 for 30 minutes or until tender; chop.
4. Bake the cabbage for 12-15 minutes at 350.
5. Toss altogether.

### Quick Spirulina Salad<sup>i</sup>



#### Daoist Notes:

- Easily digestible.
- *Bu*, protein comes from the spirulina—*qi* building.
- Bitter lettuce, sweet carrot, pungent mint all balance each other to not distort a *yin-yang* balance.

#### Ingredients:

Baby spring greens mix  
Corn  
Peas  
Broccoli  
Parsley  
Mint  
Spirulina, powdered

#### Preparation:

1. Lay a bed of greens.
2. Top with the vegetables, parsley & mint.
3. Sprinkle with spirulina.

## Cinnamon Amaretto Crackers<sup>li</sup>



### Daoist Notes:

- Easily digestible.
- Ingredients are all of a similar elemental constitution, so if eaten in moderation, it will not distort *yin* or *yang*.
- The sugar is made of natural brown rice—sticks to principle of no processing.
- Light, and will stimulate *qi* if eaten in moderation.

### Ingredients:

2 cups whole-wheat flour  
4 tbsp brown rice syrup  
6 tbsp amaretto  
½ tsp cinnamon

### Preparation:

1. Mix all ingredients together in a large bowl.
2. Gather dough into a ball and roll out with a floured roller.
3. Bake at 350 for 20 minutes, flip crackers, and bake for another 10 minutes

### Notes:

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<sup>i</sup> Newman, Jacqueline M. xi.

<sup>ii</sup> Needham, Joseph M. 571.

<sup>iii</sup> Newman, Jacqueline M. 1-3.

<sup>iv</sup> Newman, Jacqueline M. 4.

<sup>v</sup> Newman, Jacqueline M. 4, 10.

<sup>vi</sup> Chang, Kwang-chih. 9-10.

<sup>vii</sup> Chang, Kwang-chih. 5.

<sup>viii</sup> *Ts'ai* is the Wade-Giles transliteration of the Chinese character. It has been replaced by the newer, more widely accepted Pinyin transliteration, *cai*.

<sup>ix</sup> Chang, Kwang-chih. 7, 10.

<sup>x</sup> Chang, Kwang-chih. 10.

<sup>xi</sup> Chang, Kwang-chih. 11.

<sup>xii</sup> Processing in the ancient Chinese sense does not equate to processing in the current Western sense. Here it means overly refining grains and manipulating foods into a state far from the way the earth creates them, excluding slight cooking techniques.

<sup>xiii</sup> Needham, Joseph M. 596.

<sup>xiv</sup> George Basalla is an economic historian of the 1980's.

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- xv Needham, Joseph M. 602.
- xvi Schipper, Kristofer. ix.
- xvii Taosim is the Wade-Giles transliteration of the Chinese character. It has been replaced by the newer, more widely accepted Pinyin transliteration, Daoism.
- xviii Schipper, Kristofer. 5-6.
- xix Schipper, Kristofer. 5.
- xx Schipper, Kristofer. 3.
- xxi Image courtesy of: Taiji-europa.
- xxii Schipper, Kristofer. 4.
- xxiii Schipper, Kristofer. 7.
- xxiv Schipper, Kristofer. 8.
- xxv Schipper, Kristofer. 19.
- xxvi The *qi* are the energies or breaths that exist within chaos, waiting to be harnessed in some way and mature into vital energy.
- xxvii Schipper, Kristofer. 30-34.
- xxviii Schipper, Kristofer. 34.
- xxix Chan, Alan. 35-37.
- xxx Schipper, Kristofer. 35.
- xxxi Image courtesy of: tvTropes and Useful Notes on Taoism. The *Taijitu* is commonly referred to in the West as the yinyang, as it is a graphic representation of the concepts of *yin* and *yang*.
- xxxii Schipper, Kristofer. 35-36.
- xxxiii Schipper, Kristofer. 36.
- xxxiv Schipper, Kristofer. 41.
- xxxv *Ch'i* is the Wade-Giles transliteration of the Chinese character. It has been replaced by the newer, more widely accepted Pinyin transliteration, *qi*.
- xxxvi Chang, Kwang-chih. 367.
- xxxvii Newman, Jacqueline M. 184.
- xxxviii Aguilar, John, Jr.
- xxxix Chang, Kwang-chih. 369.
- xl Newman, Jacqueline M. 184-185, 187.
- xli Aguilar, John, Jr.
- xlii Table courtesy of: Newman, Jacqueline M. 187.
- xliii Yeoh, Aileen. 15.
- xliv Yeoh, Aileen. 15.
- xlv Newman, Jacqueline M. 188-189.
- xlvi Table courtesy of: Newman, Jacqueline M. 191.
- xlvii Newman, Jacqueline M. 191-192.
- xlviii Yeoh, Aileen. 20.
- xlix Recipe and image courtesy of: Rodriguez, Jennica and EatChifully
- l Recipe and image courtesy of: Rodriguez, Jennica and EatChifully
- li Recipe and image courtesy of: Rodriguez, Jennica and EatChifully

### **Chapter 3: Japan and Zen Buddhism**

Zen Buddhism is a marriage of Daoism and classical Buddhism, taking beliefs from both into its philosophical and religious precepts. In the history of the Buddhist Tradition, Zen is an important sect within the Mahayana tradition, and taking many of the concepts of Daoism into its prescriptions. Zen can be somewhat difficult to understand as it is a largely philosophical and intuitive practice but it is, however, a religion, as it has an ultimate transformation as its goal. The historical Buddha is a critical fixture in this religion, as are the scriptures, even though each person's practice and interpretation of each may be different.

Zen has been called a transmission outside the Scriptures and this is true but this does not mean that the Scriptures are to be ignored...if you try to understand Zen from a rational, argumentative point of view, no argument is ever going to be good enough...It follows from this, then, that Zen is an intuitive RELIGION and not a philosophy or way of life.<sup>1</sup>

The core ideal of Zen is to take the teachings of the Buddha and put them into practice and experience the process and results in an individualistic manner, and to train in the same way as the Buddha to achieve ultimate bliss: the experience of Nirvana. Food and diet in this tradition, particularly the act of cooking, is a critical component of the practice of Zen ideals and can bring one closer to Nirvana.



Zen is an important manifestation of the Buddhist religion, sharing the common belief of the life of the Buddha and his experiences with the first two sects. The life of the Buddha is critical in understanding the rise of this religion and its various expressions and “turnings”. His life also highlights three important themes in early Buddhism related to eating and cooking, those being: The Middle Way, *karma* and right livelihood.

The Buddha was a historical figure, a man who was born in Lumbini Grove, India, in the year 623 B.C.E.<sup>ii</sup> The child was named Siddhartha Gautama, meaning, “wish-fulfilled”.<sup>iii</sup> Having grown up in a life of luxury and hedonism, Gautama was inquisitive about the true nature of man.

His contemplative nature and boundless compassion did not allow Him to enjoy royal pleasures as others did. He knew now woe but He had a deep desire to witness the way of humanity in general even amidst His own comfort and prosperity.<sup>iv</sup>

Gautama ventured outside his palace and saw the darker side of the life of man. Seeing the sufferings of those in the world around him, Gautama renounced his former life and set out on his journey into the world on his own to discover the true nature of humanity.

Siddhartha Gautama first found refuge with two yoga teachers, Alara Kalama and Udaka Ramaputra, where he studied the mental stages in the Realm of Perception and Non-Perception. He lived next with a group of five ascetics, those who practiced the most austere form of renunciation. Again, Gautama was left unfulfilled by such a rigid and extreme lifestyle.<sup>v</sup> “Gautama gave up looking for external help from teachers since He realized that Truth and peace are to be found within oneself and not gained from others.”<sup>vi</sup> The future Buddha determined that

“The Middle Way” would be his path to enlightenment—not that of the ascetics nor his life of luxury. He exclaimed, “I was, am and will be enlightened simultaneously with the universe.”<sup>vii</sup> The Buddha lived as a man, was enlightened as a man, and died as a man, proving this knowledge was accessible to all. With these doctrines, the Buddha was able to raise the worth of mankind. There was no unseen or “almighty” deity that ruled over man thus rendering him subservient. It is the selflessness and equality of humanity that are the cornerstones of the Buddha’s teachings.

The Middle Way is applied in every aspect of a practicing Buddhist’s life, especially in the act of eating. A person’s diet is to be an exact reflection of this founding principle. Overindulgence is not acceptable nor will it lead to the ultimate goal of enlightenment, and neither will abstention from food and the nutrients it provides. The Middle Way is all about balance within one’s actions, one’s thoughts and the way in which one lives in his or her environment.

There are five doctrines that are essential to the basic foundation of the Buddhist tradition: *Anatta*, *karma*, rebirth, the Four Noble Truths and *Anicca*. *Anatta* is the doctrine of no soul, because it cannot be proven through the knowledge of the senses. The self is nothing but causes and conditions. The only knowledge about a person that can be obtained is the existence of a physical mind and bodily matter. There is no soul or eternal ego that is obtained or given to an individual by a higher power. “The forms of man are merely the temporary manifestations of the life force that is common to all.”<sup>viii</sup> This concept displays the interconnectivity of all energy and matter. In birth and rebirth, there is a continuity of the life force. It is manifested in birth and is invisible in death, and that is all. *Karma* is an action or deed, either

good or bad, and refers to the law of moral causation. It deals with actions and reactions in the ethereal realm of humanity and the universe. It doesn't refer to fate or predestination, but it is a result of a person's own doing. Thus, it is possible to direct *karma* through our choices. "Karma, being a law in itself, needs no lawgiver; it operates in its own field without the intervention of an external, independent ruling agency."<sup>ix</sup> *Karma* places upon the individual his or her final destiny based upon prior action and teaches self-reliance and individual responsibility.

Since *karma* is so reliant upon the thoughts, actions, and deeds of the individual, it can be directly applied to how one eats and the consequences of his or her dietary practices. If one is not following The Middle Way in this area, it will be reflected in his or her *karma*. With such an emphasis on *karma* in Buddhism and how it ultimately will direct your future enlightenment and freedom from the cycle of rebirth, it is emphasized to each individual his or her responsibility to adhere to the ways of the Buddha and to not stray from The Middle Way.

Rebirth is a fundamental concept that explains how *karmic* conditions are present at birth and both present and past *karma* condition the birth. It is essential to note that rebirth is different from reincarnation, as the concept of *anatta* states that there is no egotistical "I" to be reborn, there is only the continuity of the life force through the passing of *karmic* qualities.<sup>x</sup>

The Four Noble Truths are the intrinsic qualities of the state of human nature as discovered by Siddhartha Gautama on his quest. The first of these truths is the existence of suffering (*dukkha*) and is acquired through *karma*. The second is the origin of suffering which is attachment and craving whether it is in a sensual,

spiritual or material sense. The third truth is that there is a way to alleviate suffering, and this through the control of greed, hate and delusions about the state of mankind.

It is the constant cleansing of oneself...the dropping of all one's desires, ideas and notions which we ourselves have filled our winds with and thus created waves on the sea thereof which prevent us from seeing the moon or reflection, of our true essence clearly. <sup>xi</sup>

These first three truths outline the nature of humankind, and the fourth and final truth lays out the way to maintain the cessation of suffering for the duration of one's life. The fourth truth is the Eightfold Path<sup>xii</sup>, which is a prescription of eight "right" behaviors that follow the Buddha's Middle Path, a life that lies between hedonism and asceticism, the fifth of which is "right livelihood". An important aspect of engaging in the right livelihood is the principle of non-injury. One shouldn't partake in any kind of act that will bring harm to one's physical or mental entity. Wrong eating and poor diet is one of the ways in which harm can be brought upon one's body, thus polluting the mind and its ability to experience nirvana. It will bring about the suffering that Buddhism tries to alleviate. Thus, eating properly and within the precepts of the Middle Way is key to achieving enlightenment.

The final critical doctrine is that of *anicca*. *Anicca* is the concept of impermanence. Gautama discovered on his journey the concepts of old age, sickness, and death, concluding that nothing lasts. Everything in the world is transitory and ever changing. While there are many other doctrines and beliefs that rose out of Hindu teachings and other various sources, these principles are essential to the study and practice of Zen.

Meditation is the cornerstone of the Zen religion, and is the way in which a person can truly understand, practice and embody the qualities of the Buddha. Zen believes that there are three latent qualities present in each being that must be unlocked such that a person can realize his or her true and whole being. That is, every living creature is in possession of the characteristics necessary to achieve Buddhahood and enlightenment, and meditation, or *Zazen*, is the method in which Zen practitioners harness these traits. There are Three Hearts that one must possess and call upon through *Zazen*. The first is The Heart of Avalokitesvara, which brings to fruition the Great Compassion that lies within each being. The second is the Heart of Samantabhadra, which brings to fruition the Great Love that exists in each being. The Third is the Heart of Manjusri, which brings to fruition the Great Wisdom possessed by each person.<sup>xiii</sup> These three entities are necessary in calling forth one's hidden consciousness and power of realization that are necessary for achieving enlightenment.

These three, Compassion, Love, Wisdom, are like three great drums which, although silent, nevertheless thunder across the world when our whole being expresses them. These three are the keys to the gateless gate of true freedom and it is only we ourselves that prevent us from unlocking it for it was, in fact, never locked.<sup>xiv</sup>

*Zazen* is the process in which one realizes his or her True Mind, and once this is achieved, the mind won't revert back to its old state.

When one has realized his or her True Mind, food is thought about in a much different way than in the mind of one who has not harnessed his or her true consciousness. Meditation with a True Mind produces thoughts about food that help one along the path to enlightenment, as the thoughts are free of attachment, but are

very logistical and precise. An excerpt from the Buddhist Pali Canon “On Meditation on Food” explains:

If someone wants to...take up the subject of meditation, he should, in solitude...contemplate material food, which consists of things to eat, drink, chew and taste...Crushed (by the teeth) and smeared (with saliva) the chewed food becomes a mixture from which all visual beauty and good odour have disappeared [as it passes] out of the range of sight...In a monk who devotes himself to [meditation], the mind withdraws from the greed for tastes, keeps away from it, turns away from it. Just to avoid suffering he takes food, without becoming intoxicated by it...He perfects the development of mindfulness as regards the body by means of his insight, and he progresses on the road which will facilitate his further advance. <sup>xv</sup>

There are many forms and ways in which *Zazen* is practiced, the most common of which is a seated meditation, as is described above. However, there are also walking and working meditations, all of which help one to unlock their Three Hearts and True Mind and help along the road to Buddhahood. Cooking, eating and all related practices are some of the greatest forms of active meditation in the Zen tradition. Any process in which a person can dedicate every region of his or her mind and body to a particular task and recognize the thought or task with each and every sense, the teachings of the Buddha are lived and experienced and can help one towards enlightenment.

For the powerful reason that cooking is such an active and intricate form of meditation and mindfulness, the cook is considered to be one of the most critical figures in a Zen temple, as is the cook in the lay world. The cook is in charge of carrying out the principles most crucial to the Zen tradition and making sure that they are present in the kitchen, the food, and that everyone who consumes the food will be nourished through the care and compassion with which the food was prepared. The *Tenzo Kyokun* is a set of instructions written to the chief cook, or

*Tenzo*. It is a part of the teachings of Dogen Zenji, one of the foremost Zen priests and a father of the Zen religion, as it exists in Japan. The *Tenzo Kyokun* explains how the kitchen is to be run, the qualities that must be possessed by any who is to deal with food, and the extreme care and mindfulness that must be employed when cooking for oneself and others.

None but the finest priests, fully awakened to, and eager for, Buddhahood, have, up to now, ever been trusted with the office of *Tenzo* for, unless there is an earnest desire for Buddhahood, however great an effort the priest holding this office may make, he will not be successful therein. <sup>xvi</sup>

Cooking is a process that is not only essential to one's life, but is a way to practice actively the calling forth of one's Three Hearts and pure mind. The *Tenzo Kyokun* explains how there is much more than rice being "cooked" in the kitchen. It is a process and a place where the qualities of Buddhahood are physically practiced and can be achieved. "The Chief Cook must be so single-minded in his own training that no resting place can ever be found between him and the actual food, the two being identical with each other."<sup>xvii</sup> It is said by many *Tenzos* and other high priests that a Chief Cook must care for the food as one cares for his or her own eyesight.

Furthermore, the pot in which the rice is cooked should be thought of as one's own head, and the water in which the rice is washed is to be regarded as one's own life.<sup>xviii</sup> The Chief Cook employs all of the qualities of a Buddha when he or she is preparing the food so that anyone who eats it may be nourished not only physically, but mentally as well. A body that is in physical health will experience mental clarity, and a clear mind helps to promote the physical health of the body as well. They are not mutually exclusive.

Thomas Merton was a Zen Buddhist practitioner who, during his life of meditation and practice, compiled a work of personal poems that are reflections of the teachings of Chuang-Tzu, one of the foremost Daoist philosophers (whose works and musings were also highly regarded and utilized in the forming of the Daoist tradition in China). The marriage of Daoism and early Buddhist principles gave rise to the Zen tradition, and Daoism, like Zen, is intricately focused on the physical acts of life that can help one along the path to ultimate serenity. Both traditions exist in every act of a person's life practices. In Merton's poem, "Cutting Up an Ox", he clearly demonstrates the thoughts of Chuang Tzu and how the principles of Zen are applied to preparing food to be eaten, and the mindset of a Zen master while he or she executes such a venerable task.

Prince Wen Hui's cook  
Was cutting up an ox.  
Out went a hand,  
Down went a shoulder,  
He planted a foot,  
He pressed with a knee,  
The ox fell apart  
With a whisper,  
The bright cleaver murmured  
Like a gentle wind.  
Rhythm! Timing!  
Like a sacred dance,  
Like "The Mulberry Grove,"  
Like ancient harmonies!

"Good work!" the Prince exclaimed.  
"Your method is faultless!"  
"Method?" said the cook  
laying aside his cleaver,  
"What I follow is Tao  
beyond all methods!"

"When I first began  
To cut up oxen  
I would see before me  
The whole ox  
All in one mass.



**Figure 1. Zen Painting of an Ox**



“After three years  
I no longer saw this mass.  
I saw the distinctions.

“But now, I see nothing  
With the eye. My whole being  
Apprehends.  
My senses are idle. The spirit  
Free to work without plan  
Follows its own instinct  
Guided by natural line,  
By the secret opening, the hidden space,  
My cleaver finds its own way.  
I cut through no joint, chop no bone.

“A good cook needs a new chopper  
Once a year—he cuts.  
A poor cook needs a new one  
Every month—he hacks!

“I have used this same cleaver  
Nineteen years.  
It has cut up  
A thousand oxen.  
It’s edge is as keen  
As if newly sharpened.

“There are spaces in the joints;  
The blade is thin and keen:  
When this thinness  
Finds that space  
There is all the room you need!  
It goes like a breeze!  
Hence I have had this cleaver nineteen years  
As if newly sharpened!

“True, there are sometimes  
Tough joints. I feel them coming,  
I slow down, I watch closely,  
Hold back, barely move the blade,  
And whump! the part falls away  
Landing like a clod of earth.

“Then I withdraw the blade,  
I stand still  
And let the joy of the work  
Sink in.  
I clean the blade  
And put it away.”

Prince Wan Hui said,  
“This is it! My cook has shown me  
How I ought to live  
My own life!”<sup>xix</sup>

This poem is a clear demonstration of the mindfulness, sensuality, and oneness that a Chief Cook experiences whilst cooking and preparing food. The entire process is seen in its unique and individual parts, and each step is thoughtfully carried out and is guided by one's own senses. If the Chief Cook is aware of his Three Hearts and of his True Mind, he or she will feel the continuity with everything else in nature and be able to execute the task at hand with ease and joy.

In order to experience and carry out these processes with acute awareness among all of the senses, Zen practitioners follow another Daoist doctrine proposed by Chuang Tzu, that being the fasting of the heart. Chuang Tzu writes about a dialogue between Confucius and his disciple on how to best create inner unity and fullness. Confucius explains that the way is through the fasting of the heart. When one sense is cut off, others flourish and work together. When one can empty the focus of the one sense or entity, it allows the freedom to experience something through all senses. Confucius says,

“The goal of fasting is inner unity. This means hearing, but not with the ear; hearing, but not with the understanding; hearing with the spirit, with your whole being. The hearing that is only in the ears is one thing. The hearing of the understanding is another. But the hearing of the spirit is not limited to any one faculty, to the ear, or to the mind. Hence it demands the emptiness of all the faculties. And when the faculties are empty, then the whole being listens. There is then a direct grasp of what is right there before you that can never be heard with the ear or understood with the mind. Fasting of the heart empties the faculties, frees you from limitation and from preoccupation. Fasting of the heart begets unity and freedom.”<sup>xx</sup>

Fasting of the heart is the core of Zen practice and meditation, whether it be seated meditation or an active form such as cooking. When one sense is liberated, every other piece of one's consciousness can come together to bring about an awareness that isn't possible to summon with through one sense alone.

Edward Espe Brown, the former Chief Cook of the Tassajara Zen Mountain Center, the oldest Zen Soto Monastery in the United States, is an expert on Zen cooking and practice, as well as “the fasting of the heart”. Brown recognizes how the term “mindful” can pose problems for those trying to employ Zen precepts in their own kitchens and lives, as it is often used in a generalist manner and can be interpreted in many ways. From the point of view of a *Tenzo*, his insights are about how to harness and take control of one’s emotions and senses as described by Chuang Tzu and Confucius. He professes one should not be dispassionate, but recognize these emotions and translate them into the process of cooking and carrying out a process with acute awareness of your own mind, body and of each and every sense involved in the creation that is being made.

What is magnificent and magical is find out how to manifest the cutting of carrots with your whole body and mind; how to wash the rice with your eyes and your hands, connecting consciousness with the senses and the world—not just going through the motions...When you stop going through the motions and manifest the stirring of soup, alive in the present moment, emotions may surface. While some find this problematic and seemly recommend dispassion, my suggestion is to invite your passion to cook...My encouragement is to turn afflictive emotions, as well as enthusiasm and exuberance, into something edible and nourishing—food.<sup>xxi</sup>

Brown isn’t the only notable Zen practitioner who professes the importance of cooking not only to nourish one’s body, but also to nourish one’s mind and the hearts of others. Abess Koei Hoshino is a venerable Zen abbess who is also deeply involved in spreading the awareness of the importance of having spirituality and awareness in the kitchen. She states,

Every aspect of life is a spiritual practice. In Zen we say “always, everyday life.” This means that everything in life is training. That’s how I have lived my life. So I never think of cooking as something separate...We should always try to achieve that purity when we prepare food...This complete attention is what

constitutes spiritual practice. It must be understood not just with your head, but with your body. This spiritual attitude to preparing food—being totally present in what you are doing—is valid anywhere in the world and anything you may do in your daily life.<sup>xxii</sup>

Cooking is an active form of Zazen and can awaken one to the possibilities of Buddhahood and the elimination of desires, aversions and volatility can bring one the satisfaction of having obtained one's True Mind and a pure heart.

Not only are Zen principles applied when cooking, they are just as much taken into account when actually eating a meal. Whether good or bad, rich or mild, a meal is appreciated for what it is. The tastes are recognized, appreciated, and then let go of. Much more of a focus is upon the emotional fulfillment that comes from eating a meal rather than the physical pleasures, which are fleeting. One recognizes where the food and ingredients come from, how they are manifested in the world and then in the meal, attention and compassion given to oneself or the one who prepared the meal, and empathy felt for those who are less fortunate to not have access to the nourishment that one is able to consume at that moment.<sup>xxiii</sup>

Food for the body is necessary of course, but it is eaten one day and eliminated the next, whereas food for the heart lasts forever. In fact, you can think of the Four Noble Truths as recipes for nourishing the heart, because that's exactly what they are. They address the various kind and levels of spiritual food that are capable of providing a sense of fullness that no amount of food can ever match...Eating becomes a doorway to many penetrating insights that reveal the interconnectedness of all living things.<sup>xxiv</sup>

Eating in excess, eating an imbalanced diet, and eating foods inappropriate for one's internal constitution can be considered diseases of desire and greed. If one can, like the Buddha did, turn inward and recognize what is going on in one's own body and mind, both pleasures and pain can be recognized and then pushed away as simply existing in the universe with no effect on the purity of one's mind and heart. To

practice Zen precepts when eating can help someone let go of the infatuations with pleasure and the aversion to pain so that he or she can simply live his or her life and enjoy food, his or her own body, and life situation, whatever it may be at a given time, knowing full well that it will eventually change.

There are many ways in which one can apply Zen concepts to eating, and all the while achieving the knowledge that the Buddha himself gained and apply these precepts to life as a whole. For instance, when eating a piece of toast, one can marvel at the crusty bread and within it see the properties of transitoriness and change within the world. The toast began as a stalk of wheat in a field, then was harvested, ground and baked with other ingredients, was brought to a grocery store, and then was purchased and moved from bag, to shelf, to toaster. By the time it reaches the plate, it has already undergone so much change, as it will again when eaten. One can recognize in a piece of steamed broccoli which may at one point have been an aversion, the beauty of nature and connectedness one has with this vegetable.<sup>xxv</sup> The colors, texture, shape and size can be appreciated, just as one appreciates and notices those qualities in oneself. When one is mindful of each stroke of the knife as it spreads the orangey-brown mustard over the flaky white bread, and then as the crunchy, vibrant lettuce and slimy, juicy red tomato is piled on top, the meal becomes so much more than a sandwich, but a culmination of the beauty of the things that nature offers, as well as an appreciation for the work and joy that went into building that sandwich, all the while being conscious that once it is eaten, it will be gone, and the pleasure or lack thereof of eating will leave as well. Abess Koei Hoshino explains,

We try to include the entire person in the joy of eating food. First we experience the environment of the room in which we will eat. Then we see the food served. We see the color, the shape, the contrast to the plate or bowl. Then we smell the aroma of the food. Then we feel in our mouth the textures of the different courses. Each texture will produce a different sound to our ear when we chew the food. And of course we taste the various flavors as we eat. Balance and harmony in all of these elements is essential so that the most important sixth taste, the aftertaste, the feeling we receive from the food, is achieved.<sup>xxvi</sup>

These ideals nourish the mind and the body and keep them in harmony with one another. When desires and aversions are conquered, the body and conscience of the mind can be truly nourished.

All of these thoughts and ideals come that arose in the Zen tradition can be directly related back to the three ideals of early Buddhism as they apply to food, diet, and the practice of eating as a means of attaining Buddhahood. The Middle Way is the ultimate prescription of how to live one's life as Siddhartha Gautama did to become enlightened. One should neither partake in a completely ascetic lifestyle, nor should he or she be too hedonistic. Living in such a manner will produce poor *karma*, and only through positive *karma* can one have a greater chance of being freed from the cycle of cosmic rebirths and achieve enlightenment. When one leads the right lifestyle as prescribed by the Eightfold Path of Right Living, he or she will likely produce positive *karma*, not inflict any harm upon themselves, and righteously follow The Middle Way towards the ultimate goal of achieving Nirvana.

## **Zen Recipes:**

### **Acorn Squash with Pears<sup>xxvii</sup>**



#### **Ingredients:**

- 1 sm. acorn squash, halved w/ seeds & membrane scooped out
- 1 firm pear
- Sprinkle of cinnamon

#### **Preparation:**

4. Thinly slice pears and arrange slices in the middle of each squash half.
5. Place squash in a baking dish and place a tablespoon of butter over the pears in each half.
6. Sprinkle the tops with cinnamon.
7. Place in a 425° oven for 20 minutes.
8. Remove the baking sheet and baste pears with melted butter.
9. Continue to roast until squash is tender, another 50-75 minutes.

### **Super Green Soup<sup>xxviii</sup>**



#### **Ingredients:**

- 2 leeks, sliced, white/light green parts only
- 1 large bunch of broccoli, cut into florets
- 1 bunch spinach, roughly chopped
- 4 cloves garlic
- 4-6 cups vegetable/chicken stock
- 2 tbs butter/coconut oil
- salt and pepper to taste

#### **Preparation:**

1. In a large pot, sauté the leeks in the butter until they soften, 2-4 minutes.
2. Add the broccoli and garlic cloves and sauté 5 more minutes. Add enough broth to cover and reduce heat to low.
3. Simmer for 15 minutes until the broccoli is soft. Add spinach and then turn off the heat.
4. Puree in batches. Add water if necessary. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

## Raw Cacao Truffles<sup>xxix</sup>



### Ingredients:

- 1 cup raw cacao powder
- 1 cup ground raw cacao nibs (use coffee grinder)
- 3 tbs coconut oil, room temperature
- 3 tbs nut butter of your choice
- 3 tbs honey
- 1 tsp salt
- extra cacao powder, shredded coconut, finely chopped nuts, etc. to roll truffles in

### Preparation:

1. Combine all ingredients in a bowl and shape into small balls.
2. Refrigerate for one hour until firm.
3. Roll in one of the above suggestions, or whatever you think will taste good.

### Notes:

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<sup>i</sup> Kennett, Jiyu. 14.

<sup>ii</sup> Kennett, Jiyu. 3.

<sup>iii</sup> Kennett, Jiyu. 3.

<sup>iv</sup> Kennett, Jiyu. 4.

<sup>v</sup> Kennett, Jiyu. 4-5.

<sup>vi</sup> Kennett, Jiyu. 5-6.

<sup>vii</sup> Kennett, Jiyu. 6-7.

<sup>viii</sup> Kennett, Jiyu. 8.

<sup>ix</sup> Kennett, Jiyu. 9.

<sup>x</sup> Kennett, Jiyu. 10.

<sup>xi</sup> Kennett, Jiyu. 12.

<sup>xii</sup> The steps of The Eightfold Path are: right understanding, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration.

<sup>xiii</sup> Kennett, Jiyu. 23.

<sup>xiv</sup> Kennett, Jiyu. 23.

<sup>xv</sup> Conze, Edward. 100-103

<sup>xvi</sup> Kennett, Jiyu. 145.

<sup>xvii</sup> Kennett, Jiyu. 148.

<sup>xviii</sup> Kennett, Jiyu. 146. 148-149.

<sup>xix</sup> Merton, Thomas. 45-47. Figure 1 courtesy of Thomas Merton.



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- xx Merton, Thomas. 52-53.  
xxi Brown, Edward Espe. *Shambhala Sun*. 1-2.  
xxii King, Theresa. 128-129. 131.  
xxiii Kabatznick, Ronna. 1-3.  
xxiv Kabatznick, Ronna. 1-3.  
xxv Kabatznick, Ronna. 32.  
xxvi King, Theresa. 133.  
xxvii Recipe and image courtesy of: Shifnadel, Simone and *Zenbelly*.  
xxviii Recipe and image courtesy of: Shifnadel, Simone and *Zenbelly*.  
xxix Recipe and image courtesy of: Shifnadel, Simone and *Zenbelly*.

## **Conclusion**

Ayurveda in India, Daoism in China, and Zen Buddhism in Japan are three religions with deep philosophical foundations. Each, while different in its own unique way, deals with the prescription for a long, healthful life and one that is in tune with nature and the larger universe in which people exist. One of the most noteworthy qualities of the practitioners of these religions is a great awareness of and attention to bodily health, particularly how it is derived from the natural foods that the Earth provides. The focus on clean food and nutrition, and how each individual person can best utilize these resources in a way that is most appropriate for his or her personal constitution, is a critical aspect for the overall health and longevity of those who follow the religions. The United States is faced with staggering rates of obesity and overweight persons, and the blame for this has been placed on the food corporations who manipulate the food we eat into a processed, barely-natural version that in some cases, promote overeating and addiction.<sup>i</sup> While the companies do need to be held accountable to some degree for their aggressive marketing strategies and continuance of production of foods that do not serve the public, corporations cannot be held solely responsible; nor can the government for a lack of enforcement of or creation of new corrective policies.

The true problem lies in the way that the United States' population deals with and relates to both food and nature on an individual level. Among the practitioners of Ayurveda, Daoism and Zen Buddhism, it is a central belief that humans are simply a macrocosm of a larger microcosm; we are but a single piece to a much larger universal puzzle. We are not dominant, nor submissive, but simply co-existent. With this engrained as a firm philosophical foundation of these religions, those people who practice do not manipulate the foods provided by nature, and eat to keep their bodies in fine tune both with their inner constitutions, as well as the constitution of the universe. They are traditions based on individual responsibility and awareness of the individual body and environment, a concept that has become lost among many Americans.

The United States has begun to make some efforts and strides in the natural and wholesome foods realm in the last decade, which shows that there is hope for this great country. Among a select group of people, health and environmental awareness and unity are rising to prominence.

Despite today's disheartening rates of obesity and diabetes—both of which can be at least partially blamed on a lousy diet—we can't ignore that America is in the grips of a heartening food revolution. After a slow incubation in foodie capitals like New York City and San Francisco, demand for finer-quality food now spreads through the land at a breathtaking pace. A by-product of this shift may well be better health. And that's no small thing, because no government initiative or medical breakthrough seems poised to rework the food-health equation for us. While there's no guarantee that better health will take hold across the board...the revolution has given healthy-minded cooks a fighter's chance.<sup>ii</sup>

It is clear that the road back to health is going to be a long one for the United States. No drastic change takes place overnight. However, if this revolution of healthy-minded cooks and patrons that has begun to sprout in coastal locations can spread

inwards and begin to capture the attention of the whole country, there may be hope, specifically if this movement is coupled with the implementation of these international ideals of health and wellness. To conclude I'd like to agree with Mr. Scott Mowbray.

I am optimistic about our diet, despite the naysayers, because our national palate is changing. The more we take our cues—and flavors—from more mature food cultures like Italy, France, China, or India, the more we will also enjoy the lower rates of disease their diets have been proved to confer. People once said the international language was love. These days, it might be healthy eating.<sup>iii</sup>

I wish you all health and happiness in the coming future.

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<sup>i</sup> Moss, Michael.

<sup>ii</sup> Mowbray, Scott. 10.

<sup>iii</sup> Mowbray, Scott. 15.

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