

How Can I Do Better?

Carl Ferré

DEAR MR. FERRE,

First thank you so much for *Macrobotics Today*. It is always so inspiring and motivating. Thank you for this healthy pleasure!

I am a level one Kushi student and have studied and practiced macrobiotic for some five years. It has saved my life . . . so far. Yet, I just can't keep a good discipline as I am still fighting a compulsive overeating disorder with strong sweet cravings. I spare you the details on the multiple problems that plague me. We all know them too well.

I have fought chronic fatigue for as long as I've lived and have survived recurrent severe depressions. I am 37 years old. I am afraid that I just can't get any better because of my bad habits. Every day is a battle for balance. I now understand the causes and consequences for these destructive patterns. Yet, my conditions persist even through my desperate efforts for well-being.

Coming from a very dysfunctional family, I have been conditioned to consider food and sweets a unique source of joy. Today I literally need to fill myself to capacity, even when I am not hungry. Needless to say, I



am indeed endangering my own life. Macrobiotic is my hope and chance of survival. Still I am barely making it.

For your information, I am not medicated anymore and hope to never resort to that ever again. The last physician I saw (4 years ago) told me that I should take antidepressants for the rest of my life. I knew then it meant I had dealt enough with Western medicine. By the way, not a single doctor ever spoke to me about

diet. Fortunately I have consulted with two macrobiotic counselors. Yet some recommendations are still difficult to follow.

I don't want to be a desperate case! I want to become a success story. I know the principles, I know what "good sweets" are, but I don't know how to get out of this rut. Besides willpower – and mine is deficient – is there anything else that can save me? Help!

Any thought from you will be deeply appreciated, as I appreciate anything you write. You have a very good heart and a sensible understanding of macrobiotics and life. I feel it from your writing. Thank you again for your generosity. And thank you in advance.

Many blessings to you,

– Misha
Canada

DEAR MISHA,

Thank you for your kind words. I will need some time to ponder your question, but will respond with some thoughts in the near future. You mention finding some of the recommendations from macrobiotic counselors hard to follow. Could you share these

with me? (I do not need to know the names of the counselors, only the recommendations given that are difficult for you.) Also, I am not a counselor myself; so, I can only give you my thoughts from my experiences and from my understanding of macrobiotic teachings.

– Carl Ferre
Chico, CA

HELLO CARL,

Thank you so much for replying. Probably the hardest recommendation to follow is not to overeat. I understand the consequences. Yet eating is such an emotional activity for me. Food gives instantaneous joy! It's hard to keep it to a satisfying minimum.

Well again sweets are my biggest temptations. I cannot find in me the strength to stay away from chocolate! I know that balance is the primary principle. I apply it as much as I can. Yet I get a little bored with beans and grains, although they are my staple foods (and I adore vegetables). Therefore I need to "expand" the taste menu and that makes me explore variety beyond the simple macrobiotic fare. I now regularly fall for tastes like cheese, juices, and dressings -- all "stronger" tastes. Also, I am not attracted toward medicinal preparations like kombu tea or kuzu drinks. I like soy lattes!

I must say that discipline is the other aspect of the problem -- to stay active on a regular basis, do self-massage, scrubbing, compresses, even thorough chewing is challenging.

I do not want to complain. I have gained and still receive so much from macrobiotic principles. It keeps me alive and in much better health that I would ever be otherwise. But how can I do/get better? I know a better quality of life awaits me beyond the chocolate, yet it seems unreachable.

I am not sure that there are solutions other than hanging on, keeping

doing the best I can. I just thought you might have some advice to share.

Again, I value your comments and work. Thank you so much for your time.

– Misha
Canada

Hi MISHA,

Since I am not a counselor as mentioned before, and since I wish to write this response for the readership of *Macrobiotics Today*, here are some general thoughts on your questions even though you probably know a lot of these things already. First, I applaud your efforts so far

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and am glad to read that eating food still gives you joy.

Having just worked on Michael Rossoff's article, "Macrobiotics at a Crossroads," for the January/February 2005 issue of *Macrobiotics Today*, I can see many issues that he raises in his writing also in your e-mails. These issues have to do with the way macrobiotics is taught. The approach that is developing on the West coast is a more adaptive one, starting with an understanding of Life.

You write: "By the way, not a single doctor ever spoke to me about diet." My question in return would be: How much did the macrobiotic counselors you saw or the macrobiotic instruction you have received deal

with issues other than diet and food? Herman Aihara taught that food is only responsible for about 5 percent of one's health. Of course, he also said that food is the most important 5 percent as it influences many other factors.

You also write: "I know the principles, . . ." and "I know that balance is the primary principle." What I have found over the past thirty years is that my understanding of macrobiotic principles has changed, getting broader and more inclusive with each passing day. I am aware that many macrobiotic teachers and counselors are trying to redefine macrobiotics in one way or another, but most seem more limiting than Ohsawa's original expression of it.

While a case can be made for balance as the primary principle, one could also say that change is the primary principle. I recall a lecture by Herman Aihara at the French Meadows camp in which he asked the audience to choose between "balance" and "change" as the most important macrobiotic principle. While there were about an equal number of those voting for each, his conclusion was that both are needed -- that the overriding principle, and thus the primary principle, is the unification of the two.

It seems to me that there are times when each person needs to concentrate on balance. There are other times when the same person needs to concentrate on change. Once one has gone back and forth from balance to change a number of times, eventually if presented with the idea, one accepts both and thus learns unification and in the process one's judgment is developed.

In like manner, we could ask whether "learning the principles" or "developing judgment" is more important. Again, both are necessary for each person and one or the other will be seen as more important at different periods of time. Unification of the two could be called, "elevating

consciousness.” Is “total acceptance” or “becoming free” more important? Unification of the two could be called “unconditional love.”

In previous articles, I have placed these ideas in spiral form and have suggested that in answering any question, one could use the spiral to help find an answer. It appears to me that your macrobiotic education has been concentrated on dietary aspects, with “balance” as the primary objective. So, my first suggestion would be to work on “change” and developing your judgment.

In other words, rather than trying to fit yourself into the mold of standard advice, use macrobiotic principles for your own condition and purposes. Your intuitive voice is speaking to you all the time and you only need to learn to listen to it and to trust it. There is nothing wrong with what you have done so far – you have taken a great first step. Now it is time to take the next step.

The details of the next step are up to you. You write: “Besides will-power – and mine is deficient – is there anything else that can save me?” On the surface this question is troubling because it implies that you are still looking for something else or someone else to save or heal you, and this is foreign to macrobiotic thinking. The standard macrobiotic response would be no – only you can save yourself.

However, on a deeper level, it shows that you are willing to explore other things, even things that some would think are outside of macrobiotics. If your definition of macrobiotics is as broad as mine, these things can come from anywhere, including Western medicine, and still be considered part of a macrobiotic practice. In my opinion, macrobiotics is a set of principles one uses for one’s benefit. Macrobiotics is as big as Life itself and thus it includes everything and excludes nothing. Of course, some things lead more toward health and

other things lead more toward sickness, but the choices are always yours and yours alone.

You have a choice – to do what a doctor tells you, to do what another health-practitioner tells you, to do what a macrobiotic counselor tells you, or to follow what your intuitive voice tells you, realizing that there are times when your intuitive voice will tell you to follow someone else’s advice. It seems to me that the key is to be honest with yourself.

In terms of diet your choice is to keep doing what you are doing or to change. If you decide to change, then you can either become more restrictive (narrowing) or inclusive (expanding) in the variety of foods you choose to eat and how you prepare them. Next, realize that while one

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direction may be more appropriate this time, the next time the opposite direction may be required.

Over the years I have seen many people who have followed a restrictive macrobiotic diet to relieve a disorder. They become happy and decide to continue with a narrow diet, after all that is to what they attribute their healing. Then, when they get sick (and they usually do because the restrictive diet is intended for remedial use), they narrow the diet even more, thinking they are following “the” macrobiotic diet, this is the opposite of what they need however and the reason why many are calling for changes in the way macrobiotics is taught.

To me, macrobiotics is about

viewing life from a larger view, and this view continuously gets larger as we grow. Since Life is infinite and since we are part of Life, there is no limitation on either the view or the growth. A nutritionist might tell us that the main source of our energy is from the foods that we eat. The macrobiotic perspective is that food nutrients are responsible only for a small part of energy, the source of energy being traced to Infinity itself. Since each of us is part of this source, we all have tremendous healing power – all we need to do is to learn how to connect or re-connect with this power. I’ll write more on this in future issues of *Macrobiotics Today*.

With all that said, here are some ideas for you to consider beginning with food issues. Again, I would suggest letting your intuitive voice (heart, soul, or whatever other name you choose) be your guide as to which ones to try.

Many years ago at the French Meadows camp, the meals were grain-and-vegetable based and often a protein and/or fat source was missing. The result was that people tended to overeat, especially the gomashio (a protein and fat source). Since my wife Julia reworked the menus to include a protein and a fat source at each meal to go along with the carbohydrate sources, the meals are more satisfying and people don’t feel the need to overeat.

Annemarie Colbin, PhD, author of *Food and Healing* and other books and founder of the Natural Gourmet Cooking School in New York City, suggests having a protein, fat, and carbohydrate source at each meal. Consistently skipping one of the three can lead to a deficiency pattern and eating disorders. Interestingly, you mentioned being attracted to cheese (a protein and fat source), dressings (a fat source), and soy lattes (a protein and fat source).

It has been several years since I’ve written about water. After many

years of macrobiotic eating, I developed a serious inner-ear problem, which I attribute partly to denying myself drinking any water for many years. When I began drinking water again, I also noticed that I didn't feel the need to eat as much. Now, I eat smaller meals more often (4 to 5 times per day) on a regular schedule. Perhaps you could try drinking water with a pinch of salt between meals. And, if you think thorough chewing is challenging, try chewing the water.

When I first began macrobiotic cooking, there was a lot of bad press about salt. So, I didn't use any and my cooking was very bland. It wasn't until several years later that I moved to California and began eating Cornelia Aihara's cooking. She cooked with lots of salt and I learned the value of good quality sea salt in cooking. Salt brings out the natural sweetness of natural foods and gives one a more satisfying feeling. In fact, Cornelia taught that if one always wanted a sauce on their rice there probably wasn't enough salt in the cooking. Over time I realized that her cooking was too salty for me, mostly because I was over eating and the total salt intake was too much. Finding the right quantities of salt, water, and oil for your condition and purpose is very important.

Another idea to consider is stress. When one sets up a list of things that are "okay" and a list of things that are "not okay," stress is often the result, especially if these lists are arbitrary and come from a book rather than from one's personal experience. Oftentimes the worry over whether or not to eat a certain food is more harmful than happily eating the food. Your intuitive voice seems to me to be saying you need "stronger" tastes. What's wrong with "variety beyond the simple macrobiotic fare"? Eating as much a variety of foods as one's condition allows is the best macrobiotic approach in my opinion. You can get the best natural quality cheese you can find, remember that quantity

affects quality, and enjoy it (and the consequences) from time to time as long as your condition allows and as long as you enjoy it fully rather than worrying too much over it.

I am glad to read that you are staying active. This is key to the proper digestion of a grain-and-vegetable-based diet. I find great joy in walking and being in Nature as much as possible. Another key ingredient for proper digestion is eating pickles as you no doubt have been taught. A third factor is finding and using the proper amount of good-quality oil. Pickles, oil, chewing, and staying ac-

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tive can't be underestimated.

One of the questions I am asked the most is: "How do I know how much salt, water, oil, and pickles are best for me?" If I respond that each person is different, has different needs, and amounts on a daily basis because the amounts are always changing, the person hangs up the phone and gives up on macrobotics. The reality is that most people want to be given a prescription rather than learning to think for themselves. And, in my opinion this is one of the reasons that macrobotics is currently taught the way it is – more as a prescription than as an adaptive philoso-

phy. Thus, I would teach each person at the very beginning of macrobotic practice how to reconnect with his or her intuitive voice or sense because it is connected to the source of all energy.

Since you mentioned them, you might also wish to work on the emotional issues that you feel are the cause of your "bad habits." There are many good books on dealing with emotions and many groups that you might join to help with this process. Also, writing down your feelings when overeating might be helpful. When I began macrobotics, I wrote down every thing I ate and calculated every nutrient using charts from the United States Department of Agriculture in order to satisfy myself that I was getting complete nutrition. Now, I trust my intuitive voice completely.

If everything else fails, I read or reread George Ohsawa, starting with *Essential Ohsawa*. Every time I reread it I understand a bit more. In the near future I hope to write down some of what I spoke about at last year's French Meadows camp on "Getting What You Want" as it might be helpful for you as well as the expansion of it planned for this summer's gathering. In the meantime, here is a meditation for you from a friend's philosophy, "Yesterday is for learning, today is for action, and tomorrow is for joy." I wish you well in your continued practice.

Carl Ferré is the author of Pocket Guide to Macrobotics and editor of Macrobotics Today magazine.

