

The New Essence of Macrobiotics

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Many years ago I gave a lecture on the essence of macrobiotics. Since then I have changed, so this time the essence is a different essence. Sometimes essence changes, too.

What I want to tell you is my experience in macrobiotics and what I learned from Ohsawa. Maybe you can use several of these things in your study of macrobiotics.

There are two sides to macrobiotics. One side is diet, and the other side is the principles, or spirituality. I've always cared more about the spiritual side; I never learned much about diet. I still don't care too much about it, but you can study diet. I learned about diet care—dietetic macrobiotics—from the Americans, pretty much. American macrobiotics has not been too concerned about spirituality, but that tendency seems to be changing and more people are interested in the spirituality of macrobiotics. Macrobiotics is very, very spiritual. To me, it is the most spiritual way of thinking.

Many people say macrobiotics is too materialistic—always concerned about food. One time I lectured in California at the Tassajara Zen Center. They have a hot springs there, so many tourists come, and they think that taking a hot bath is Zen. No, that is



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not Zen, you know. Many people think that eating brown rice is macrobiotics. No, that is not macrobiotics. Maybe partial macrobiotics. Anyway, they asked me to come down to the Zen Center and talk about macrobiotics; after I finished about a one-hour talk, their conclusion was that they didn't want to try the macrobiotic diet—that it was too materialistic. Zen is more spiritual. So, that was my mistake, if they understood it that way.

But they also made a big mistake. Food is not material. You cannot put together protein, carbohydrates, fats, vitamins, and minerals and make foods. You cannot make food. Food is spirit. Spirit is food. See? You have to understand oneness. Food and life are one, food and spirit are one. Always one. If you divide food and spirituality, then you are observing either materialistic macrobiotics or spiritual macrobiotics.

Macrobiotics unites spirit and matter together, like a wife and husband. Food and spirit have to be together—no separation. One. This is the first thing to understand; macrobiotics is not just spirituality, not just materiality. Spirit and material are joined. Without eating, there is no body. But also there is no spirit if you don't eat, at least not manifested. Food is very important, and spirit is important. Spirit creates food.

If you want to have a building, first there is a spirit—you have a design. Then you get the material to build the house. Unless you have a spirit, you won't build this house. No shape. You have to design the shape, make a plan. That's spirit first. Always there is spirit. Then the material comes. There is no separation. To me, this is the first thing to realize; in macrobiotics, matter and spirit are not separate.

THE MATERIAL ESSENCE

In macrobiotics it is emphasized that we eat whole grains as a principal food. This is the first thing. That's what Ohsawa told us fifty, forty, thirty years ago. At that time, we didn't know why grains are most important; he just said that grain is the most abundant food on the earth. Only grain is produced in enough abundance to support the whole population of the earth—six billion people. No other food can do this. With meat, you have to fight for enough land to raise cattle; with fruit, there is not enough production to supply the whole population. This is the kind of logic Ohsawa used in recommending whole grains to us.

But now, what Ohsawa taught has been more and more accepted as scientific theory. Health professionals, as well as many spiritual leaders, have started to take macrobiotic advice. It has been biologically proven that the DNA of grains represents the last and highest development of the plant world, and the highly developed DNA of humans represents the last and highest product of nature in the animal kingdom. We use the highest DNA of the plant world and achieve the highest development of the animal world.

It is better not to mix high-grade human DNA with a lower grade of the plant world, for example blue-green algae, which contain a low, undeveloped DNA. Like a cancer cell, the cells of this plant lack certain information. The difference between a cancer cell and a normal cell is that the DNA is different. The DNA of a cancer cell only has information to grow; it has no information to die. Interesting? A cancer cell doesn't know how to die. All our body cells die, usually in seven years—a seven-year life. That's very good.

If we don't die, if we are always living—a thousand years, two thousand years—it will be a problem, right? Some people will be waiting

for us to die. If no one dies, this earth will be full of human beings with no space to live. Cancer cells don't die. Very strange. Everything else dies. So they grow, grow, grow, grow, grow. Seems to be very good—no sickness. "No sickness" is usually very good, but in this case, it's not good. So be careful when choosing foods with low, undeveloped DNA.

If you are a grain eater, you have to chew well. This is necessary because digestion begins in the mouth with the salivary enzymes that break down carbohydrates. Good chewing or mastication has been called Fletcherism, named after Horace Fletcher, an American businessman who discovered, at the age of 45, the health

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benefits of good chewing. He was sickly, with no appetite and poor digestion. He became so strong from chewing that he lectured all over the world.

Also, if you chew well, you can think better. If you have a difficult problem, chew very well. Then you can always find a solution. If there is a problem, there is a solution. No problem, no solution. There is no problem which has no solution. If you chew well, you will find the solution.

When macrobiotics first started, nutritional theories were not very developed. Now they are much more advanced. The first nutrition theory that revolutionized this country came in 1960. The January 1st issue of Time magazine had an article by Ansel Kay, a medical researcher studying the relation of heart disease to diet. After conducting worldwide studies,

his conclusion was that excess animal fats, saturated fats, caused heart and artery disease. Science was one step closer to macrobiotics which had been recommending no animal fats in the diet.

Next came protein, considered the most important material in building the body. In the last century a German scientist experimented with rats, not human beings, and found they grew very well when fed with protein food. From this experience it was calculated that humans need about 125 grams of protein per day; that's about one pound of meat per day. So at the end of the last century, everybody ate a pound of meat a day. They were afraid of being sick if they didn't eat enough meat. Meat became a symbol of status, and the meat companies advertised more and more. Then, in this century, it was established that 50 grams is enough for humans. Later on they said 30 grams is enough.

It used to be, if small is better, large is much better. If 25 grams is necessary, we better have 50 grams. The more the better; that used to be the thinking. Now, they are saying that excess protein is harmful. What is harmful about it?

Protein is made up of carbon, hydrogen, oxygen, and nitrogen. (Nitrogen also exists in the air, but we cannot use it; if we could use this nitrogen, we wouldn't need to eat.) Except for the nitrogen, which does not burn up in the body, this is the same composition as fat and carbohydrate. Extra fats and carbohydrates provide energy, but if we have extra protein, the carbon, hydrogen, and oxygen are burned as fuel and the nitrogen doesn't burn. So it remains in the body as uric acid, creating an acid condition. This removes calcium from the bone—the beginning of osteoporosis. Artificial vitamin D added to milk and other dairy products, as well as these high protein foods themselves, add to the danger of osteoporosis. Some scientists claim that in about ten years the biggest health problem in this country

will be osteoporosis, that everyone will have it.

Now, scientific theory says that about 25 to 30 grams of protein a day is enough. Researches say animal protein is not necessary, that vegetable proteins can provide the complete amino acids. This is what macrobiotics has been saying—that enough protein is basically supplied by whole grains, vegetables, and sea vegetables; no animal food is really necessary. If you crave it, eat a small amount of fish sometimes.

Finally we come to carbohydrates. We said in the beginning that whole grain is most important. That's complex carbohydrate. It used to be that simple carbohydrates and complex carbohydrates were considered the same. Science thought there was no difference. When I was young in Japan, the doctors said that brown rice is no good—white rice is better. That's what they said, because digestion is easier (if you chew very little). Brown rice cannot be digested because of the bran—the outer shell of the grain. White rice is 70 or 78 percent digestible. Why eat more food if you cannot digest it? That's what the doctors were saying, that simple carbohydrates are better than complex carbohydrates.

Ohsawa said no, simple carbohydrates are not good; we should eat complex carbohydrates—whole grains. The doctors couldn't understand; the scientific mind couldn't understand. Now, finally, they understand why complex carbohydrates are better.

First, the English doctor, Denis Burkett, studied African tribes that had no heart disease. The same natives living in cities had heart disease. His conclusion was that the tribes ate their traditional diet, including complex carbohydrates and fiber. Fiber is indigestible; we used to call this a waste product, but now we know its usefulness.

Ohsawa always taught us, "Don't waste anything. If you eat a carrot

or burdock, don't remove the skin. Eat the whole thing." This is a basic macrobiotic principle—whole food, no waste. Science is now starting to understand but still doesn't understand. "This tonsil isn't necessary, it isn't working—operate, cut out." Right? Many people have lost their tonsils, appendix, and other organs. This is arrogance. They don't know how the body works, yet they say, "This isn't needed, take it out."

More recently, about 1976, a husband and wife team of professors at the University of Oregon School of Nutrition experimented successfully by giving brown rice to diabetics. Since diabetes is a sugar problem, carbohydrates were always prohibited; usu-

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Do you get it?"

ally protein was given. But they were thinking of simple carbohydrates. This was the first time medicine recognized the value of complex carbohydrates. The report of this experiment went to McGovern's committee advising the U.S. Dietary Goals, and that's why they recommended 60 percent complex carbohydrates. This was very good dietary advice, similar to macrobiotics. That pamphlet was published by the government in 1977, but the next year the meat, dairy, and sugar industries all came out against the Dietary Goals. They stopped that publication. You cannot get it any more—it's now out of print. And yet those recommendations, like macrobiotics, can help solve the two biggest health problems in this country; heart disease and diabetes, both related to excess fat intake.

So, the material side of

macrobiotics is the dietetic essence: whole grains, complex carbohydrates, vegetables, minerals, chewing well, and so on.

THE SPIRITUAL ESSENCE

A basic macrobiotic principle is that there is no waste product. God gives us no waste. In the twentieth century we found that fiber is very important; since then, all diets have changed. Food companies are even adding fiber to refined grains products. This is not natural, but the important thing is not to waste food. Whole food is very, very important.

But the principle of no waste applies to more than food. We have to appreciate everything, even if we think it's not important, not necessary, or useless. Maybe there is usefulness. Finding usefulness in uselessness is an essential macrobiotic principle. Do you get it?

One time I was living in Sacramento, the state capitol of California. Very nice name, Sacramento. At that time, around 1970, most macrobiotic students were hippies; this country's macrobiotics was started by the hippies. (They ate brown rice and said, "Oh, this is like marijuana—it makes me high.") Very strange, American macrobiotics. This is not the essence, though.) Many hippies were coming from San Francisco, asking to stay in my house to study with me, or study cooking from Cornelia. So I said, OK, stay. One hippie stayed in my house who Cornelia didn't like. She thought he was useless because he did nothing—no study, no work, no cooking help, no cleaning. He didn't do anything. So Cornelia thought he was useless. She wanted him to leave. I said, "No, keep him. He's very important in the house. If he goes away, another one will come in!" So Cornelia found the usefulness of uselessness. That's macrobiotics. You have to always find usefulness in uselessness. Look for that.

If you are sick, find the usefulness

of sickness. If I am sick, I am very happy. Why? I can take off, vacation! See? Sickness is very good. But, macrobiotics doesn't give me much sickness. I can't rest. Always I have to work, work, work. I can't go fishing. I wish you could have sickness, but in macrobiotics you are always busy. You have to find usefulness in uselessness. That's essential. If you cannot find it, this world is full of uselessness.

Happiness and unhappiness are the same thing, the same spirit. Happiness and unhappiness are front and back. Happiness is waiting just behind unhappiness, always. Health is waiting behind sickness. They are together, always. If you are unhappy, don't look for happiness far away. Behind your door is happiness. If you are sick, don't look very far away; your health is behind the door. Knock on the door—it's behind. You just change this way and that way. Change, flip the switch, and you will find it. People always try to find it far away—that's why they can't find it. Behind your unhappiness, happiness always exists.

When I went to Ohsawa's school, I didn't do anything. Every day the other students were doing something. My wife had died, and I didn't know what to do. I was desperate. For one month, every day I just listened to Ohsawa's lectures, and I finally understood who I am. That, to me, is essential—knowing who you are. Then the world changes.

There is the ego, and there is the real I. This is infinity, spirit, or soul. Your spirit is infinite, your mind is infinite. The emotional mind is limited; don't confuse this with the real I. Mostly we are thinking with the ego, but sometimes we think by the infinite mind. It's very important we sometimes think from this place. Ohsawa called it Supreme Judgment. When we reach this, we are very happy—so happy we cry.

We started from the infinite world; then we were born as man, as a hu-

man body. Consciousness develops from mechanical, sensory, sentimental, emotional, intellectual, social, and religious judgment, and then finally reaches the infinite world. This is human life. You have everything. You have yin and yang, mechanical and electrical energy, you have every atom, you have the plant world and the animal world as part of you. Hair is your plant. Mine is gray; it used to be black, but now it has changed. Teeth are stone, bone is stone. You have everything, you are the whole universe. You are whole. Wonderful? At night you look at the stars—that's part of you, because you can see them. They say the stars are a million miles away, but they are also part of us. We spend millions of dollars to go to the moon, but it is a part of us.

Your mind is much bigger than a star or a galaxy. That's why you can see beyond the Milky Way, to black holes; your mind is much bigger. That's man. This body is not man. The body will die out in only eighty years.

You once came from infinity and were born here after a long journey. In eighty years we go back. Actually, every night I go back. While sleeping, my spirit goes back to infinity, and comes back in the morning—by shuttle bus. The infinite rocket is very fast—infinite. The rocket engine flies to my bedroom, to return my spirit, and knocks: "Herman, wake up, the time has come."

I ask the spirit, please wake me up at 7 o'clock in the morning. Then the spirit comes back at 7 o'clock in the morning: "Wake up, Herman, it's 7 o'clock now." That's how you can wake up at a set time. If you are macrobiotic you don't need an alarm clock. You set it for 7 o'clock—7 o'clock you wake up; set it for 7:15—7:15 you wake up. The spirit comes back every night.

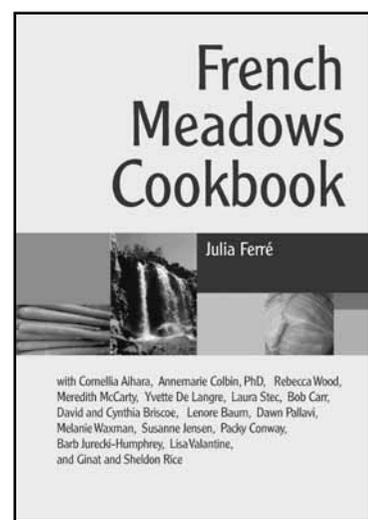
Sometimes if you eat certain foods, maybe chicken or meat, or fool

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"2009 commemorates 50 years of 'Ohsawa-style' camps in the United States—that is, camps where participants come to heal, rejuvenate, learn, and live in Nature...To recognize this 50th year milestone, we are pleased to present this collection of recipes from camp."

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around at nightclubs, bars, dance halls or discos, the spirit cannot come. Then you may have nightmares. When you observe macrobiotics very well, the spirit comes back—whooshhhh. You sleep very, very peacefully. I am very happy when night comes—my sleeping time. The happiest time is when I sleep. I'm surprised many people are not happy when sleeping—they have nightmares. I'm waiting for my sleeping time. Then I go to infinity, and come back.

Infinity is your mother that you came from. Your origin. We came here to a place called Earth—we landed on the earth for a picnic. We came to the earth as a picnic from the infinite world. We have to enjoy the picnic. Eighty years of picnic. Why don't you enjoy the picnic? You just came here to enjoy, to a small island called Earth.

And when the time comes, I will say goodbye and go back to the infinite—and sometimes come back again. See? Enjoyment. We came here to enjoy. You see children going on a picnic—they're always happy, right? But why do we have crying? Why did we become sick? It's because we don't know our limitations. Our body has limits. Infinity has no limitation; our spirit, mind, can do anything we want, can think anything we want. We can plan or dream anything. But the body has limitations—boundaries.

Whoever doesn't understand this will have sickness and unhappiness. Spirit is unlimited. You can think anything you want—crazy things, joyful things, happy things, unhappy things, anything you can think of. But the body has limitations.

One time in Anaheim, near Disneyland, I was lecturing at a natural foods convention and some Japanese food manufacturers invited me to a party after the day's work. After dinner they served dessert and I ate cheesecake—regular cheesecake. The next day I was invited again, and I ate

another one—the second cheesecake. On the third day, the same thing happened; after the exhibition I was invited to the party, so I had dinner with them where I enjoyed another cheesecake. The next day I went to San Diego to lecture. What happened? I lost my voice. I was ashamed. People said, "What happened, Herman?" So—I confessed. See? That's limitation. I can have two cheesecakes, but not three! You have to know your limitation.

Macrobiotics is very good because it gives you your limitation right away. If you are not macrobiotic and don't know your limit, you may continue something and then, someday—cancer. Strong people often don't know

*"We came to the earth as
a picnic from the infinite
world. We have to enjoy
the picnic."*

their limit; that's why there is so much sickness. Weaker people learn their limitation sooner. Weak people cannot eat cheesecake—they will be sick right away. I can eat two. Do you want to try me? I'm always happy to try!

Sickness doesn't matter. Enjoy your life. Life should be full of joy. We came here to enjoy. Some people have started a macrobiotic problem: they give up all enjoyment. They think macrobiotics means to give up enjoyment, but macrobiotics is full of enjoying life. Don't give up all enjoyment. Make the body strong so you can enjoy more. But remember that enjoyment is not only in the physical world. Many people make the mistake of thinking that all enjoyment is physical, but spiritual enjoyment is much greater.

What is spiritual enjoyment?

Love. How, in daily life, do you express love? By giving. What do you give? You give up what you like. If you like brown rice, you give brown rice. If you like cheesecake, you give cheesecake—then you will eat less. If I like cheesecake very much, I give it to somebody else so I don't eat it! Then I enjoy my spiritual love, and he enjoys eating cheesecake. Both can enjoy.

When you started macrobiotics you gave up steak, cheese, hot dog, hamburger; that's why you became happy. It wasn't the brown rice that made you happy. You gave up what you liked—that's why you became happy. When you give something up, you reach a higher state of mentality. This is joy, spiritual joy.

For me, giving up smoking was the most difficult thing to do. Why? The ego was holding on. Giving up this ego, you reach a high spirit. Giving up means freedom. So if you have a very nice husband, give him up. Let him do what he wants to do. Many people don't want their husband or wife to do what they want; that's why they fight after they are married. At first they do: "I want my husband or wife to do anything he or she wants." But later on, holding down: "He or she has to be my way." See? This is the ego holding down. Give it up.

When you give this up, don't worry about losing anything, because you are actually gaining something. When you reach the infinite spirit you will have everything. Don't worry about giving up the small self. You will gain the whole thing. We are afraid to give this up, but if we do, we reach the universal spirit and keep it. To me, that's the essence of macrobiotics.

Time to eat now? Thank you.

Herman Aihara (1920-1998) co-founded the George Ohsawa Macrobiotic Foundation. He is author of Acid and Alkaline and other books. This article is reprinted from Macrobiotics Today, January 1989.