

## WASH YOUR RICE

Listening to Korean Chef Roy Choi talk about his culinary style lends new meaning to spiritual awakening. As he explains, rice is a basic nutritional necessity in east Asian culture: “it is how you live, everything you are.” As Americans say wheat is the staff of life, Choi applies the same importance to rice. In preparation to cooking rice, Choi washes the rice. He does not mean rinsing it, he means cleansing it. In an almost sensual fashion, he describes massaging each grain, “as you transfer your energy to the rice it transfers its energy to you.” Through the process, the starch from the rice first clouds the water. He says you must drain the cloudy water and wash it again. Repeating the process the water goes from cloudy to clear. For him, it is a spiritual connection, “like cleansing your soul.” (NPR Morning Edition, November 5, 2013.)

Eastern faith traditions look upon the mystical connection with the Ultimate differently from western traditions - especially those of the Semitic variety. Ancient Chinese writers refer to the Great Ultimate: a relationship between being and non-being, and the unity of Nature and mankind. Chaplain refers often in essays to Taoists Chuang Tzu and Lao Tzu. In Chaplain’s essay “Mr West Meets the Satori,” Lao Tzu is quoted as placing mankind’s existence on loan from the Universe. That is, mankind’s life and its power is not completely under its own control. Even western Scriptures suggest this by the phrase, “what is given is taken away.” In Chaplain’s essay there is an exhortation by a Zen Master: “The root of distress is a sense of alienation from the natural order of the universe.” Chef Choi’s rice cleansing is a perfect metaphor for this nature-human dynamic. Rice is a product of nature. Mankind consumes rice for life and energy. A person in hunger is in distress. This is not the correct natural order. Choi’s claim that rice is, “how you live, everything you are” - validates the proper human natural order.

Chef Choi exhibits himself as a philosopher as well as a chef. The visual connection of rice water to soul cleansing is vivid. As a young Roman Catholic school student, the nuns taught Chaplain that the soul could be cleansed of all its sinful black marks only through confession. Any remainingsmudges must be purged to pure white in purgatory - a place half way to heaven. Choi’s metaphor has a better grasp on the idea. He indicates that the cleansing of rice is a moment by moment thing. Convenient; why wait until purgatory? A daily cleanse of what has been done wrong and of one’s ill thoughts is far more advantageous to both the human soul and to nature, than waiting for purgatory. Cleansing of rice has another mystical quality. Choi’s method of massaging each grain, “as you transfer your energy to the rice it transfers its energy to you,” relates to the concept of Process.

Philosopher Alfred North Whitehead and Theologian Charles Hartshorne both followed the concept of Process, or Becoming. Whitehead was secular while Hartshorne added the cosmic (God or gods, if desired). The concept of Process or Becoming in either version has to do with the growth of the human both in morality and in ethical

thinking. That is, as one processes through life, they gain moral concepts from a variety of sources and influences. One also sheds some of those influences, as well as transfers some to others as they perceive the ethical nature of those influences. Chaplain describes this in the essay, "Where Does the Universe End?" Whitehead called this Becoming a Flux. Hartshorne called this Flux "an ever changing flow of energy between mortal and immortal." Hartshorne's words ring clear in Choi's description; between mortal and nature.

Sometimes, philosophical concepts become too heady. They are often a language understood only by those with philosophical leanings. Chef Choi - itinerant philosopher - presents a wonderful way to understand the concept of natural order and, how we live in it and by it. He offers us an excellent visual organic way to meditate on how we are loaned our existence by nature - the Universe - and how to respect it. There is a conclusion to this essay. It is one of suggestion: buy some rice, cleanse it, think of what it means, and then enjoy eating it in good spirit.

May your soul be cleansed, and your tummy be filled.

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