

The Samurai and the Soup

A certain samurai had a reputation for impatient and hot-tempered behavior. A Zen Master, well known for his excellent cooking, decided that the warrior needed to be taught a lesson before he became any more dangerous. He invited the samurai to dinner.

The samurai arrived at the appointed time. The Zen master told him to make himself comfortable while he finished preparing the food. A long time passed. The samurai waited impatiently. After a while he called out: "Zen Master - have you forgotten me?"

The Zen master came out of the kitchen. "I am very sorry," he said. "Dinner is taking longer to prepare than I had thought." He went back to the kitchen.

A long time passed. The samurai sat, growing hungrier by the minute. At last he called out a little softer this time: "Zen Master - please. When will dinner be served?"

The Zen master came out of the kitchen. "I'm sorry. There has been a further delay. It won't be much longer." He went back to the kitchen.

A long time passed. Finally, the samurai couldn't endure the waiting any longer. He rose to his feet, chagrined and ravenously hungry. Just then, the Zen master entered the room with a tray of food. First he served miso shiru (soybean soup).

The samurai gratefully drank the soup, enchanted by its flavor. "Oh, Zen Master," he exclaimed, "this is the finest miso shiru I have ever tasted! You truly deserve your reputation as an expert cook!"

"It's nothing," replied the Zen master, modestly. "Only miso shiru."

The samurai set down his empty bowl. "Truly magical soup! What secret spices did you use to bring out the flavor?"

"Nothing special," the Zen master replied.

"No, no - I insist. The soup is extraordinarily delicious!"

"Well, there is one thing . . ."

"I knew it!" exclaimed the samurai, eagerly leaning forward. "There had to be *something* to make it taste so good! Tell me - what is it?"

The Zen master softly spoke: "It took time," he said.