



KALSANG TASHI

From Arunachal Pradesh, India, to Neukölln, Berlin

“I never use recipes;
I always use the judgement of my fingers.”

It's the 1970s in Arunachal Pradesh, a land criss-crossed by colourful flags in the Himalayan foothills of the North Indian region. There's a sizable Tibetan population, including Tashi's family — his mother, father, and their seven children.

Tashi was born to a proud mother, a Tibetan refugee who fled after the 1959 uprising against the Chinese. His father was a Buddhist monk from Tawang, India, and a lone wolf prone to violence. When Tashi was eight, his mother passed away, leaving behind warm memories of days spent working with the land. As a child, Tashi lovingly prepared and brought food for his mother's lunch, to keep her energy and spirits high. Little did he know that this would be the spark that ignited his life-long passion for cooking.

Following in the footsteps of his siblings, who all fled because of their father's frequent beatings and assumed mental illness, Tashi left home at 15 to spend four years in a Buddhist monastery. Shortly afterwards, he joined the Special Frontier Force (SFF), an operations unit of the Indian army comprised mainly of Tibetan refugees. He served in the SSF for almost a decade, spending as much time as possible in his happy place — the kitchen. Not enjoying army training and preferring to cook, Tashi became a porter in

Manali, a township in the Beas River valley of the Himalayas. In this work, his physical and mental strength were fused, enabling him to carry up to 40 kilos while walking a whole day on steep dirt roads frequently hit by landslides. Here, a German tourist with bold hair and an awkwardly fitting chuba (a traditional Tibetan dress) caught his eye.

And so, life changed again — fast! They married after six months, and Tashi set about his new life in Berlin. Arriving in April, he swooned over the blossoming spring, and new relationship. There was also a healthy dose of cultural shock. In November, he stood on a small balcony, watching leaves fall as the season transformed. He'd never seen this in India; he was so far from the barefoot child lugging water home that he once was.

Twenty years have passed, and with them, Tashi has built a resilience to long and cold winters, a new culture, and German grammar. He now feels established in Berlin, and works as a cook for a catering firm. He is also the proud father of two daughters. Having had many former lives, Tashi can pick the best of each to form an incredibly unique and special perspective — in life and food. Unsurprisingly, he avoids the beaten path in both, cooking and living, intuitively.



Making Momos for the Tibetan New Year (Losar)

"Momos are prepared for big celebrations like the Tibetan New Year, marriages, guest visits, or when candles are lit for the lamas. As a child, I loved momos, but could rarely eat them; my mother was often busy, as she was the only one working in the family. New Year was the only exception.

Cooking momos takes a long time. There are different momo patterns with twisted, round, and braided shapes that have to be made by hand. It seems to be easy to do, but it's not. There's a skill to folding. It was wonderful to make momos with her; it was one of the best times of my life.

The time to prepare momos depends on how many people will eat them. For example, if you make one kilogram of meat, it takes two to three hours to make them, because it's a single person working.

Then, we went to the temple for blessings for a good year and good health, and prayed for our families. Everybody from the village celebrated together, and then we all went home to eat momos.

Finally, many families and their friends hosted parties together for 10 to 15 days. They pooled money to buy a cow together, sharing lots of meat. Back then, people didn't look for big things in life. We didn't have much, but it was beautiful.

In Berlin, I celebrate it with my two daughters because it's important to me that they know my culture. I miss my childhood, even if it was a hard life. I always tell my daughters, 'You are lucky, you were born here on a flower. I was born on the thorn.'

→ Tibetan New Year, commonly known as Losar, is celebrated annually in regions with ties to Tibetan Buddhism. The starting date is typically in February or March, following the Tibetan Calendar.

→ The first three days of Losar are considered very important. On the first day, people visit monasteries, and usually spend time with their families. On the second, official public celebrations are held, and, on the third, people place prayer flags in the hills and around the house. Holy altars with offerings are found in every Tibetan home during the celebration.

→ Traditionally, Tibetans do not celebrate individual birthdays. Instead, according to common practice, everyone turns one year older on the first day of the New Year.

→ Momos are steamed dumplings typically filled with vegetables, spices, and meat. They were initially made with only buffalo and yak meat, as vegetables were scarce in the Himalayan regions.

→ Momos are important in Tibetan family culture. Recipes tend to be passed down through generations, so families often have distinct versions. Because of the work that goes into making this dish, it is seen as a time for social and familial bonding.

Momos

🍲 1 h 30'

🕒 20'

👤 60 pieces / 4 people

Ingredients

Filling

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1kg minced meat (either pork or beef, it can be a little fatty)

350g onion

200g spring onion

200g coriander

3 tbsp soya sauce

3 tbsp oil

50ml water

a pinch of salt

Dough

1kg white flour type 405

500ml water

salt

Equipment

Rolling pin

Steamer

Dumpling press (optional)

Storage

The leftovers can be stored in the fridge, and pan-fried the next day.

Recipe tip

If you don't have a steamer, you can cook the meat momos in boiling, salty water for 15 mins. They can also be cooked in clear vegetable stock

Method

Filling

Put the meat in a bowl.

Chop the onion, spring onion and coriander.

Mix the meat, chopped onions, spring onions and coriander with the soya sauce, oil, water and salt. Leave it for 25 mins to rest.

Dough

Put the flour and salt in a bowl.

Add the water and combine with flour to make one ball of dough.

Smear a little oil on the ball.

Cover it with a piece of cloth. Leave it for 30 mins to rest.

Divide the ball in four equal parts.

Take the first part and make a flat circle 50cm in diameter with the rolling pin.

Take a glass of 6 or 7cm in diameter to cut out 15 little circles from the dough. Move the glass carefully round and round to cut out the pieces.

Then repeat with the other three parts of the dough.

Making the momos

Hold a dumpling wrapper in one hand, and scoop about 1 heaped tbsp of filling into the centre of the wrapper.

Start sealing the edges with your other hand. After folding, press the edge with the dumpling press to seal it well.

If you don't have a dumpling press, just fold the dumpling in two, seal the edges with your fingers. Press the side with a fork.

Smear a little oil on the bottom of the steamer, and place the momos on the oiled steamer, one finger's width apart from each other. Boil the water and place the steaming rack on top.

Steam for 20 mins.

