

FUEL

ON THE

PATH

DIETARY PHILOSOPHY OF THE HUT

🍵🍵: Shen Su

In went the sliced onion, sputtering in the quickly heated oil, fragrantly filling the kitchen air. There were clean cutting knives, weathered cutting boards, seasoned woks and all sorts of kitchen accouterments splayed about. Steam whistled out of the space where the lid clanged against the pot, pans sizzled loudly beneath the billowing fume hood and colorful commotion stained the cooking space like a watercolor painting. The compact area was alive with energy. In place of robes, malas and meditation cushions were aprons, oven mitts and rolled-up sleeves. Where one bowl of ingredients ended, another began. At a moment's glance, things appeared chaotic with cooks dancing about, but from a wider perspective, the food was seasonal and timed just so. The small space afforded no room for randomness and demanded intuitive coordination. The meal was carefully planned, ingredients pre-purchased and the lunch was suited to balance out the morning's breakfast and tailored to the tea and guests. Everything was taken into consideration and in harmony. The clashing of a gong signaled what everyone's bellies were waiting for: It was lunchtime at Tea Sage Hut.

The food has changed a lot over the years at Tea Sage Hut. For the most part, meals have always been healthy,

delicious, abundant and surrounded by reverence and gratitude. Many of you likely remember those times of complete satisfaction at the kitchen table after a transformative tea session. There was a lot of love that went into those meals. Not only did the food taste great, but it also nourished the body in a balanced, seasonal and healthy way. Over time, our food philosophy has refined, changed and expanded in many ways to better serve our guests, our environment and ourselves. Though many changes have set in since the early days, one thing has remained the same, and that has been the approach towards the food served at Tea Sage Hut. The food eaten here has always been acknowledged as amongst the most important medicines we will take on any given day. A large portion of the day has always been reserved for preparing and receiving meals, and they are viewed as necessary medicine, fueling us along the path to Truth. For without food, water and shelter, when and where are we to take a cup of tea?

Our Philosophy

A day at Tea Sage Hut will include meditation, tea, service and two healthy vegetarian meals. Our food philosophy, like the food itself, is simple but

very important. Much of our food philosophy stems from a macrobiotic diet, Five Element theory, and Dogen's *Tenzo Kyokun*, or *Instructions for the Cook*. It is a combination of traditional wisdom and modern knowledge, applied in a way that skillfully suits our intentional community. We choose an organic, plant-based diet that is colorful and abundant with plenty of variety at each meal, comprising of foods that are local, seasonal, balanced, nutritious and delicious. Our philosophy accounts for the provenance of the food, the preparing and receiving of food, and the greater impact our diet has on the environment. We cook with devotion, receive everything with gratitude and make the best use of our food, not wasting anything. Our food is an offering and we see it as an honor to prepare and receive food in this way. You can very easily approach food as an offering to your body, filling you with life and connecting you to the world around you. Like Tea, food is a doorway to Nature, reminding us how connected we are. When we prepare food, we are reminded that the world provides for us, and does so abundantly.

道路燃料

Here at the Tea Sage Hut, we have developed a simple, balanced vegan diet for our guests. Keeping the meals vegan means that everyone can accept them. Creating a balanced diet for our Center took a lot of research and development over time through experience. On the one hand, there is a lot of meditation and tea ceremony during a course, and staying light of body is helpful for this, especially as the metabolism slows down. However, on the other hand, we also have service periods and the course schedule is quite dense, so we need to make sure the guests have adequate energy for the day. Also, as many of you know, there is no dinner here (just a small snack), so most of the daily nutritional intake comes from lunch. For these reasons, we had to create a menu that is rich, balanced, both nutrient-dense and light. Here is how we have gone about it!



The Macrobiotic Diet

Like many traditional approaches to life, they are sometimes renamed to rekindle their effects and make them more relatable in our modern times. Macrobiotics is one such modern term, coined after an ancient Eastern approach to a healthy lifestyle. It is a plant-based dietary system rooted in the Yin-Yang theory of Asian culture. It addresses the different energetic qualities of food, the relationship between our attitude and the food we eat, the impact our diet has on the environment, and the recognition that food is more than just a list of calories and fuel. In a macrobiotic diet, achieving this Yin-Yang balance and holistic perspective is accomplished through eating mainly plant-based foods, including a combination of whole cereal grains, raw and cooked vegetables, beans, fermented foods, fruits, and nuts and seeds. Proportions can be divided based on a percentage of weight and/or calories, with an emphasis that all ingredients are natural, organic, locally grown, seasonal, whole foods.

Fresh herbs and vegetables, beans and legumes, nuts and seeds, unrefined oils, tea, unprocessed grains, fruits and fermented foods are all healthy food groups to enjoy in a macrobiotic diet.

Whole cereal grains account for about half of the proportions by weight and include brown rice, barley, millet, oats, corn, rye, wheat and buckwheat. Raw and cooked vegetables make up about a third, including a wide variety of seasonal leafy greens and vegetables. Some nightshades are often excluded in these proportions because they cause problems for a small percentage of people and aren't essential to the diet. Beans, such as azuki beans, lentils, edamame and chickpeas, account for a smaller percentage within a meal, whereas bean products, such as tempeh, tofu and miso, can be served in larger portions more frequently, especially when fermented, in the case of tempeh and miso.

It is common practice to avoid foods that are processed, have refined sugars, dairy or animal products, coffee, strong spices, alcohol, bottled drinks, and foods with artificial ingredients, chemicals or preservatives, most of which are low in nutritional value anyway.

Macrobiotics is not only concerned with food groups and proportions. It is common in a macrobiotic diet to also consider other aspects of our lives, like personal hygiene, exercise, organization of the kitchen and home, and other wholesome activities, such as meditation, time spent outdoors, good posture at work, having plants indoors, allowing good airflow into your home, regular sleep cycles, daily gratitude, eating slowly, thorough chewing, achieving satiety, etc. This promotes not only a healthy diet but also a healthy way of living, and it very much suits our way of life at Tea Sage Hut. Of course, any healthy approach to life will stem directly from a healthy, balanced diet.

Five Elements

The Five Elements, or five phases, are a central philosophy within Chinese culture. They relate to the five internal organs, five seasons, five emotions, five colors, etc., and much of Chinese culture is aimed at living in harmony with these Five Elements in all their respective forms.

Learning to balance the Five Elements of food helps ensure that you receive enough nutrients from what you eat. All foods have their own energy, cooling (Yin) and heating (Yang) or they are neutral. In addition to Yin and Yang, each food has its own taste which accords with Five Elements cuisine. The elements are fire, earth, metal, water and wood, and their respective tastes are bitter, sweet, pungent, salty and sour, which correspond to specific foods, organs, seasons, colors and energies. A thorough understanding of this can be applied to help develop a harmonious diet and lifestyle. The macrobiotic diet already takes into account the balance of the Yin-Yang energies as described above and already ensures we are eating foods that are in season. One simple way of achieving a Five Elements balance is to choose foods that correspond to all five flavors and colors. Though it is a rudimentary application of Five Elements theory, it is a good place to start when preparing meals because it is easy for us to ascertain when certain flavors are out

of balance or when certain colors are out of proportion or missing. It's easy to see and taste when all five colors and flavors have been paired in the correct proportions. We will take a closer look at proportions, flavors and the look of our food in our bowl system described below.

Instructions for the Cook

In Dogen's *Instructions for the Cook*, he stresses the importance of applying your awakened mind in the kitchen and viewing your work as your practice. It's one thing to talk about a food philosophy and another thing to put it into practice! All meaningful practice must account for how we prepare and receive food, and the mind of those preparing and receiving this food is paramount. Part of putting our food philosophy into action is being likened to the food we serve, which is to say, clean of heart, pure of mind, balanced



in body, attuned to the season, abundant in joy and colorful with laughter! As we cultivate ourselves, we are preparing our food, and as we prepare our food, so we cultivate ourselves.

A Way, a Dao, is a *Way of Life*, which includes an awakened orientation towards *everything* you do in your life. Easier said than done! A Way of Life is not limited to special periods of meditation and certainly not separate from so-called mundane activities. Everything you do and how you do it matters, even the way you hold and read this magazine. Everything becomes your practice if you make the choice. This is the attitude with which we approach our work in the kitchen. To cook when others are meditating is not to miss meditation. Not only is it an honor and a sign of a mature student to be assigned as the cook in a monastic environment, but also it *is* your meditation in that moment. This is part of what Dogen meant in the *Instructions for the Cook* when he said

to “put your awakened mind to work.” This means taking that which you have cultivated in your more formal practice, like meditation, for example, and then applying that into your daily activities. If what you experience *cannot* be translated into everyday activities (which comprise the majority of your life) then what use is that experience? Therefore, our practice must extend beyond the conventional boundaries of the meditation hall and infuse into our day-to-day routine, which includes working in the kitchen.

To further understand the philosophy towards food at Tea Sage Hut, we can also consider the way we think about the kitchen. Before the times of central heating and modern kitchens, homes were situated around the central hearth, a gathering place for warmth, cooking and family meals. Of some of the gods revered in Chinese culture, the kitchen god, *Zao Jun* (灶君), perplexed me the most because the kitchen seemed so insignificant in

comparison to gods of other places like the earth and oceans. For me, the kitchen was that tiled place where parents occasionally made decent things to eat, save the broccoli and dirty dishes always awaited. Obviously, I was culturally and temporally distanced from the times and places when gods were assigned to kitchens, because in those times and in those places the kitchen wasn't the place we think about today—it was the very heart of the home, that central place where life and warmth gathered, refueled, and then dispersed outwards into the other reaches of the home and beyond. When defined like that, it becomes a place deserving of divine presence, a place to practice gratitude and prayer. That's why before each meal we light incense and pray before the kitchen god, reminding ourselves that this is a sacred place of practice and that we are privileged to prepare this food. We also ask for nourishment and healing in each meal.



THE BOWL SYSTEM

In order to work towards the ideals of our food philosophy and put things into practice, we've employed a simple and effective bowl system for our meals. This affords us the convenience of creating food in larger quantities easily and with fewer volunteers in the kitchen. We also don't want the food to be rushed, or make it feel too much like a chore. Food cooked with joy nourishes our souls, along with our bodies. Through this system, we also develop delicious and nutritious meals in a system that is easily expandable into the future when we build our bigger Center, Light Meets Life. Volunteers will be able to learn to make these dishes easily and enjoyably, and within a short period will be helping out in the kitchen service.



What's in a Bowl?

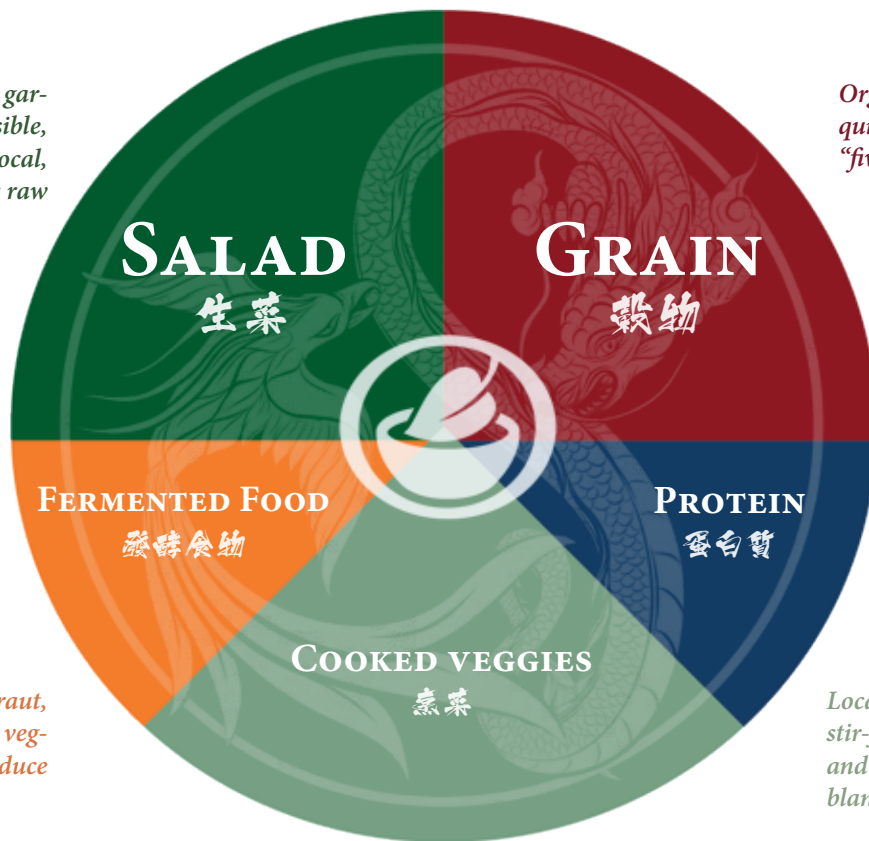
As you can see in the simple diagram, we try to account for five basic proportions, including grains, proteins, cooked and raw veggies, and fermented foods. Immediately, a limitless variety becomes available and a nice balance of food groups is easily achieved when prepared in the right proportions. There's a lot of room for wiggle, but typically, each food group makes up anywhere from ten to thirty percent of the bowl by volume.

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Theme

Like designing a *chaxi* (tea stage), it's much easier to balance the elements of your stage when you begin with a theme. The theme allows you to discern which elements to use, based on how they harmonize with the theme. So too, we like to theme our lunch bowls and pair foods that go well together. That might mean a culturally specific dish, like our Japanese Bowl, or a more generally themed dish, like our "local bowl," where we combine local, seasonal ingredients. They're fun, easy to create and remove any randomness at your meals, and provide lots of variety to make some changes over time—literally, the spice of life!

Raw greens from our garden as often as possible, mixed with other local, seasonal and organic raw veggies.



Organic rice, noodles, quinoa, millet or mixed "five-treasure rice."

Nuts & seeds, tofu, tempeh, mushrooms and other healthy energy.

Local, seasonal veggies stir-fried in healthy oil and water, steamed or blanched with spices.

Homemade sauerkraut, kimchi and pickled veggies, often using produce from our garden.

Heaviness Scale & Overall Balance

碗裡的重量和整體平衡

This is a key feature of our meals. Everything changed after we started implementing a relative heaviness scale. The first half of our day is spent meditating, drinking tea and eating. In order to strike just the right balance between our meals and tea, we assign a heaviness scale to both breakfast and lunch. Although breakfasts are different from the lunch bowl system, they can be balanced out by their "heaviness," which is a number we assign based on the ingredients. We consider each meal and then assign a number from one to ten, one being the lightest and ten being the heaviest. What we strive for is an overall score of ten between breakfast and lunch. That means, if we feel our breakfast is about a three on the heaviness scale, then we aim to serve a lunch that is about a seven. This goes a long way towards making our guests feel very comfortable at the end of both meals.

Knowing what's being eaten for breakfast also helps us choose our tea more appropriately, and so the overall experience of breakfast, tea and lunch can be controlled and tailored to suit the needs of our guests and our tea sessions. Some days we also do more physical work, like cleaning and farming, so we can prepare meals by serving slightly heavier foods with more nutritional calories. We also don't want to eat too much of any one ingredient, so, for example, on a morning when we have rice porridge for breakfast, we choose a different grain at lunch. This affords us a much-needed flexibility in our menu, and in our nighttime meetings for volunteers at the Center, we often make small adjustments to the following day's diet based on what is happening at the Center, the kind of tea we are going to prepare the next day, the needs of the guests or any other unexpected changes.

Developing a healthy, balanced diet for the Tea Sage Hut has been incredibly rewarding as a volunteer and the results have shown. This magazine is actually a testament to this, as we decided to publish our dietary philosophy and some recipes because so many of our guests love the food here!

Not only can we serve healthy, balanced meals on any given day, but we can also achieve an overall balance for an entire ten-day course, knowing exactly how many people there are and what activities they will be engaged in throughout the course. Of course, as I mentioned, we need to remain flexible because we may need to adjust a meal based on some unpredictable factor, like weather, a surprise guest or just a change in plans. As a result, our meals for an entire ten-day course at Tea Sage Hut have become more organized, balanced, cost-efficient and enjoyable—both to eat and prepare!

Proportions

Proportions are particularly important because equality is an important part of life at Tea Sage Hut. Like at the tea table, when we temporarily ordain and practice equality, so too we serve the same food in the same proportions to our guests. This is a little challenging because people have different appetites and food restrictions, but we must remember that the food is purchased with donated money and cooked by volunteers. Like bowl tea, when we find ourselves in such a situation, it is good to set our discriminating mind aside and accept things just as they are with all the gratitude we can muster. You might end up eating a little more or a little less than you are used to, or you might eat some foods you're not accustomed to, but in the name of equality and gratitude for free, nourishing, healthy food, prepared by volunteers with love and care, these are excellent sacrifices to make. For most people, this is only a temporary sacrifice to make while you are briefly staying in an intentional community. At Tea Sage Hut, we often emphasize the phrase "while you're here" as it relates to surrendering to the Center's schedule. By setting aside personal preference *while you are here* and giving the schedule a fair trial, you can learn what suits you and what doesn't and choose whether or not to incorporate it into your life outside the Center. Even if you choose not to incorporate any aspect of the Center's lifestyle into your own, the very act of surrendering itself is an invaluable lesson.

The proportions of flavor are also important. In each bowl, we aim to serve foods that cover the five flavors: bitter, sweet, pungent, salty and sour. This is actually quite easy to achieve because of the variety of foods available and the five proportions found in each bowl. When designed properly within a theme, we can always account for a balance of these flavors.

Aesthetics of the Bowl

It's no wonder that pictures of food are some of the most popular social media uploads—they look beautiful and delicious! Appreciation of food starts well before we eat it; in the preparation, the development of aromas, the onset of hunger and, of course, the look of your meal, especially when placed in a way that demonstrates care, attention to detail and consideration of color. Color is a particularly important measure of overall balance in a meal. Not all meals that look colorful are healthy, but all healthy meals are often rich in a variety of fresh, natural colors. The exact same foods can taste very different and make you feel very different when arranged intentionally and beautifully. Those little details go a long way; a dash of sesame on your rice, a garnish of cilantro, a delicately placed fan of avocado slices. Guests here often remark excitedly at the look of the food before they even sit down.

Quality

Of course, our aim is to serve food that is healthy for our environment and us. We endeavor to source local, seasonal, organically farmed produce as much as possible, understanding the deeper meaning of "we are what we eat," which is to say we are the food, soil, biodiversity, moonlight, starlight, sunlight and every form of energy that went into the creation of the food we consume. We are part of the entire cycle in one way or another; and if we are to approach our food as medicine, then all aspects of it must be taken into consideration. It's not just the quality of the food and how it's prepared that we refer to, but also the quality of our mind as we receive the food that changes how our bodies integrate and utilize it. Gratitude is perhaps the easiest way to prepare our mind to properly receive our food. Ultimately, how it's grown, how it's prepared and how it's received will determine the quality.

美學的成分讓整體健康

食物遠不止是物質它是生命的能量

茶道

Fuel on the Path

A lot of our food philosophy, as Dogen reminds us, is about honor. The universe has unfolded in a very favorable way for some, but not for all. Countless others go without food at all. What more privileged people throw away as food scraps would be received with sheer joy by the starving. It is therefore our responsibility as the privileged few to honor our food and recognize the sacrifice that went into

its creation, not wasting anything and practicing deep and sincere gratitude at each meal. Only by orienting ourselves thus can we accept the food bestowed upon us with a joyful mind.

Without food, there is no meditation, no tea, no life. Preparing and receiving food is necessary for all aspects of life. When we approach our work in the kitchen as a practice with an awakened mind; when we reflect on how it's

grown, how it's prepared and how it's received; when we exercise daily gratitude at each meal—we become worthy to accept our food. Ultimately, spiritual work is done for the liberation of all beings. Therefore, we must accept our food as fuel on the path to truth and for the good of all. This is our responsibility and I joyfully invite you to take it on with us.

