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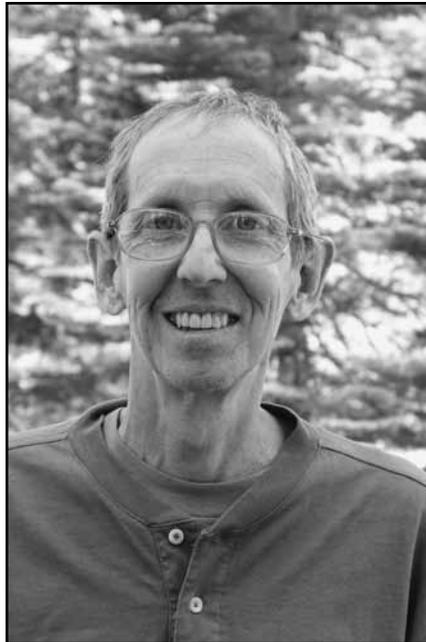
# Macrobiotics and Animal Foods

Carl Ferré

A young macrobiotic student named Joe had a problem with his neck. He practiced macrobiotics religiously for a couple of years, yet his condition continued to worsen. Joe flew from Texas to Boston to consult with Michio Kushi. He followed Michio's advice with no success. He consulted with Herman Aihara but Herman's advice didn't help either. Eventually, Joe couldn't turn his head without turning his entire body. His neck was cemented in one position.

Joe bounced from doctor to doctor but found no relief. Finally, one doctor suggested Joe see a specialist in North Carolina. This specialist diagnosed Joe's problem as an extremely rare bone disorder and gave him a solution—chicken. The specialist explained that Joe's bones were deteriorating and that there was something in chicken (and only in chicken) that could remedy his condition.

Joe was a friend of mine. I met him in 1975 before his problem started and we practiced macrobiotics together. He was very outgoing and funny—the life of any party. I moved to California to work at the George Ohsawa Macrobiotic Foundation in 1978 and saw him last in 1983 during a visit to Texas. He was complete-



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ly healed and back to his old self. I asked Joe how he had cured himself. He related his story as summarized above and then said, "I had to give up macrobiotics and start eating chicken in order to be well."

"Don't kid yourself," I blurted out, "You became macrobiotic once you started eating what your body needs." He couldn't understand it, however. The idea that chicken is excluded from macrobiotics was deeply

ingrained in him. To this day, I believe he was more macrobiotic when accepting his need of chicken and eating it than he was while following a prescriptive "macrobiotic" diet without chicken.

## **BACKGROUND**

Let's face it, some people include animal foods in their macrobiotic practice and others don't. Some people believe animal foods can be used in a healthy way. Other people believe animal foods other than seafood should be avoided completely. Some people are more inclusive in their practice and others are more restrictive.

There are compelling reasons to restrict or avoid animal foods other than seafood and impelling reasons not to exclude them from macrobiotics. Today, there are greater dangers in eating animal foods than ever before. The greater danger, however, is in reducing macrobiotic philosophy to a restrictive curative diet. This article presents the pros and cons of including animal foods other than seafood in macrobiotic thinking and practice. Note that from here on, "animal foods" refers to animal products other than seafood.

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The confusion about the place of animal foods within a macrobiotic practice begins with macrobiotic literature. *Zen Macrobiotics*, published in 1960, contains George Ohsawa's most detailed dietary advice. In it, he presents ten ways of healthy eating—five are vegetarian and five contain animal foods. His list of macrobiotic foods contains animal foods such as chicken, turkey, and eggs and dairy products such as butter and milk.

On the other hand, Ohsawa writes that animal foods are not necessary for a healthy life. He also believed that animal foods inhibit spiritual growth. He encouraged us to develop ourselves to the point where we don't need to eat them. I believe Ohsawa included animal products to avoid reducing macrobiotics to a rigid adherence to a set of rules and to avoid turning people away from macrobiotic thinking because they had a desire to eat animal food. Ohsawa wanted macrobiotics to be as inclusive as possible. He abhorred exclusivity in any form.

In their writings in the 1970s, Herman and Cornelia Aihara placed animal foods in a luxury food category to be eaten on special occasions. In fact, Cornelia served turkey and other animal foods at Thanksgiving for many years and published these recipes in *Calendar Cookbook*. Both Ohsawa and Aihara gave guidelines for the proper use of animal foods, including occasional use in small quantities, organically fed, and free-range animals. And, both Ohsawa and Aihara wrote that animal foods are not necessary for a healthy life.

The use of animal foods in macrobiotic practice took a turn toward avoidance with the writings of Michio and Aveline Kushi in the 1980s. In *Standard Macrobiotic Diet*, Michio Kushi placed animal foods, other than fish and seafood, in the "customarily avoided" category. By 1985, after writing that a small amount of fish or seafood could be served a few times a week, Aveline

Kushi wrote in her *Complete Guide to Macrobiotic Cooking*, "Other animal food, including meat, poultry, eggs, and dairy products are strictly avoided."

This departure from Ohsawa's teaching began the very adherence to a rigid set of rules that Ohsawa was trying to avoid. Today, many macrobiotic teachers and practitioners follow Aveline's prescription and strictly avoid meat, poultry, eggs, and dairy products. Further, many believe and teach that these foods are not part of a macrobiotic diet. When students encounter the writings of Ohsawa and Aihara, they become confused. We are left with a question: Are animal

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foods okay in a macrobiotic practice?

Macrobiotics, the great or large life, is big enough to support those who eat animal foods and those who don't. Macrobiotic principles teach that all opposites or antagonisms are also complementary. We can unify people who believe animal foods may be used in a healthy macrobiotic practice with people who believe all animal foods should be strictly avoided. Personally, I value and support both positions; however, I need to note there are problems with both.

### **PROBLEMS WITH INCLUDING ANIMAL FOODS**

The problem with writing that animal foods are okay to use is the possible confusion created by such a statement. The letters to the editor

in this issue of *Macrobiotics Today* spell out these concerns quite well. A macrobiotic diet is primarily a plant-based diet—the occasional use of a small amount of organically fed, free-range animals, and products from such animals, does not change this. It also does not mean that Ohsawa, Aihara, or any other person who understands macrobiotic principles condones abusive and cruel farming techniques.

People who exclude animal foods claim that saying even small amounts of animal foods are okay leads people to think that it's okay to eat animal foods whenever they want and in whatever quantity they want. This isn't true. Both Ohsawa and Aihara wrote about the many dangers of eating animal foods, especially given the quality of such foods in their day. Today, the quality is worse. Their cautions against an uninformed and over indulgent use of animal foods are relevant to this day.

There is a myth in macrobiotic circles that requires mentioning. Some macrobiotic practitioners think that because they don't eat animal products, they are higher spiritually, have higher judgment, or are in some other way better than people who include some animal food. Some vegan macrobiotic practitioners won't knowingly sit at the same table with people who eat animal foods regardless of the quality or quantity.

Whether or not a person chooses to eat or avoid animal foods, the attitude behind the decision is equally important. One core teaching of macrobiotics is non-exclusivity, or rather acceptance of others. Being able to tolerate others' decisions is important, especially when considering that most of us have relatives and associates who eat meat.

Another argument for the exclusion of animal foods is that most people beginning a macrobiotic practice do so in order to cure some illness. People in such a condition most often need to avoid animal foods in order

to heal. Somewhere along the line, it became easier to recommend all people avoid animal foods than to teach people their appropriate use. While there are many reasons for restricting most animal foods, the prohibition has caused confusion and has limited macrobiotics in many ways. The biggest limitation, in my opinion, is the impulse to blindly follow a standard diet rather than learn macrobiotic principles.

## PROBLEMS WITH EXCLUDING ANIMAL FOODS

One problem with the strict avoidance of animal foods is that it causes people who need to eat animal products for their health to worry excessively or to avoid the advice.

My friend Joe needed to eat animal food, namely chicken, for his condition. He quit macrobiotics because of it. He threw away the entire philosophy because of an inaccurate understanding of macrobiotics. How many other people are pushed away because of such a limiting perception?

I've known other people who have been told they need to eat animal foods beyond seafood. I faced the same dilemma several years ago. I choose to include some animal food for a while and it helped. I followed macrobiotics principles in determining what and how much to eat. It is not as difficult as some people imagine.

Another problem with excluding animal foods is that many macrobiotic teachers include them in their diets. Many years ago, I attended a wonderful lecture by a macrobiotic teacher on the many reasons to strictly avoid dairy products. I was so moved by his presentation that I went to his room after the talk to personally thank him. He was eating cold cereal with milk. I was shocked and wondered why he didn't practice what he preached.

Years later, I learned the reason while attending a macrobiotic teach-

ers gathering. We were asked how many of us had not eaten an egg or some other animal food other than seafood in the past couple of months. Only one teacher out of sixty raised her hand. I was confused. The justification given was that it was okay for teachers to use animal foods because teachers know macrobiotic principles such as quality, quantity, and appropriate use.

I began to think that eating animal food is okay for people who know macrobiotic principles and not okay for people who don't. Why not tell people that in the beginning? Why not explain how to include animal foods in a healthy way rather than telling

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people that they must be avoided at all costs?

Macrobiotic philosophy comprises a set of universal principles that can be used in all areas of life. However, macrobiotics has become so tied to a curative diet that the principles have been pushed to the background. Macrobiotics has become limited and is no longer macro in the dictionary definition of "very large in scale, scope, or capability." Not only is macrobiotics mostly limited to diet but also the diet is restrictive in nature.

## HOW TO INCLUDE ANIMAL FOODS

This section presents ideas for including animal foods using macrobiotic philosophy. These sug-

gestions are not intended to suggest in any way that anyone should include animal foods in his or her macrobiotic practice or without careful deliberation. It is up to each individual to decide whether or not to include animal foods in her or his macrobiotic practice.

**Condition:** Basically, animal foods are acid forming and are more taxing on the body to process than vegetal foods. For this reason (and others), people who have any existing disease are advised to use caution or to consult with a qualified health care provider before consuming animal foods. People who are totally healthy are advised to thoroughly study the nature and effects of animal foods before eating them.

**Constitution:** Some people find they do well including some animal foods and others don't. We are all different—there is nothing identical, including people. For example, many people with type-O blood tell me they do better including some animal food, while people with type-A blood do better with vegetal foods and avoiding animal foods.

**Purpose:** One's purpose for using macrobiotic principles/philosophy in one's life has a direct influence on whether or not to include animal foods. People who follow a macrobiotic practice for spiritual growth might find as Ohsawa and Aihara taught—the more vegetal food and less animal foods the better. People interested in healing a disorder will find the same advice applies, unless there is a specific need for their unique condition.

**Attraction:** I recall a session at French Meadows camp during which Cornelia spoke with the men while Herman entertained the women. One of the men asked Cornelia what women look for in a man. She looked around and said, "You are all too yin!" She encouraged us to eat more yang food, including animal food if appropriate. Her thinking was that we were not yang enough to be attractive

## Macrobiotic Table of Animal Foods

(Listed within each category in order from yin to yang)

Fish	Animal Products	Dairy Products
▼ oyster	▼▼ snail	▼▼▼ yogurt
carp	pork	sour cream
halibut	beef	sweet cream
lobster	hare	cream cheese
trout	▼ chicken	butter
sole	▲ pigeon	▼▼ milk
▲ salmon	partridge	camembert
shrimp	duck	gruyere
herring	turkey	▲ roquefort
sardine	▲▲ egg	Edam cheese (Dutch)
red snapper	▲▲▲ pheasant	▲▲ goat milk
▲▲ caviar		

Selected foods from the table in *Zen Macrobiotics* by George Ohsawa.

to yin women. We can disagree with Cornelia's advice but not with the principle—opposites attract.

**Quality:** When choosing any food, its quality is of prime importance. In my opinion, the quality of food chosen is magnified when choosing animal foods. Choose foods that are free from chemicals, pesticides, preservatives, additives, and so on. The basic rule is: the less altered the better. This principle eliminates most animal foods from commercial grocery stores. Choose animals (and animal products) that are free to run around the yard and that eat only organic food and feed. Visit the farm if possible. Wild game is usually of better quality.

**Quantity:** Ohsawa said it best—"quantity kills quality." In my experience, a little bit of animal food goes a long way—one egg in cornbread for example. As always, eat and drink only what is necessary for your condition and purpose. If animal food is needed for one's condition, and a small amount is desired, one idea is to buy bones from a natural butcher shop to make soup stock. This way the minerals from the bones are available without the excess fat of the meat itself.

**Yin/Yang:** While as a category animal foods are considered more yang, they have both yang qualities

and yin ones. The fat in meats is yin and is often the hardest thing to process or counter-balance. Ohsawa's healthful ways of eating and drinking advise consuming less grain and more salads, fruit, and desserts if animal foods are included in one's diet.

**Change:** Everything changes. Macrobiotics is about being flexible or adaptive. Adjust cooking methods to balance what is being prepared. Balance yang food with yin foods and preparations. There are many ideas in macrobiotic cookbooks on how to do this. What has a beginning has an end. If we begin eating animal foods, there will come a time to end eating them, and later, a time when we are pulled to begin again.

**Front/Back:** What has a front has a back and the bigger the front, the bigger the back. Ohsawa taught us that anything that is beneficial might be harmful—the greater the benefit, the greater the potential harm. Blindly following a rigid set of rules without understanding the theory is most dangerous. Eating animal foods without proper understanding and precautions is no exception.

## CONSEQUENCES

One of the primary concepts of macrobiotic philosophy is that whatever we eat and drink has consequenc-

es. Ohsawa taught that experience is a great teacher. His advice was, "Try it and see." Whatever we choose to eat and drink, the important thing is to evaluate the consequences. If we feel worse, we have less desire to eat or drink the food we determine to have caused the discomfort or illness.

There are consequences to our thinking and teaching, too. The Foundation's landlord once told me that he loved what we were doing. He said he knew we were helping many people maintain and restore their health. He went on to say that he would rather live 10 more years enjoying meat and pizza, however, than live 30 or more years on an austere macrobiotic diet. As he was walking out the door, he turned and said, "Of course, I may be calling you from the hospital in 10 years or so."

I missed a golden opportunity. At the time, I was so focused on macrobiotics as a curative diet that I let him walk out the door. The interest he showed for macrobiotics was lost. I could have explained that he could use macrobiotic principles while eating meat and pizza. Instead of closing the door, I could have opened another one by seizing the moment and changing the direction of his thinking.

Whether or not we choose to eat animal foods, we can appreciate animal foods and accept people regardless of what they eat or don't eat. Macrobiotics is not a rigid set of rules but an adaptive philosophy that applies to all of life. All expressions of macrobiotics have value and are necessary. The more we can accept others the greater our freedom and joy.

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