

The hundredth monkey discovers chaos theory

...OR The hundredth microbe discovers the kimchi theory

Patrick Ironwood

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a review of

Wild Fermentation by Sandor E. Katz, 2003, 180 pp, \$25. vwww.chelseagreen.com

The “hundredth monkey” suggests that if enough animals (including people) begin doing something, the rest will follow. “Chaos theory” suggests that a very small change can set a process in motion which causes an enormous effect. As a single yeast cell will divide and change barley to beer, we can feel empowered to change our lives.

Welcome to the world of Sandor Ellix Katz.

In its kooky and non-intimidating way, Sandor’s book, *Wild Fermentation*, takes us on a journey through time, taste and anthropology. with a unique and refreshing look at the current state of the world. In addition to traditional fermentation, the book covers GMOs, world trade, cultural homogeneity, gender, radical living, community, AIDS, love, health, and death. Always relating these things back to fermentation with a variety of recipes and philosophies, Sandor’s book is guaranteed to make the world a more savory place. I’ve never read anything quite like it. *Wild Fermentation* is personal, useful and life-affirming. If only the earth’s heads of state would be satisfied by controlling the multitudes of microbes in sauerkraut or kimchi instead of the people.

Whether you are vegan, vegetarian, opportunivore, or if you just eat, *Wild Fermentation* will set you spinning through healthy and exciting possibilities developed over the millennia by people and microbes working together in all sorts of wild combinations. Lounging everywhere on Earth, microbes are always present, always reproducing and always evolving with their ever-changing environment—they are the true engines of change—evolution.

Wild Fermentation includes recipes for sauerkraut, borscht, kimchi, miso, tempeh, dosas and idlis, yogurt, kefir, cheese, many types of bread, polenta, amazake, rejuvelac, kombucha, vinegar, cider, tej (Ethiopian honey wine), mead, champagne, wine, beer and much more.

I laugh out loud when I think about this book being read by the public. It’s full of easily digestible radical analysis and the matter-of-factness of Sandor’s fabulous lifestyle among the radical faeries living in the rural wilderness of middle Tennessee. Sandor writes:

“My advice is to reject the cult of expertise. Do not be afraid. Do not allow yourself to be intimidated... Do-it-yourselfers include folks who garden, cook ‘from scratch,’ make clothes and handicrafts, build and fix things, and practice healing arts...Anarchist punk culture uses do-it-yourself, or DIY, as a slogan to live by. Publishing a zine,’ being in a band, dumpster diving perfectly good food, squatting, activism, and skillshare events...

“So is rural homesteading. At Short Mountain, where I [Sandor] live, we create and maintain all our own infrastructure, including solar electricity, phone lines, and water systems. We raise goats and chickens, grow much of our food, and build and maintain the structures we inhabit. Among us are folks who make music, spin and dye yarn, knit, crochet, sew, and fix cars...

“Do-it-yourself fermentation is a journey of experimentation and discovery. Rediscovery really, because, like fire or simple tools, these are some of the most basic transformative processes that our ancestors used and that form

the basis of human culture. Every ferment yields unique results, influenced not only by ingredients but by environment, season, temperature, humidity and other factors affecting the behavior of the microorganisms whose actions make these transformations possible...Who knows what compelling' healing flavors could be floating around in your kitchen?"

This book will leave you feeling light and satisfyingly full—the opposite of Planet Microsoft. Wild Fermentation is about diversity in every kitchen. So much of the new world order relies upon sterility and cleanliness—anti-biotics and antimicrobials that suggest we might live forever without disease, discomfort, distraction. What a load of product-selling pulp! We have evolved not only surrounded by but actually created by our own personal microscopic community of life—which we need for a healthy existence and our continuing evolution. Sterility will ultimately lead to our demise. Our bodies are mostly made of microbes which have evolved working together. Deep in our evolutionary past, we were no more than a vehicle for the bacterial ancestors of our organs and tissues to find food, comfort and meaning.

Wild Fermentation will unleash a legion of radical cooks, tinkerers and inventors who will zealously spread diversity from kitchen to kitchen, from mouth to mouth, until all the world is free and wild again.

Wild Fermentation may bring about the shift we have been waiting for. If enough people start experimenting and being creative with fermentation, as Sandor encourages, we will have deviation from all recipes, as has already begun in our kitchen. While reading this book I ran over and over to the garden so I could experiment in the Moon-shadow kitchen with these fun and life-affirming concepts. I think fermentation is the hundredth monkey—or hundredth microbe—and, as it spreads, a new and vibrant “culture” is emerging.

Don't read this book—consume it!

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