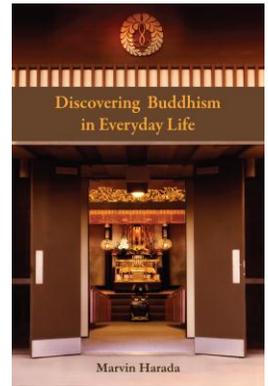


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A Recipe for Enlightenment

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For a long time we never had cable or dish TV, but after getting it a couple of years ago, I find that I enjoy watching the food network more than other channels and programs. I enjoy cooking and I find the shows fascinating. *Emeril Live* is one of my favorites, and I have learned a lot about cooking from watching Emeril. It is amazing how he can simply and easily put together such delicious looking dishes. He makes cooking look simple and also fun.

What if the path of Buddhism were that simple? What if all we needed was a simple recipe for enlightenment? Would we follow it? *Could* we follow it? What would the recipe consist of, and whose recipe would it be?

Although I too am on the path and don't consider myself enlightened in the least, I would like to reflect on what a recipe for enlightenment might consist of. The only ones who could compose a recipe for enlightenment would have to be those in the Buddhist tradition who have become awakened or enlightened. If we look at the lives of some of those individuals, perhaps we can get an indication of what their recipe would consist of.

Shakyamuni Buddha's own life, for example, would probably have the following ingredients:

1. Dissatisfaction with material world.
2. Deep inner unhappiness.
3. Reflective personality.
4. Spiritual seeking mind.
5. Austere, ascetic practice.
6. Teachers and teachings.

All of Shakyamuni Buddha's life experiences, as a prince, as a spiritual seeker, blended together to create his own awakening and insight into enlightenment. You could say that if any one ingredient was missing, he might not have attained enlightenment, just as if any one key ingredient is missing from a dish, it just won't turn out right.

What about Dogen, the great Zen Master? What would his recipe for enlightenment be like? What would it consist of?

1. Deep, burning spiritual question.
2. Austere Zen practice.
3. Teachers and Teaching.
4. Years of meditation.
5. Physical and spiritual fortitude.

Dogen's recipe for enlightenment might look like something like the above. Dogen had a deep, burning question that motivated him in his religious search. Dogen's question was on the teaching of Buddha Nature. If, as the sutras teach, we all have Buddha Nature, then why do we have to practice so hard to realize it or awaken to it? Dogen resolved his question by realizing that practice was not a means to an end, but that it was an expression of enlightenment itself. In other words, sitting in meditation is the expression or manifestation of one's Buddha Nature.

What about Shinran Shonin? What would his recipe for enlightenment be? What would it consist of? I think Shinran's recipe would be something like the following:

1. Failure at years of monastic practice.
2. Sincerity and honesty about oneself.

3. Teachers and teachings.
4. Realizing truth is beyond your ego self to figure out.

Shinran Shonin struggled and searched for enlightenment for 20 years, but until he met a wonderful teacher named Honen, who then introduced him to the wonderful teachers and their teachings, (Seven Masters, etc.) he couldn't realize or see the truth of the Dharma. Now, through the guidance of Honen, Shinran found himself within truth, he found himself the object of the Buddha's wisdom and compassion, he found himself sustained, grounded in a timeless, universal truth.

What about all of us today? Isn't there some kind of simple recipe we could follow to come to understand Buddhism? Does it have to be so complicated and difficult that we could never figure it out, like trying to read a difficult computer manual? Is that the nature of enlightenment, that it has to be difficult and complicated?

I would like to offer a few simple recipes for enlightenment that we might consider. We have to understand that each one of us is different, with different life experiences and personalities. In a sense, each one of us has to find the right recipe for enlightenment for us. It will not be the same for everyone. Let me offer a few:

Recipe One:

1. Personal tragedy or suffering.
 - a. Loss of a loved one or failed relationship
 - b. Illness, etc.
2. Search to spiritually resolve suffering.
3. Teachers and teaching.

In this recipe, the personal tragedy or suffering of life becomes the very seed, the root of the eventual blooming of the flower of enlightenment. In this recipe although one doesn't want personal tragedy or suffering, it is not rejected or negated, but instead is embraced and becomes the motivation, the driving force in one's spiritual seeking. If one is able to meet good teachers and teachings, the personal tragedy or suffering can be transformed into great insight, realization, and enlightenment. Hisako Nakamura, a woman in Japan who lived her whole life without hands or feet, resolved her personal tragedy through her encounter with Buddhism.

Recipe Two:

1. Search for happiness.
2. Dissatisfaction with life.
3. Unfulfilled life from material things.
4. Study and reflection on the Dharma.
5. Teachers and teachings.

We don't necessarily have to have a traumatic personal tragedy to become religious. Being dissatisfied with life, being unfulfilled in life, being depressed and not even knowing what causes it, are actually the signs that one is seeking something deeper, that one is actually seeking for a truth like enlightenment. In this recipe, our unfulfilled life becomes the seed for our enlightenment. Our unhappiness, our depression, our dissatisfaction with life is transformed into the opposite. Our life becomes fulfilled. We find the deepest meaning of happiness. We are not only satisfied, we are deeply grateful for all the many things we could never see or appreciate in life. In other words, we find happiness and meaning in things that we never knew.

We have to find our own recipe for enlightenment and realization of the Dharma. In some cases it takes years of "simmering and baking" to create a dish of enlightenment. In other cases, it might not take so long. We have to find the right ingredients of our life and experiences that enable us to create or discover the recipe for enlightenment for ourselves. The recipe is there for us to discover just like cooking, sometimes we have to experiment and try and try and try, and one of these days the dish will turn out perfectly. Try kicking your religious life up a notch by discovering the truth of Namuamidabutsu.