

Yoga With A Knife

Ingredients

There are many ingredients to this soup. Read like a mantra, there is zucchini and summer squash from mom and dad's garden. There are carrots, sprouts, macadamia nuts, sunflower seeds, veggie broth,



Bragg's, oregano, parsley, and salt and pepper. And, of course, a knife—to cut through what was once solid. And fire—to cook it up so I can assimilate it.

Another essential ingredient to this practice is breath. I breathe in deeply and smell the aromatic cauldron of veggies boiling on the stove; a scent so pure and strong, it reaches each room with misty tendrils, filling the entire apartment. The broth has turned an orange-brown color and juggles the bits of veggies—orange, green, and yellow—with its rolling boil. Each breath fills me with calm satisfaction, a sensual comfort of work close to Earth.

Like many rituals, this one has a costume. Instead of tight lycra, here I don my bulky, heavy-cotton chef shirt; a now-dirty white, the sleeves rolled up to the wrists, the chef shirt boasts two columns of buttons on either side, with my jazz moniker "SP Train" sewn into the correct place, over my heart. The jazz reference seems fitting. After all, cooking is a performance of sorts. The kitchen is my venue, my Village Vanguard. The other players are the stove on bass, the cutting board on drums, and the sink on piano. It's a concert. It's like jazz and yoga, both: equal parts recipe and improvisation.

Music is part of the ritual. Usually it's Chet Baker or Miles Davis (the trumpet sounds so good in the kitchen). But today, it's Lee Morgan's *Sidewinder*. My good friend just gave me this album as a thank-you gift for letting him stay crash at my house last week. I let the sounds waft through the kitchen on repeat so I can digest all of it: the album, the memory of my friend, the ingredients, the time at home, and the opportunity to savor a moment lost in my own thoughts and designs. I can't help but think how "tasty" this music is, how easy on the ears.

Of course, there is an order, an alignment, to this practice. In the same way I'd align my body in yoga practice, I align all the members of my kitchen. I boil the carrots before the squash to get the texture right. I cut and cook before I clean. At the end, this knife goes here, this plate there. I stretch and reach to put away the tall glasses in the top of the cupboard. I squat to put away the heavy pot in the drawer beneath the stove. My body knows what to do next, accustomed to this ritual.

The Practice of Washing Dishes



My life changed the day I realized that I would be doing dishes every day, sometimes a couple times a day, for the rest of my life. This realization was not resignation but realization. Regardless of any other important mental, spiritual, or physical work I may do

in this lifetime, one of my most fundamental tasks will be dish washing. It is something simple and ordinary but grounding and essential. Like breathing, I guess. Like moving my body through the same sun salutations. In this way, I get new lessons from old teachers.

There is contentment and ease in this practice. I love the sensation of the warm water and suds over my hands, the stable feel of my feet planted into the kitchen floor. Celeste is in the other room reading; her peaceful pleasure is palpable throughout the apartment, like a sigh and a slow, beating heart. I can feel she's as content as I am, happy to have the comfort of both of us at home, me creating a meal for us in my favorite practice in the kitchen.



Enlightenment

Eventually comes the moment of enlightenment: eating. I struggle not to analyze the food. What if I would have added some fennel while the veggies were cooking? I decide in time before I've spoiled the magic that it's good enough, that there's nothing else to do. But eat. This is the moment for enjoyment, nourishing body and soul. I savor it slowly and eat just enough, not too much, like we practice with yoga postures, finding the balance—so we're satiated but not uncomfortable.

This practice starts with me directing the kitchen into chaos: pots boiling, utensils strewn on counters, something dribbling

over the stove onto the floor, the molten hot contents of the blender exploding into a veggie volcano when I hit the pulse button... Then calmly, happily, I use a little bit of muscle and bring it all back into order, one sponge wipe at a time. I towel off the last bit of the silverware and put it back into the drawer. I bask in the clean, clear quiet at the end, and then, finally, take off my chef shirt and hang it on its familiar peg as I walk out the door. Only to do it again tomorrow.

As the old Zen adage, "Cut wood. Carry water," teaches us, if we don't find enlightenment, meaning, and purpose in life's everyday tasks, we are moving too fast and missing the bigger picture. Slow down, and find a way to enjoy it. This daily life is the practice. Eat it up!



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