

ZEN IN THE KITCHEN

Disney's delightfully successful animated film '[Ratatouille](#)' focuses on the life of Remy, a rat with a remarkable talent.

That talent needs first to be recognised as such, then developed.



And that development needs the right environment.

In the story we get to meet the famous chef, Gusteau, who proclaims that 'anyone can cook'.

It's also the title of his winning cookery book that Remy reads in the kitchen of the house where his clan lives.

Gusteau is right: anyone *can* cook.

Any one.

The One.

Because The One can do anything and everything.

As Disney, on his way to creating the studios on what were originally orange plantations, stated: "If you can dream it, you can make it."

When you are able to get in touch with The One, you, too, will be capable of ... well, in this case, changing your style of cooking.

[Osho](#), himself a remarkable Zen Master, describes the origins of Zen very simply.

The story starts in India, where 'dhyān' means meditation.

But India is a place where great things start but do not necessarily come to fruition.

Another location is needed for that.

Bodhidharma travelled eastwards for several years till he settled in China where the seed of the teachings could grow into a young sapling.

But even in China the conditions were unsuitable for this tree of wisdom to mature.

So, just as the nurseryman transplants his trees to ensure the right conditions for the particular phase of growth, it was only when the teachings reached Japan – even further to the east – that they could blossom in the unique cultural conditions of that country to become the Zen as we know it today.

So the key in many senses is meditation.

The key is simplicity.

The key is an obedience to the inner voice – that even at the moment of writing these words is guiding my fingers over the keyboard.

'Obedience' has negative connotations. But Zen reminds you that a word is but a word is but a word. And the obedience here is a simple honouring of the flowering awareness of the instructions spoken by – as the Bible states – *the still small voice within* ([1 Kings 19: 11-12](#) – a beautiful text in itself, well worth looking up).

Back to Gusteau and 'anyone can cook'.

That means you.

You'll need some basics:

- a place to cook
- a means of cooking
- some tools
- some ingredients

... and above all a sense of discovery and a desire to feed yourself, not out of hunger but from great curiosity about all the ways of nourishing your body while exploring whole new worlds of methods and flavours.

An important point: this is *not* a treatise on ‘culinary’ cooking or ‘cuisine’.

This is just a text to bring you into closer contact with an innate creative process which may be dormant, may be reluctant to be awakened, yet is certainly within you.

It’s that which combines your need for food with a desire for pleasure and enjoyment.

Like when I’m with a friend in an oriental restaurant.

I know very quickly what I want to eat, the ‘right’ meal to nourish my body and satisfy my senses.

People often order ‘mind food’ instead of ‘body food’. What’s the difference? Well, if I’m hungry I may grab biscuits or open a bag of crisps – that’s most probably the mind at work. My body prefers more than just fillers; it wants nourishment, real food.

For example, there’s nothing wrong with popcorn but while it can fill you up you will still be hungry at another level because your body requires a broader spectrum of nutrition.

I should note here that popcorn – without any toppings! – is particularly useful for those wishing to lose weight. Like plain salad, it provides oral satisfaction, is filling and leaves little room for additional food with more calories!

Back to the restaurant: I just ask my dinner guest very simple questions to get in touch with the body’s preference from the choice on the menu:

Do you want rice or noodles?

[If rice] Do you want plain or fried rice?

[If noodles] Do you want fine rice noodles or thicker ones made of other grains?

Do you want a vegetarian dish or do you want some animals? (Yes, that’s the way I ask the question!)

[If ‘animals’] Do you feel like eating shrimp or other fish? Or beef? Or chicken? Or would you like to explore other specialities of this restaurant? I see that they have lamb, snake and sea-slug ...



‘Mind food’ is also when your stomach is full to bursting yet you still nibble at the prawn crackers, and then cram in a dessert on top of it all.

‘Body food’ is when you’re able to respect the stomach’s STOP signal, put down your cutlery and, if you’re in a restaurant, request a doggy bag.

So, responding to inner signals plays a crucial part in your relationship to food, cooking and genuinely *creating* the right meal *in the moment*. Some readers may need to discover these signals, for others it will already be part of their lives.