

# Changing Macrobiotics with the Times

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I appreciate macrobiotics so much that a long time ago I decided to share my experiences and studies with others. My learning began with reading books, attending classes and seminars, studying in Shanghai in a Chinese medical school, writing books, teaching, and most recently being called upon to present a case for preventive healthcare at the White House in Washington, D.C. With this study I have been trying to discover what is necessary to survive as a healthy human being.

It is my belief that each of us has a destiny to fulfill in this lifetime. There is a reason why we are on this earth. When we are children purpose and reason aren't important to us. We exist and if we are lucky we enjoy ourselves and perhaps even learn something about life. We are fortunate if we have kind parents, a supportive environment, and some interesting life experiences. With these experiences we may grow up to realize that in addition to taking care of ourselves there is an inner benefit in helping others. It



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occurred to me that it would be useful to learn what tools were needed to survive and then to share these tools with others. This concept of survival has expanded to become even more important with each passing year.

When I was first introduced to macrobiotics more than twenty years ago, the teaching emphasized responsibility and taking care of oneself. At the same time I was reminded that

we are all part of nature and subject to natural laws. In fact sickness was taught to be a correcting mechanism of nature occurring when fundamental laws were violated.

Over the years there has been a gradual lessening of interest in the fundamental principles of macrobiotics by the general public with an increase in its practical application. In other words, the theoretical teaching has been overshadowed by technique particularly in the realm of diet and foods. These days most people want to know what to eat and not to eat and are content to forget about the theories behind such determinations. The irony is that most people don't follow such a rote system even after they ask for it. The average person who asks about macrobiotics today prefers to have a prescription, and to replace old-style medical treatment—medications—with new-style medical treatment—food.

## **Is Food Enough?**

Until recently many die-hard macrobiotic enthusiasts have said "Yes! it is."<sup>1</sup> Any unfortunate person who does not respond positively to dietary changes is considered not to be practicing macrobiotics.<sup>2</sup> While it

is true that probably 99.9 percent of those exposed to macrobiotics do not practice it exactly in the manner the books proclaim, this does not mean their practice is faulty. In fact I believe that if people practiced as they “should” there would be many more failures. The reason is because no book can accurately prescribe for anyone. Each person is unique and must make individual adjustments that can never be covered adequately in writing. You can see the limitation of the written word if you try to put in writing what you eat and why. There will be many nuances and special permissions that you know are okay for you, but someone else may not understand the reasoning or be able to do it.

The point is, macrobiotic dietary principles were developed as guidelines and were supposed to be used as such. If you read the writings of George Ohsawa<sup>3</sup> you will find many statements that are open to interpretation. Some of his writing guarantees recovery from illness within 10 days with a diet consisting of only brown rice.<sup>4</sup> In other writings he states that attitude, especially arrogance, creates the lowest state of health regardless of diet.<sup>5</sup> At one point he states that yin is the greatest cause of evil in health while later he states that he personally had to drink whiskey and take medications<sup>6</sup> (both considered yin substances) because he had become too yang. This leaves us with many questions, among them: “Which is more important—a healthy diet or attitude?”

Without doubt Ohsawa was a visionary and a fanatic. Apparently people either loved<sup>7</sup> or hated<sup>8</sup> him. I think he felt his role was to challenge and provoke. Literal accuracy in his teaching was less important than the spirit of what he had to say. As far as I am concerned there is nothing wrong with this approach. But we have to remember this was Ohsawa’s personal style.

Yet with the outlandish claims that were made, Ohsawa was always consistent in his teaching to empha-



**PATRICK McCARTY TEACHING AT FRENCH MEADOWS 2005**

size the purpose of macrobiotics as the pursuit of freedom.<sup>9</sup> Does the practice of macrobiotics lead to freedom? In the pursuit of freedom, is a diet of whole grains, vegetables, and miso soup with occasional servings of beans, fruit, nuts, and seeds enough to achieve such a goal?<sup>10</sup> In the last 20 years for the over 8,000 people whom I have counseled, the answer is “No! it is not.”

## **CHINESE MEDICINE**

I went to China in 1982 and again in 1994 to learn the unique perspective of the Chinese medical system on health and healing. I’ve learned that accidents and illness can strike anytime—regardless of mental attitude, preventive measures taken, status, or what have you. Strange things happen; this is life. When they do occur there are methods to deal with these imbalances and disharmonies. The methods include dietary therapy; herbal therapy; movement therapies such as Tai Chi and Qi Gong; external therapies to adjust internal energy such as shiatsu, moxibustion, cupping, and acupuncture; and visualization and prayer. This multi-faceted approach has been used in China for over 3,000 years.<sup>11</sup>

The idea that diet alone is sufficient to remedy illness is correct only when the imbalance is caused solely by diet. If you never have headaches, drink a half bottle of red wine at one sitting, and wake up with a headache the next day, we can correctly say the wine is the cause. Stop the wine and you won’t get that type of headache. However, if you have recurring headaches and you don’t drink wine, there may be many reasons for it. Some reasons may be dietary, emotional, and/or environmental in nature. Do you see the dilemma? Causes are not always clear cut. We have to look at many aspects including lifestyle and correct those things that are out of balance—unfortunately this is not always an easy task.

In the realm of diet and herbal therapies there is a concept called *Fu Zheng*.<sup>12</sup> This literally means “to strengthen what is correct.” The term is applied particularly to herbal and nutritional therapies where the primary goal is to improve constitutional integrity and build resistance to disease, thereby promoting health and longevity. It is used preventively as well as for specific conditions. Simply stated it is the use of foods and herbs to prevent imbalances from

arising. From my perspective this is a great concept, especially knowing the realities of life.

The mechanism for how food and herbs nourish and protect are simple. Food energy is called *Food Qi* or *Nutritive* (or Food) *Essence*.<sup>13</sup> This essence is transformed by the *Stomach* and assimilated by the *Spleen* to become the basis of the *Qi, Moisture, and Blood*<sup>14</sup> that nourishes the organism. If *Food Essence* is available to make *Qi, Moisture, and Blood* we remain healthy and can store extra energy to be used in times of stress and need. The entire procedure is dependant on the individual organ's ability to process the food.

If there are problems in the stomach, pancreas, duodenum, liver, gall bladder, small intestine, or large intestine, how can the body get the energy from the food? The fact is approximately 85 percent of those whom I see clinically have trouble in one or several organs. Give them food alone and they can't process it. This is particularly true for patients with cancer, environmental allergies, and chronic fatigue.

## A NUMBER OF HELPERS

It is for this reason that I use a number of helpers to get the job done. If I limited myself only to diet the success of my clients would not be sufficient. Have you ever seen sincere people trying macrobiotics who are wasting away?

After six months on a "healthy macrobiotic diet" they can be breathless and hardly walking, incapable of physical exertion, and have very little muscle mass while weighing next to nothing. Often they have been told that they are discharging old toxins. While discharging excess toxins is a real phenomenon, it is my conviction that these people are not discharging, they are starving. It appalls me that they equate emaciation with healing and macrobiotics because clearly they are not the same.

One of the advantages of shiatsu

with its abdominal palpation method is the ability to clearly assess the condition of the internal organs. On examination it becomes plain that most ill people lack the ability to digest and assimilate the mainstay of a macrobiotic diet. The fact is they have difficulty digesting any whole foods. It is for this reason that they prefer simpler foods such as sugars and fats.

For over fourteen years a number of macrobiotic counsellors including myself have been recommending a lighter style of macrobiotics.<sup>15</sup> In addition to less salt, shorter cooking times, and the inclusion of fresh foods with a greater percentage of vegetables, an emphasis on exercise, external treatments, and specialty products has emerged to become integrated parts of the recommendations for recovery. Here is what I've discovered and what I'm recommending.

## OBSERVATIONS OF CLIENT TRENDS

1. People are sicker and weaker now than they were 20 years ago.
2. Serious problems are developing at younger ages.
3. Environmental illness is increasing at an alarming rate.
4. The average digestive system is weaker than it was previously. The major areas of deficiency are the pancreas, particularly in its role of enzyme production and distribution, and the small and large intestines where absorption and elimination are not accomplished to the degree necessary to maintain a healthy interior environment.
5. The average client cannot tolerate some important aspects of the standard macrobiotic diet, notably whole grains (especially wheat and corn), seaweed, fermented foods, and salt.

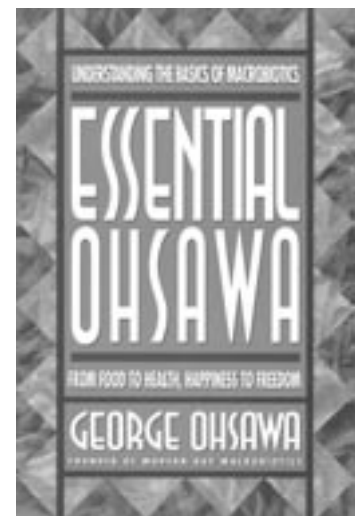
## SOLUTIONS

In addition to the sound principles of a whole-grain-centered diet, I include the following recommenda-

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tions.

1. **Shiatsu** – a time-tested bodywork method originating in Japan that increases circulation and strengthens internal organ function and the immune system.

2. **Acupuncture and Moxibustion** – needle and heat treatments developed in China that relieve pain and strengthen immune function against pathological factors.

3. **Exercise** – Body movement is important for circulation, flexibility, and mental outlook. Particularly useful are brisk walking, swimming, yoga, weight lifting, Tai Chi and Qi Gong.

4. **Traditional Chinese herbs** – Many patent formulas can be used for every type of problem. Especially useful are *Xiao Yao Wan* (liver/digestive disturbances and menstrual troubles), *Women's Precious Pills* (*Nu Ke Ba Zhen Wan* for women's troubles), *Liu Wei Di Huang Wan* (general weakness, lack of Kidney energy), *Curing Pill* (used for upset stomach, travel sickness, and dysentery), *Aplo-taxis-Amomum* pills (*Xiang Sha Liu Jun Wan* used for digestive weakness), and *Yin Chiao Chieh Tu Pien* (used for symptoms of colds). Reishi mushroom (literally “spiritual mushroom”) is used to strengthen the liver and lungs and is excellent in minimizing the side-effects of chemotherapy and radiation therapy.

5. **Digestive enzymes** – vegetable-based enzymes to aid digestive function especially for under- and overweight people, and for conditions of immune deficiency and cancer.

6. ***L. salivarius*** – a highly stabilized species of lactobacilli bacterium.

7. **Ume concentrate** – the umeboshi plum without salt, useful in over-acid conditions.

8. **Green magma** – dehydrated barley juice mixed with cooked dehydrated brown rice, useful for maintaining normal blood chemistry for those people taking chemotherapy and radiation treatments.

9. **Co-enzyme Q10** – specifically helpful in heart, immune, and gum-disease conditions.

10. **Blue-green algae** – wild freshwater algae for energy and digestive enhancement, and memory improvement.

11. **Pro-Gest** – phyto-progesterone-rich skin cream containing wild Mexican yam, exceptionally helpful for PMS (pre-menstrual syndrome), menopause, and in reversing osteoporosis.

12. **Salt Bath** – a hot, mineral bath that increases circulation, helps the body discharge toxins, and relaxes the bather.

13. **Daily Quiet Time** – 10-30 minutes spent each day in some type of reflection, meditation, visualization, prayer, or just pondering the meaning and direction of one's life is essential to create the space necessary for healing.

## EVOLUTION

After the first two years of seeing clients, I gradually evolved my interpretation of macrobiotics to include all things that could be useful. I've tried to help people understand their problems and choose appropriate solutions. For the last 18 years this has expanded to include and exclude just about everything except refined sugar (which is always excluded).

I have both recommended and dissuaded clients from using radiation, animal products, fermented foods, and speciality products such as vitamin C. Whatever I feel will increase survival and mental health I consider to be macrobiotic and is included in my recommendations for that individual's practice. All along I have been guided by a single principle: “Trust in nature.” While I have changed some details of practice I have never wavered from what I consider the universal principles of macrobiotics.

Discovering practical tools that allow us to relax and keep our confidence high while we fulfill our lifelong dreams is my aim. This is a pro-

cess in motion. Fortunately for me, many people have been generous to share what they have learned. Hopefully this sharing will result in us surviving a little better.

## NOTES

1. Students attending my shiatsu class were perplexed when a macrobiotic teacher in another class publicly stated they “need not study shiatsu” because “diet is the only important element in health.” Palm Springs, Fall Health Classic 1992.

2. I've heard this stated many times after cancer patients who tried macrobiotics died.

3. George Ohsawa (1893-1966) is considered to be the father of modern macrobiotics.

4. *You Are All Sanpaku* by George Ohsawa.

5. *Philosophy of Oriental Medicine* by George Ohsawa.

6. *Practical Guide to Far Eastern Macrobiotic Medicine* by George Ohsawa.

7. Accounts told by Lima Ohsawa in Boston, 1984.

8. Referring to Albert Sweitzer who Ohsawa met in Africa.

9. *The Unique Principle* by George Ohsawa.

10. The standard macrobiotic diet until revised in August 1994.

11. Information from lectures at Yue Yang Hospital, Shanghai, China, 1982.

12. Information from lectures at Guang An Men Hospital, Beijing, China, 1994.

13. *Whole Health Shiatsu* by Yamamoto and McCarty.

14. Important aspects of Traditional Chinese Medicine, these have a strong influence on the immune system.

15. Officially sanctioned with the New Dietary Recommendations issued by Michio Kushi in August 1994.

