

On Instructions for Monks in the Kitchen Hall

(*Jikuin Mon*)

Translator’s Introduction: The text of this discourse would have been placed in the kitchen for the Chief Cook and the other kitchen monks to read and refer to.

When Hangyō Kōzen prepared the first published version of the *Shōbōgenzō* in 1690, he added this chapter, along with Discourse 1: A Discourse on Doing One’s Utmost in Practicing the Way of the Buddhas (*Bendōwa*) and Discourse 5: On Conduct Appropriate for the Auxiliary Cloud Hall (*Jūundō Shiki*), to the other versions of the *Shōbōgenzō* that he found in Eihei-ji.

On the sixth day of the eighth lunar month in the fourth year of the Kangen era (September 17, 1246), I expounded on the following for the assembly, “The method of training for monks who are responsible for preparing meals is to have them make reverence their underlying principle.” After the Tathagata’s entering parinirvana, the Dharma has been accurately Transmitted from far off India and to China, and during that time, celestial beings have made spiritual offerings to the Buddhas and Their disciples. Rulers of nations have also made alms offerings of royal food to the Buddhas and Their disciples. In addition, the households of wealthy and ordinary lay folk have respectfully made food offerings, and there have even been laborers and servants who have done the same. These alms offerings were accompanied with deep respect and cordiality. Among persons in lofty positions, as well as among ordinary folk, were those who made offerings of food and other things in a most respectful way, accompanied with highly courteous bows and with the most polite forms of speech, because of the depth of their intentions. Now, even though we are deep within remote mountains, we should personally receive the authentic Transmission of polite acts and respectful words from those who serve in the Kitchen Hall of our temple, for this is how those in lofty positions, as well as ordinary folk, have pursued their study of the Buddha’s Dharma.

For example, when speaking of the breakfast gruel, you should take the time to say, ‘our revered gruel’ or ‘our morning gruel’, but not just ‘the gruel’.¹ When

1. ‘Our revered gruel’ and similar phrases are somewhat heavy-handed English translations. In Japanese, the respectful form for ‘gruel’ is made simply by adding the prefix ‘o-’ to the Chinese-derived word *shoku* to form *o-shoku*. The word for ‘morning gruel’ is *chōshoku*,

speaking of the midday meal, you should take the time to say ‘our revered midday meal’ or ‘our lunchtime’, but not just ‘lunch’. You should take the time to say, “Would you please prepare some white rice for me?” and not just, “Pound me some rice!” As to washing rice, you should take the time to say, “Would you please wash some rice for me?” and not spend your time saying, “Wash me some rice!” You should take the time to say, “Would you please select some vegetables for our stir-fry dish?” and not, “Get me some veggies!” You should take the time to say, “Would you please prepare a nice broth for our meal?” and not, “Make us some broth!” You should take the time to say, “Would you please prepare some nice hot soup for our meal?” and not, “Make us some soup!” You should take the time to say, “The lunchtime meal—or the morning gruel—has been prepared ever so nicely.”

Be sure to treat all the utensils used to prepare the midday meal and the morning gruel with similar respect. Disrespect invites calamity; it is never accompanied by anything meritorious.

While the midday meal and the breakfast gruel are being prepared, no one should breathe all over the rice and vegetables, or any other food items. Do not let the sleeve of your robe brush against even dry food items. If your hand has come in contact with your head or face, do not handle any utensils or food until you have washed it. From the time of sorting the rice until the cooking of it to make a broth, should you happen to scratch yourself, by all means you should wash your hands.

In places where the midday meal and the morning gruel are being prepared, you should recite lines from Buddhist Scriptures or passages spoken by the Ancestral Masters. Do not engage in worldly talk or use crude speech. As a principle, you should take the time to use polite word forms when speaking of such things as rice, meals, salt, and soy sauce. You should not use your time saying, “There’s rice,” or “There’s veggies.”

When senior monks and novices pass by the place where the midday meal or the morning gruel is being conducted, they should respectfully bow with hands in *gassho*.*

If there are any spilt vegetables or spilt rice, they should be made use of after the meal.²

which again is a reading derived from the Chinese. Dōgen contrasts these with the colloquial Japanese word for gruel: *kayu*.

* See *Glossary*.

2. That is, fed to animals or used for compost.

To the extent that the morning or midday meals have not concluded, you should not intrude upon them.

You should take care to preserve the utensils used for preparing meals and not use them for other purposes. Do not let them be handled by lay folk who have come from home until they have washed their hands. Such foodstuffs as vegetables and fruit which have come from lay folk and which have not yet been cleansed should be rinsed, incensed, and left to dry by the fire, and then respectfully offered to the Three Treasures and to the monks of the assembly. In the mountain retreats and the temples of Great Sung China today, if lay folk bring such things as dumplings, dairy cakes, and steamed cakes, they should be reheated before being served to the monastic community. This will purify them. Do not serve them without reheating them.

These are but a few points among many. O you who are in charge of the Kitchen Hall, you need to understand their great import and put them into practice. Within all your myriad duties, do not act contrary to these standards.

These items are the lifeblood of the Buddhas and Ancestors and the Eye of patch-robed monks. Non-Buddhists know them not: celestial demons cannot endure them. Only the disciples of Buddha have been able to Transmit them. O you who are senior officers of the Kitchen Hall, discern them well and do not let them be lost!

*Displayed here by Dōgen,
the Founding Monk of this temple.*

I, as Master of Eihei-ji Temple, now address the Chief Officer: If it is already past noon when a donor makes an offering of cooked rice, you should keep it in storage until the next day. But if it is something like cakes, fruit, or some kind of gruel, or the like, even though it is already evening, serve it as a medicine meal for the assembly of the Buddhas and Ancestors.³ And what is more, such a meal is an excellent trace left by those in Great Sung China who realized the True Way.

The Tathagata always permitted monks living in the Himalayas to wear underclothing. We on this mountain also permit such medicine during the times of snow.

*Kigen, the Founding Monk of Eihei.*⁴

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3. Traditionally, only two meals are served to the monastic community, one in the morning and another before noon. Because monks, particularly those who are ill or are engaged in heavy physical labor, may need more nourishment than these two meals provide, an evening meal may be offered as a form of ‘medicine’ to provide additional nourishment for the body.
 4. Kigen was one of Dōgen’s names.