
Interview with Michio Kushi

Tom Monte

Last September, I sat down with Michio Kushi at his home in Brookline, Massachusetts. Before our meeting, I asked several old friends for their advice and suggestions for the interview. "Don't expect much from Michio," a few of them told me. "He isn't well and he sometimes tires quickly," they said.

Michio had been operated on in the fall of 2004 to remove a cancerous tumor in his large intestine. Nevertheless, by his 80th birthday in May 2006, he appeared to be in good health and high spirits. He was traveling again, teaching and seeing clients. But the following year his health declined precipitously and many worried if he wasn't starting to fail.

Thus warned, I was prepared for a short visit when I arrived at Michio's house on that gray day in the early fall.

The house was quiet when I entered. Mark Van Cauwenberghe, M.D., who has been preparing Michio's lectures for presentation on CD-rom, escorted me into the large living room where Michio sat on a pillow on the floor, hunched over a manuscript that apparently he was editing.

He looked up and gave me a big smile. "Yes, yes, how are you," he said.

I was both surprised and relieved when I saw him. His hair, which had



MIDORI, MICHIO, AND TOM

always been well groomed and combed back, was now unkempt and a little wild. He was also thinner than I had ever seen him. Clearly, he had aged a lot since we met last. At the same time, he was full of energy and enthusiastic to talk. His manner was light and happy. Whatever foreboding I had had when I walked into the house immediately was dispelled.

We spoke for two hours and he didn't flag once. His English was rough, as always, despite his more-than-50 years in the United States. But he was as clear as good crystal and his memory was remarkable. He had been through a lot

these past few years, but he was still a vital and formidable force.

Tom Monte. So, how are you doing, how is your health?

Michio Kushi. Good, very good. Better and better. Please tell everyone I am doing well. Tell them, everything is all right. I have no problems. I have no cancer, everything is fine. I will become again more and more active—nation-

ally and internationally. I have to make many plans now.

What are your plans?

Plan number one of course is my health—I need to establish.

Number two is the Kushi Institute. I need to make nice educational programs. Constant improvement is needed.

Next is Europe where we need more Kushi Institutes. Not only one Kushi Institute. More Kushi Institutes are needed in other countries. That is now proceeding.

In Spain, a big macrobiotic health



MICHIO KUSHI LECTURING IN 1993

clinic is opening. That is a high-class facility that will open in March or April—sometime next spring [2008]. Preparation is going on. It is under construction, but nearly completed. In the past two-and-a-half years, or nearly three, there has been construction.

When we decide the opening date, more promotional material will come. [The Sha Wellness Clinic is located in Alicante, Spain and can be found on the web at www.shawellnessclinic.com.]

Besides this, there is Kushi Institute of Japan is going on.

How old is the Kushi Institute of Japan now?

Now about three-and-a-half-years old.

How many students do you have in Japan?

This K.I. is in the countryside, two hours from Tokyo, like Becket from Boston. They have leadership class. They have now level 1, level 2, level 3. About 30 people in each class. But many people like to come just short time. So altogether maybe 50 people can stay.

Then they extend to Tokyo, called Kushi Macrobiotic Academy, because

many people can't come to the countryside. There many cooking classes are held. There 400 students every week, morning and afternoon classes. And then besides that about 2,000 people on a waiting list. And there people can transfer to the Kushi Institute Leadership program in countryside.

How do you see macrobiotics spreading in the world today?

In the United States, macrobiotics will become much more developed next year. I have been concentrating much more in Japan because Japan was behind.

It appears that macrobiotics is not spreading as rapidly today as it did, say, in the 1980s. Why is this the case?

I think people have to know that in the past ten years, macrobiotics is very well recognized by medical nutritional communities. That part many, many macrobiotic people, especially the so-called—they may consider macrobiotic leaders or teachers—they should much more study. Study is needed. Macrobiotics is developed constantly.

Some macrobiotic teachers have

said that macrobiotics is not scientific, it is philosophy, and write that in an article. But then Marc Van Cauwenberghe, [who is a medical doctor] or my son [Lawrence Kushi, Sc.D., associate director for epidemiology at Kaiser Permanente in Oakland, California, and a nutritional scientist] sees that kind of article, they laugh at it. Because there are now hundreds of scientific and medical studies available supporting macrobiotics.

So you believe that the reason macrobiotics is not spreading in the United States is because people think it's not scientific?

Exactly. They don't study.

Who doesn't study?

So-called macrobiotic leaders, or macrobiotic people. They don't study. And therefore they have no confidence. They should be more open and more confident, and should speak to the public.

The old style of macrobiotics is still there. That means that rigid thinking is there. This is bad, this is good. Macrobiotics is all encompassing.

For example, tomato. We have not been recommending. Primarily for macrobiotics is not recommended. But for people who are eating animal foods, if someone eats chicken or egg, the tomato is good to balance. Because yin and yang. So study of yin and yang is needed and needs to be applied to a much wider domain.

The reason that macrobiotics is spreading so quickly and widely in Japan, one reason is, I told them, macrobiotic meal is to be presented as happy, beautiful, delicious, and enjoyable. And not something like zen-monk-training-type meal.

When we look at the macrobiotic community, we see very few senior people who started macrobiotics in the 1960s and 70s. I just picked up an old Order of the Universe magazine [1977] and saw a photograph of you teaching in Paris and there were

hundreds of people in the audience. And there used to be hundreds of people attending the Amherst College conferences in the 70s. Where have all those people gone?

Actually, there are so many people still there who are not communicating with each other. There are many. Also, at that time, I was also lecturing in major cities in the United States and Canada. But I stopped that sixteen years ago and concentrated on Europe and Japan. Since then, some of that going down.

So you're saying that everything depends on you.

Right now. I hope not like that for the future. Macrobiotic people who studied, and know macrobiotics, should be active. You know at the Kushi Institute Summer Conference, teachers gather. Those teachers are very good. Besides them, there are other teachers available here and there. Other teachers are returning to macrobiotics. After twenty years, they went out to society and now they are returning to macrobiotics. They should experience and get out from the macrobiotic teaching for awhile. I have no objection to that. It's very good. And after experience, they reconfirm whether macrobiotics is a guide or not. And I think many people who are having those kinds of experiences and confirmations are coming back now.

What do you think the fate of macrobiotics will be when you are gone?

Of our leading teachers, some of them are very good, maybe 30 or 40, maybe less than 50, but very good teachers. They will succeed. If, before I go, some kind of organization is done to form some kind of teachers association, they will carry the education activities.

But macrobiotics is not just education, as you know. It's also farming, also food production and distribution. Also macrobiotics is contact-

ing with government and discussing with medical societies. It's so wide to change society to a healthy way and one peaceful world.

How do you ask people to view the fact that you got sick?

Three or four doctor friends said to me, "Michio, you became sick because you took care of so many cancer patients. So you got their energy." That is one side of theory.

However, my theory is that because of my travels and seminars I could not practice good macrobiotics. Naturally I could not practice macrobiotics at all some times. Some days not eating. Some days eating very late at night. Staying most of the time in hotels. Eating in restaurants. So my lifestyle was unnatural lifestyle. Also, I was three times, four times busier than normal people. This was a non-macrobiotic lifestyle.

That tumor was on the transverse colon. I talked to medical doctors and they discussed all together about that tumor. And naturally they recommended chemotherapy or radiation to prevent the reoccurrence. But of course I refused. Just with eating, recovering more and more and more. They wanted to check, like colonoscopy. So I said okay. And they said nothing spread anyplace. I'm cancer free.

Why do you think so many macrobiotic people have died young, well before they reached 70 or 80?

That I think is their macrobiotic practice. Their practice is not really macrobiotic. Their practice is conceptual way of eating. Typical example is old style of macrobiotics. Although I amended, I changed, the old-style macrobiotics, the belief was that yin is bad, yang is good. That is a total fallacy. From the time of George Ohsawa, that kind of impression was given. Yin is very important and yang is very important. Right? I wrote in my *Book of Macrobiotics*, yin and yang ratio, yin is much more—five times to sev-

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en times—versus one yang. And the balance is most important.

But if people eat conceptually, then in ten years, twenty years time, the physical condition will become strange.

So you think that the belief that yang is better has led to a lot of sickness?

That's right. Exactly. So when macrobiotic people have become sick, it is mostly because of yang. Maybe for many people, too much salt. And they feel that fruit is some kind of sin, and they feel guilty eating it. No, fruit is needed. Fruit is needed for some cases. And some believe that raw salad is wrong. No, raw salad is needed for some cases. And flexibility is needed. Again, yin and yang, people have to study.

Many people think that pressure cooking has been a problem for macrobiotic people and is the cause of people becoming too yang. What do you think?

Yes, pressure cooking, as a base, is very good. But at the same time, boiling method, or more porridge style, so many varieties of cooking are there and should be used. People should adapt many ways.

There are people who think that pressure cooking is the basis for overeating.

I think not pressure cooking, but pressure cooking with too much salt is the problem. That is making the food too yang. Only a pinch of salt is needed.

But if the effect of pressure cooked food is to make the organs, such as the stomach and digestive organs, much more yang, more pressurized, won't that result in more craving and overeating?

Depends on the person. Again, macrobiotics is not only rice [which is often pressure cooked], but also other grains, beans, and vegetables. So if vegetable cooking is more light,

and occasionally fruit is eaten, then all is balanced. Pressure cooking is the traditional way of cooking brown rice, but at the same time we need not to stick to it, because we can boil, we can steam it. So we can use other ways of cooking.

How have the illnesses that have affected your family, and also have affected you, changed your view of food and macrobiotics?

Again, in the case of Aveline and Lilly, it was one-sided eating. As many macrobiotic people were like that. In the case of Lily, she was living seven years in California and she was eating differently. Difficult to practice. She was excellent musician. She was making music for the movies and

“The wider macrobiotics is fine, but if the practice is wide, then the people should understand balance very well.”

other things and she was working and eating very late at night. In the case of Aveline, the quality of her eating was very good, quality of the ingredients, but the way of eating was one sided. Too yang. For example, she was eating kombu that was fried. It was very delicious. Once in awhile, it's okay, but eating every day, its causes problems to arise.

But why would people feel the need to eat so yang?

I think one reason is conceptual. But secondly also macrobiotic food is very delicious. But in time, certain ways of eating become habits. Like alcohol becomes a habit. Same thing. Any food can become a habit.

Many people are confused about

macrobiotics today, especially when they compare the older teachings to what they are seeing now. For example, at the Summer Conference this year, some of the recipes being taught included coconut oil, coconut milk, hot peppers, and also tropical foods. In the past, these recipes would not have been included in a temperate climate.

I do not want to comment because I'm not there, but again, the extreme way is not good. The wider macrobiotics is fine, but if the practice is wide, then the people should understand balance very well. So for example, coconut oil is not of this climate. Coconut oil is higher in saturated fat. Other vegetable oils don't have so much, so we shouldn't use coconut oil daily or often. Hot spices can raise blood pressure. They can also make thinking become very hot and then the person can't be quiet and rest. So we shouldn't use unless animal food or some other foods or activities are included that are very yang. Understanding macrobiotics is understanding balance.

So the macrobiotic diet has been changing a lot over the past 50 years.

After George Ohsawa died, then I changed the diet in many ways. Then no more attacks or criticism from the medical science and nutritional science. Before that, there were attacks.

So in general you would say that you made the diet wider and more yin?

Not necessarily. I made it wider, but more balanced, and eliminating the concept that yang is good, yin is bad. Both are needed.

At the Lisbon event last year, at your birthday party, you told a group of macrobiotic people that you taught only 30 percent of what you know. Why did you hold back 70 percent?

I didn't have a chance to meet with them often. So those macrobiotic leaders and teachers must gather at

least once a year and really study with a beginner's mind before I go.

And do you think that you have done enough to cultivate macrobiotic teachers, as students, to prepare for your passing?

Not yet. I think I need ten more years. We need a more systematic counseling system. How many people are getting better from macrobiotics? What kind of data are the counselors keeping? What kind of response are people getting after they receive a medical check-up from their doctors? Did the person get better or not? The scientific data collection, the scientific mind, is needed among macrobiotic teachers. So I like to advise them to use a research mind, check-up mind, after care.

But the macrobiotic culture was started in such a way that the counselor was an educator, not a doctor or scientist. Educating the person in ways of taking better care of himself or herself was the goal.

That's right. That is one aspect. However, at the same time, patients themselves want to have depending mind. So one patient goes to one counselor, and if he is not happy, goes to a second or third counselor, moving around from counselor to counselor. And often, among the counselors opinion is different, then they get more confused. Or they want to see me, but I don't want to see individual peoples.

All those things happening. And that is because, number one, we need systematic counseling system. And of course, counselors have their own opinions. That's to be respected. But at the same time, the opinion should be a little more standardized. And again, what is needed is to study and experience and to gather together and talk more.

Do you think the macrobiotic community has had good communication within it, and also supporting

each other?

Not yet. Yes some people are supporting each other and that is good. But not to my satisfaction. They should be much more open and much more communicating.

And why do you think that's the case—that people are less open and are not communicating very well.

I think that kind of a system has not been established. I am trying to establish system next year so that teachers and counselors can communicate with each other much more. That is very important.

So are you going to concentrate more on supporting teachers?

That is my main purpose. The educational way, especially bringing up leaders in the next ten years. Not the general public, but bringing up teachers and leaders to take care of the general public. I have been taking

care of the general public, but now I must take care of teachers to take care of the general public.

Those leaders, I like to give as much as possible, my knowledge or my understanding. Leaders have their own understanding, experience, that's fine and then they take care of other peoples. I'm counting on 2000 leaders to change the world. On one hand, there is no hurry, but another part of me says, we must hurry up.

Do you think George Ohsawa's writings are still relevant?

The understanding of order of the universe is very good. That is more permanent and will continue. That teaching was something like the constitution of the universe. Though we need more explanation of the study of yin and yang. We need more examples of how yin turns into yang, and many examples in the worlds of physics, chemistry, astronomy, in the

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MICHIO AND AVELINE KUSHI WITH STUDENTS IN THE 1980s.

society, and in the physical condition, and mental conditions. Then people can understand more.

There is a concern that many macrobiotic people are not thriving, including in the areas of their health and in their overall lives. What are your thoughts about that concern?

For those who are not doing well, I think it's the cooking. For many, they are not doing cooking well. When they married, their home cooking is main source of food. Outside cooking is okay sometimes. But home cooking is very important and people must really study cooking.

Do you perceive that many macrobiotic families need help? Are you aware of that? What advice would you give them beyond the need to study cooking? What else would you say?

Yes, macrobiotic way of life, male and female, we must learn how to support each other. We should not push. We should respect each other and learn how to support each other. Of course, currently in America and all over the world, there is corruption in the family life. Family life should be recovered—not traditional rigid way,

but more new way, respecting each other, allowing each other freedom, but still taking care of their health. Love is needed.

When I first came to macrobiotics 30 some years ago, people were making many promises about what macrobiotic people would experience, especially in the areas of health, but also in society at large. Do you think those promises have been fulfilled?

Not yet. But they definitely will be fulfilled. Let's take Japan for example. Of course, macrobiotics originated in Japan but it went in a fanatical way for a while. Before I started. Now my presentation of macrobiotics is more bright and more happy way. The Japanese have changed tremendously. Not only the sick people, but also healthy people getting better in other ways. That's why macrobiotics is spreading so much. And the medical community is starting to realize that macrobiotics is helping patients and they are supporting macrobiotics more and more.

Do you think Aveline's contribution to the natural foods movement and to macrobiotics has been recognized enough? [Michio's wife, Aveline

Kushi, who died of cancer in 2001, was one of the world's most important figures in macrobiotics and natural foods.]

Not yet. Number one, we should do something in Becket, something more organized. That will begin from next year. Aveline's native town, Yokota, in Japan wants to have an Aveline memorial in memory of her contributions. Like Mother of Natural Foods Movement in America and Europe. The entire town decided that. The town is recognizing her contribution as the initiator of organic rice. They are also trying to establish a traditional art of living center in Aveline's memory and want to have European, American, and Asian people come there and experience and study.

When Aveline died, the *New York Times*, the *Boston Globe*, the *Los Angeles Times*, all wrote about her death, all writing about her contributions.

It's possible that many people do not fully appreciate Aveline because she became ill. They failed to see what a great spirit and beautiful human being she was.

She died because of medical treatment. So that should be also very clear in what you write. Because she got the cancer and then by simple radiation and macrobiotic eating, she experienced a complete cure. Then, while I was away, her doctors strongly advised her, in order that the cancer not spreading again, let's have the radiation inside, not outside. And she accepted.

Are you talking about radiation implants?

Not implants, but something like radiation sticks through the uterus. The radiation affected the governing vessel [the acupuncture meridian that runs from the bottom of the torso up the spine] and caused the cancer to spread to the bone. In the case of Lilly, cancer was completely cured. Both Aveline and Lilly were completely cured. In the case of Lilly, liv-

er meridian runs through uterus. Two weeks after treatment, liver trouble started and cancer returned and was spreading. And that made the terminal condition. Medical treatment did it. And of course, actually I should have complained to them but I didn't.

More and more people die by medical treatment. Heart disease was number one cause of death, cancer number two. But now they are considering that medical treatment is the number one cause of death. I do not refuse medical treatment if it is needed. But it should be minimized.

Do you think you were too focused on your traveling and spreading macrobiotics and not enough on Aveline when she was ill?

“The first thing people should do is to heal themselves, second heal family...”

That happened very quickly. And while I was in seminar in Florida, but as soon as I came home I went right to the hospital and already she had been treated. That was a big mistake for me—timewise.

What is your advice to macrobiotic people in general?

First, it's important to develop their knowledge and practice of macrobiotics. People who practice macrobiotics should talk to people, and introduce this way of life to people. If they think macrobiotics is beneficial, they should share it with others.

Number two. This is not religion. People should not be rigid in their practice or in talking to people about macrobiotics. People should not be fanatical. The important thing is com-

mon sense and experience.

The first thing people should do is to heal themselves, second heal family, third heal society, fourth heal the country, fifth the whole world. To that order. And then always keeping the beginners mind and humbleness to order of the universe and humbleness to all natural phenomenon. Humbleness to all people. To all animals. All plants. We can't make them, so we should be humble and modest.

However, at the same time, they should know they have infinite life. We are changing constantly. After human life, still we are changing, our vibration changing, we are becoming more and more part of the universe. Our life itself is endless, infinite. So that we must have the good understanding. So everything, every people, are on the journey of life, from infinity, manifesting as human beings, and going back to the infinite. Then we should consider them all brothers and sisters and love them.

What do you see as your legacy?

If they say, there was someone who tried his best to manifest infinite universe to the human beings, and he has tried—regardless of how successful (now laughing)—to act that way and tried his best to changing the human beings from sickness to health, from war to peace, and helping the entire world to be more one peaceful world and to help people become happy. I hope they talk about me like that. That's enough.

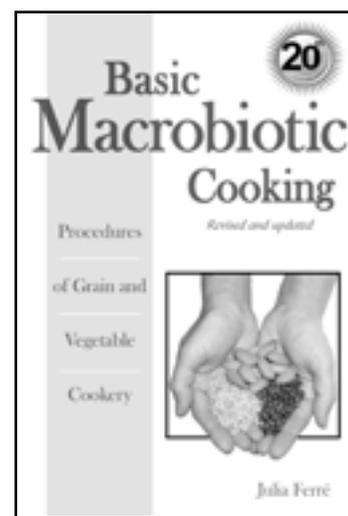
Tom Monte's newsletter, the Tom Monte Monthly, can be found at www.TomMonte.com, along with monthly lectures that can be downloaded from his website. You can also be part of an international online Healer's Community, composed of healers and people seeking guidance and support, also available at www.TomMonte.com. Tom lives with his wife, Toby, in Amherst, Massachusetts.

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