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Cooking Practices Audio.mp3

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START OF TRANSCRIPT**[00:20:25]**

When I was growing up, dinner time was sacred. I don't know if my parents would have used that language at the time, though I do know they would indulge their minister daughter in that language. But it really was sacred. Almost every night we'd gather around the table, someone would cook and the rest of us would set the table, laying out the plates and napkins and silverware and glasses we'd select serving dishes and serving spoons, putting them out on the table. And once we sat down before we ate, we join hands and we'd say Grace. And as we passed the food, we'd share with each other two things, something that had happened in our day and something that we were thankful for. I wouldn't have thought this at the time, but our evening meals were full of ritual. We certainly had dinners that were more rushed when someone wasn't there or when we watch TV or read our books during dinner. But usually dinner was a time of intentionally coming together, taking a moment out of our busy days to eat and catch up and spend time together. And that intentionality around food is something I've carried throughout my life in different ways.

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And that's something that deeply influences the way that I now think of cooking and nourishing myself so often in life. I find that I don't pay enough attention to my body. I get caught up in the work that I'm doing, which is so deeply mind focused, only noticing my body when it's telling me something is wrong like that. Not I get in my shoulder from hunching over the computer or grumble in my belly to remind me I haven't had lunch yet. In so many ways. I strive to be in touch with my body, to care for it lovingly and gently, and it is hard to do now. Being human means that we must nourish our bodies. Our bodies need sustenance in order to survive, need to be fed in order to continue to do all that we do in the world. And even though what and how and where and when we eat is vastly different from community to community, even from person to person. Nourishing ourselves is just a fact of being human.

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It's like breathing. We have to do it. And unlike breathing, we have to constantly and actively make decisions about how we are going to do it. But even though it's a requirement of being human, I think that nourishing our bodies can still be a spiritual practice, at least in those moments when we do it with intention.

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Not every time that I cook or eat feels like a spiritual practice. Sometimes I microwaving a breakfast burrito, eating it in the car on my way to a doctor's appointment or heating up leftovers for dinner when I am already way too hungry to be focusing. That doesn't feel like a spiritual practice. It doesn't feel intentional and something I'm doing on purpose. Those times just feel like I'm doing what I need to do to feed my body and get through the day. But that's not to say that eating a frozen breakfast burrito or heating up leftovers can't be a spiritual practice. It's not what I'm cooking or eating that determines if it's a spiritual practice, it's the way I'm cooking or eating the intention and the thought that I put into doing it, rather. Nicole Genel is an Episcopal priest and she's a former executive director of The Abundant People, a nonprofit organic farm and BIPAC and woman lead worker collective in Southern California. And she has a powerful reflection that I really love about how it is a spiritual practice for her to participate in a CSA and community supported agriculture where you financially support a farm at the start of the season and in exchange you get produce from that farm throughout the season. She writes about how each week her family picks up their box of vegetables from the farm. Her partner cleans and stores everything, and she begins the process of cooking it. Throughout the week, the vegetables call me back, Reverend Jamal says, keeping me accountable to my spiritual discipline. There are several more rounds of chopping, staying, roasting, spicing and baking. Those cooking moments are an invitation to reflect on my life and the life of the.

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Community of which I am a part I try to be present to the meditative rhythm of prepping, creating, cooking, cooling and washing dishes. This is my time to reflect on my life's work and relationships.

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So I participated in a CSA on and off through my life right now, every other week we get a pound and a half of mushrooms from a local farm, which is absolutely wonderful. And with a CSA, I do find it's easy to be intentional about the food and cooking and eating. I get weekly emails from the farm with pictures of the farmers and the harvest, and I know exactly where my food is coming from. Even when they share something from another farm, they tell me all about it. But even when my food is coming to me from the grocery store, even when I'm not sure where my vegetables are grown or how far they traveled to get to me, I try my best to be intentional about the ways in which I interact with my food, reminding myself how powerful it is to be nourished by this food that has made its way through so many hands to get to me. And I've been trying recently to start my day with an intentional meal rather than waking up catapulting myself into the day. I'm lucky that I have a schedule that allows me to linger at the breakfast table.

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Most mornings I make my breakfast. Sometimes I have the time and energy and interest to make something more involved, like pancakes or breakfast sandwich or the incredibly well topped bowl of oatmeal I made earlier this week. And often it's a bowl of cereal or one of those breakfast Fritos I mentioned. I boil the kettle and I prepare myself a cup of tea. I sit at the table and I enjoy my food and my tea may be reading a book or texting a friend, maybe listening to music or a podcast, not necessarily putting all of my focus and attention into my food, how it tastes and smells and makes me feel. But by slowing down and being intentional with breakfast, I notice these things more than I usually would. And I find that it sets the tone for the rest of my day. And every once in a while I do take the time to slow down and to be much more explicit and intentional with my meal. And so I invite you to gather a bite of food or a sip of drink if you have one.

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I have just a little bit of granola here this morning, and I invite you to hold it in your hands and bring it into this moment of meditation. And if you don't have one nearby, that's OK. You can just imagine one, settle your body, adjust your position so that you feel relaxed and comfortable. And let us begin with a few short, deep, slow breaths. In and out and in and out, this bite or sip that you are holding, beloved, is powerful. It has the power to nourish your body, the body that you rely on in order to be who you are in this world. And this bite or sip connects us all to one another in this moment, as we take the time to eat and drink together, even when we're not in the same room, sharing food and drink around us in the same moment. And so take this food at this drink and contemplate it.

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What does it look like?

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What colors and shapes can you see when you examine it?

[00:29:51]

And what can you smell?

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Is it savory or sweet? Is it bitter or salty, and how does it feel in your hands? What textures does it hold? Is it smooth or sticky, crumbly or firm?

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What's its temperature, hot or cold or warm?

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And finally, take this bite or set.

[00:30:34]

What does it tastes like, what flavors can you tease out, what does it feel like in your mouth? Enjoy it as long as possible. Savor it, allow it to nourish you, allow yourself to be nourished.

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And as this bite or sip sustains you, I invite you to cultivate gratitude for all the hands it had to pass through to get to you, those who sold or sold these seeds, who cultivated the plants and animals, those who picked and packaged those who transported this food and its ingredients near and far, those who processed and packaged it for selling, those who prepared it and brought it to your table. Whether this food came directly from your own garden or from far, far away, nothing finds its way to our tables without being touched by the hands of many others. We are always connected to each other. Our nourishment and sustenance is always supported by so many people. Notice the contributions they all bring to this moment of nourishment for your body and notice the ways in which you carry that nourishment, imbued with their contributions into your life, into everything that you do. May you be nourished and sustained by the spirit or SIP and all that has made it possible to be here with you. So, dear ones, what did it feel like to focus so intentionally on what you are consuming? Did you experience what you were eating or drinking differently than you might otherwise?

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I invite you to share with one another if that feels comfortable. As I took my bite of this granola intentionally and slowly, I noticed all the different flavors that are at play in it, all the spices, the nuts and the sweetness, the oats. But I don't always notice when I just eat a bowl of it. And I appreciated taking that moment to think about everyone who was involved in getting it to my table. This granola that I was eating has so many ingredients and so the number of people involved is just amplified.

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The people who I will never meet but who have deeply influenced this moment of sustenance in my life, I appreciated getting to slow down and reminding myself to savor this sustenance.

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As I said earlier, I don't do a guided meditation every time I eat or even most of the times that I eat, but I do find that doing one every so often helps me internalize. It helps my body to remember that being nourished is a true blessing, helps me focus on a particularly tasty raspberry or mug of tea that is just the perfect temperature or the blending of spices in what I'm eating when every so often I take a little bit of time and energy to explicitly focus on my meal.

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It helps me in the moments when I'm not paying quite so much attention to still implicitly pick up some of those things. And so I invite you to think about how you might carry some of this intentionality into your regular meals. You may choose to do a guided meditation regularly while you eat, but even if you're not doing that, how can you imbue just a few moments of intentionality into your meals?

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And one way that I bring that intentionality into my eating is to also be intentional about my cooking. I really enjoy being in the kitchen, whether I'm really focused on a recipe in a cookbook or just making it up as I go. One of the things that I love about cooking is that it is physical and it is embodied. It reminds me to remember that I have a body to use that body and to engage it as much as I engage my mind. Even before the pandemic, I did a lot of my work remotely, sitting at my computer, staring at the screen, collaborating over Zoom. And now it's even more apparent how easy it is for me to go about my day with a minimal engagement of my body and moving my body when I cook feels comfortable. It feels straightforward. The aches that I get in my shoulders when I need bread, I'm much more comfortable than the aches I get from sitting at my computer for hours and hours. The repetitiveness of stirring risotto or soup. It's a welcome relief from just moving my fingers and nothing else at the computer. When I cook, I am always moving around. There are ingredients to go find and materials to gather, dishes to stack, things to fuss with.

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Timers to turn off, food to check on. Cooking always involves my whole body and for that I am so grateful. I invited you today to bring the ingredients for a simple recipe like cinnamon sugar or a basic vinaigrette. And together, I want us to take a few moments to explore how even just putting two simple ingredients together can be an embodied experience. How taking just a few moments to prepare some food can help ground us, and how prepping that food for later can connect us to the deep blessing of nourishing ourselves. So if you have your ingredients with you, I invite you into a moment of very simple cooking with me. So I have today some sugar and some cinnamon, and I'm excited to mix this up and to store it and sprinkle it on my oatmeal, maybe mix it into my tea, incorporate it into something that I bake. Actually, really appreciate that. I don't have to know exactly what I'm going to do with it to prepare a recipe. I can let myself be inspired later about how I'm going to use it and I'll have to make a long, elaborate plan. I can just decide to make this now and figure it out later.

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So all I'm going to do is to put this cinnamon into this sugar in the bowl and then I'm going to take a spoon and mix them.

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If you're making vinaigrette, you could stir or whisk or shake them in a jar, whatever else you have.

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Just take a moment to combine the ingredients, mix them together, create something new out of multiple parts. Feel the way your body gets into this repetitive practice. The ways you may begin to feel more grounded as you bring your attention to this task. Think about the ways you might choose to use what you are making, the ways in which you might nourish your body with it.

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Think about the power of taking just a moment now to care for your body later.

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And when you eat this later, when you dress your salad or top your oatmeal or whatever it is that you will do with this simple recipe you have made. Remember what it felt like to put these ingredients together to engage your own

body in creating something that will nourish it later.

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What a blessing.

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So, beloveds, I hope you are able to carry some of this feeling of intention, of intention into your cooking and eating, allowing yourself to be grounded in the very act of nourishing and sustaining your body. For all that, it does mean that be powerful to you and may the very act of nourishing your body sustain you. And I invite you to join me in entering a spirit of prayer. Only one one who sustains us. We gather knowing there is so much on our hearts, so much on our minds in these times, so much that we are carrying.

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It can feel overwhelming as we try to do all that we are called to do.

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Help us spirit to remember the ways we are able to keep moving forward, to remind us that taking care of ourselves, embracing the miracles of our bodies and nourishing them is what we need to do this work our bodies, our miracles, spirit. Help us to remember that caring for and sustaining them is blessed work. And in those moments when we cannot seem to remember this, when we find ourselves surrounded yet again by those who will help to nourish and sustain us. Until we are able to do it for ourselves.

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May we be nourished?

END OF TRANSCRIPT



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