

Macrobiotic Values

A Macrobiotic Dictionary, Part 5

Carl Ferré

Macrobiotics is most known for its dietary approach. Fewer people know or study the underlying principles. The least known aspect is what can be termed “values.” One of the reasons for this is that they are more difficult to understand and practice. The following values mostly from George Ohsawa’s teachings are from the new online macrobiotic dictionary. Sandy Rothman continues to help by adding clarity to the entries. We welcome your comments and suggestions.

Acceptance: Although Ohsawa used the words “accept” and “acceptance” to mean consent, agreement, or approval at times, he used them mostly in the sense of open-mindedness, impartiality, or receptiveness. He encouraged people to accept/receive difficulties and misfortunes with a joyful attitude because everything comes from the Infinite (Oneness) and because he believed as he wrote, “nothing unpleasant or sorrowful is needlessly produced.” Everything that happens is necessary and useful in that it can help one understand life from a larger (macro) perspective. The eternal order in life is that it oscillates between difficulty and



photo by Nancy Adler

Carl Ferré

pleasure—it is impossible to stay on one side or the other. Ohsawa teaches that the more grateful a person can be for all that happens in life, the happier he or she will be. “Accept everything with greatest pleasure and thanks. Accept misfortune like happiness, disease like health, war like peace, foe like friend, death like life, poverty like prosperity—and in case you do not like it or you cannot stand it, refer to your universal compass, the Unifying Principle; there you will find the best direction. Everything

that happens to you is what you are lacking. All that is antagonistic and unbearable is complementary.” *Essential Ohsawa*, page 63 and 146.

Appreciation/gratitude: Appreciation goes hand-in-hand with acceptance. Gratitude is deep joy for all things we are given: from air, sunshine, and water to life itself. One expression of gratitude is in giving to others. Giving to others is a way to improve spiritual power. Giving up something, especially what one values most, to help others is a manifestation of love.

Arrogance: Ohsawa taught that arrogance (over-inflated feelings of superiority or self-importance) is the most fundamental and difficult of all maladies that must be cured first. An arrogant person knows no joy or gratitude and doesn’t mind other people’s problems as long as his or her needs are met. One aim of macrobiotic living is happiness that comes from the realization that everything and everyone emanates from one Infinite, absolute world. This understanding can help remedy arrogance.

Beginner’s mind: Being open to

new ideas like a small child, meaning without preconceived biases. This term comes from the Zen concept of “shoshin,” which is translated as beginner’s mind. Ohsawa uses the term also to mean accepting challenges gratefully.

Belief: Trust or confidence in something considered to be true without empirical evidence or rigorous proof. Ohsawa cautioned against a blind belief in medicine that heals only symptoms or a blind belief in macrobiotics. He believed that this kind of blind confidence often ends in tragedy. According to Herman Aihara, his favorite motto was “non credo,” meaning do not believe without verifying for oneself.

Complaining: Complaining is expressing dissatisfaction or finding fault with something, often in a whining way. Ohsawa encouraged people to have a joyful attitude with no complaining. The goal is to live with Unconditional Love—the ability to embrace everything and to turn every antagonism into complementary agreement. This ability is extremely difficult for human beings and very few, if any, are able to accomplish this attitude. Still, keeping this goal in mind can be helpful in dealing with complaints.

Curiosity: The desire to learn about life, to have a big appetite or dream, to make the boring interesting, and to be open to new ideas. Ohsawa also encouraged people to figure out the answers to questions by themselves. Learning to think for oneself is one goal of macrobiotic practice.

Difficulties: Problems or things that are hard to deal with, achieve, or comprehend. Ohsawa taught that

overcoming difficulties and challenges leads to great joy and increased understanding. He maintained that the bigger or greater the difficulty, the bigger or greater the joy when it is solved.

Egoism: Similar to arrogance, egoism is self-centeredness by which the motivation or goal of one’s actions is exclusively for one’s self-interest. Ohsawa used the term for anyone who denies the Order of the Universe and his or her responsibilities. “The drive to cure only symptoms or to have control of one’s health without accepting responsibility is comparable to the notion on the part of an individual that he can step in front of a moving train and not be struck down. It is simple exclusiveness and egoism; it eclipses and denies true will, the Order of the Universe.” *Essential Ohsawa*, 62.

Embracing change: Everything changes is the only constant in this ever-changing world in which we live. Ohsawa believed that this realization allows us to live without fear because everything can and will change sooner or later. “Everything changes in business, politics, science, marriage, in all of life—there is always a new winner. That which is the height of fashion today is out-of-date tomorrow. The man of humility, he who has no fear of being last, therefore knows a contentment that is the essence of happiness.” *Essential Ohsawa*, 155-156.

Enemies: Ohsawa encouraged people to work to turn enemies to friends (everything changes). He believed the greater the enemy, the greater the possible friend. “We must be grateful to our enemy since it is due to him alone that we are as we are.

The world of relativity is dialectical. If you have understood this dialectical law, you will be able to realize, answer, judge, predict, or define all things.” *Essential Ohsawa*, 146. See also No Enemy on page 8.

Exclusivity: Exclusivity is similar to arrogance in that both are difficult to cure and are origins of unhappiness. Ohsawa encouraged loving others as a remedy for exclusivity. “To love is to give and not to take in return. The give-and-take system is a mere egoism, for to give and give more is to become a creator. Since everything you have will sooner or later fade away, to give, give, and give is to deposit in the unlimited bank, the Bank of Infinity. This is at the same time an infinite insurance policy that guarantees infinite life for you. The only premium that you pay is give, give, and give. Give what? Give that which is the biggest and best gift in this world—health and eternal happiness, by means of the key to the kingdom of heaven. And, this key is simply the explanation of the structure of the infinite world and its Unifying Principle translated into the macrobiotic language, the art of longevity and rejuvenation. You can make yourself happy forever by distributing and establishing health and happiness, by discovering new horizons of joyful, amusing, and interesting living.” *Essential Ohsawa*, 158.

Faith: Real faith is having complete confidence and trust in the natural order of life—the Order of the Universe. This type of faith involves the use of one’s supreme judging ability—a clear-sightedness of one’s relationship to people and things in the relative world as well as one’s connection with the Infinite (Oneness). “The greater one’s judging ability,

the greater one's happiness" was Ohsawa's formulation. One expression of real faith and kindness is to give to others without expectation of anything in return.

Flexibility: Similar to adaptability, flexibility overcomes rigidity and allows one to be open to new ideas and opportunities leading to a more active life. Flexibility (yin) on the outside and firmness (yang) on the inside is considered to be a better combination than strong (yang) on the outside and weak (yin) on the inside.

Freedom: Freedom is the attribute that Ohsawa prized most. He wrote about wanting to be as free as a bird to fly wherever he wanted without restraint. A free person is happy, loving, and honest and, as with faith, an individual's freedom depends on one's supreme judging ability. "Here

is the core of the matter: Courage, honesty, justice, happiness, and freedom cannot be given by one person to another. You must realize them by yourself and for yourself. If they depend upon others or upon certain conditions, they are all borrowed and not truly your own. If someone guarantees your freedom, your freedom is your debt. The greater such freedom, the greater your debt. Happiness, freedom, and justice must be infinite, unconditional, unlimited." *Essential Ohsawa*, 177.

Giving: To freely hand over something to someone else (or others) without expecting compensation in return. Ohsawa viewed giving as an expression of true gratitude and a key to happiness. "Since everything you have will sooner or later fade away, to give, give, and give is to deposit in the unlimited bank, the Bank of

Infinity. This is at the same time an infinite insurance policy that guarantees infinite life for you. The only premium that you pay is give, give, and give. Give what? Give that which is the biggest and best gift in this world—health and eternal happiness, by means of the key to the kingdom of heaven. And, this key is simply the explanation of the structure of the infinite world and its Unifying Principle translated into the macrobiotic language, the art of longevity and rejuvenation. You can make yourself happy forever by distributing and establishing health and happiness, by discovering new horizons of joyful, amusing, and interesting living." *Zen Macrobiotics*, 168.

Gratitude: Gratitude is deep joy for things we are given: from air, sunshine, and water to life itself. It also means a willingness to show ap-



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preciation for, and to return kindness for, things one receives. Ohsawa encouraged people to have gratitude for everything received, both good and bad—the good to be enjoyed and the bad to be changed to something good by using macrobiotic principles.

Happiness: Ohsawa believed that everyone is born happy until he or she becomes out of balance due to poor eating habits or not having enough knowledge of the Order of the Universe to be able to maintain a balanced condition. His advice to overcome this type of unhappiness is to practice a macrobiotic approach to diet and to strengthen one's comprehension of the natural order of life.

Humility: To be humble, having a modest view of one's importance, is to be free from arrogance. Ohsawa felt changing arrogance into humility to be one of the most difficult things to do. "The man of humility, he who has no fear of being last...knows a contentment that is the essence of happiness." *Zen Macrobiotics*, 9.

Individual responsibility: This is a difficult concept for some people to understand. Ohsawa felt that the first step in healing any disorder is to search for and recognize one's own actions that contributed to the disease. The second step is to find the underlying cause of the disorder and to work on that rather than merely curing only the symptoms of it.

Love: Ohsawa wrote about seven types of love similar to the seven stages or aspects of judgment. He presented these kinds of love to distinguish "lower" types from universal, unconditional love, to which he encouraged people to aspire.

1. Physical love is instinctive and

characterized by appetite, hunger, or animalistic behavior. Ohsawa encouraged people to enjoy this kind of love, but also to develop the other kinds as well.

2. Sensorial love is erotic, seeking physical comfort and sensual pleasure—what one finds agreeable or disagreeable.

3. Sentimental love is emotional and based on what one likes and dislikes—what one finds desirable or undesirable.

4. Intellectual love is characterized by love of science based on calculation, understanding, and systematic thinking—what one finds useful or useless.

5. Social love is love based on the desire for companionship and approval from others and can be seen in love of country by the actions of reformers.

6. Ideological love is the love of ideas and can be viewed in the works of philosophers and other original thinkers.

7. Universal love is unconditional love that embraces all things without question or distinction, distributing eternal joy of life to all.

Mea culpa: Latin for "my fault." Ohsawa taught that all diseases are some variation of one's loss of balance—physically, mentally, or spiritually. Thus, he felt the first step in recovery is to search for and recognize one's own actions that contributed to the disease. While it can be useful to consider one's own actions that may lead to disease, factors outside oneself may contribute as well.

No complaining: Ohsawa encourages people not to complain because he believed it shows a lack of a joyful attitude and gratitude. Rather than complaining, he urged people to work to change something objectionable into

something that can be tolerated using macrobiotic principles.

No enemy: Ohsawa teaches that in there are no enemies in the relative world. "Our philosophy also teaches that no enemy or evildoer exists in this world—nature and human society included. There is only misunderstanding, incomprehension, or awkward behavior." *Cancer and the Philosophy of the Far East*, 100. However, humans view some people (and illnesses) as enemies. In these cases, Ohsawa encourages people to change enemies to friends using macrobiotic principles. He says cancer, for example, can be seen as beneficial because it shows that changes in one's life are needed to remedy it.

No excuses: As Herman Aihara explained, Ohsawa wrote in a categorical way and often overstated the case in order to get people to move in what he considered a better direction. For example he wrote, "Even when you are resented, envied, or scolded by mistake or misunderstanding, you should not make any excuses because there is no excuse in nature. Only man makes excuses." *Macrobiotic Guidebook for Living*, 115. As Herman Aihara put it, "Nature doesn't accept excuses, but our parents and others do; so, we learn to make them." *Kaleidoscope*, 282. Herman believed that making excuses was a function of one's small ego and that if one could let go of the desires of the small ego, he or she could gain higher consciousness and a greater understanding of his or her true self.

Non credo: Literally, "credo" means "I believe." Ohsawa used "non credo" to mean "do not believe without verifying for yourself." This motto became one of his favorites and he encouraged people to apply it to all

teachings and theories, including his own. When evaluating whether or not to believe or do something, try it and see for yourself and learn from your failures and mistakes.

One grain, ten thousand grains: A fundamental law of biology by which one grain planted generates ten thousand grains and by which Ohsawa encouraged people to live. “Master Ishizuka taught me macrobiotic medicine and rescued me from a mortal illness. Consequently, I dedicated my life to saving ten thousand existences as a testimony of my gratitude: ‘One grain, ten thousand grains.’ For me, ten thousand people represent the world.” *Macrobiotic Guidebook for Living*, 107-108. Note: One grain produces about one thousand grains. Ohsawa used ten thousand instead to correspond with the common phrase “ten thousand things” found in Taoist and Buddhist writings referring to all things in nature.

Overcoming fear: Fear is a yin emotion caused by a real or imagined threat to one’s well-being or by uneasy feelings for one’s family or friends. Left unresolved, fear can lead to hostility (yang). As in Chinese medicine, macrobiotic thinking is that fear is related to the health of the kidneys. Thus, one way to overcome fear is by making healthy dietary and lifestyle choices that specifically help the kidneys. In the largest sense, George Ohsawa taught that fear is a characteristic of an individual who lacks confidence in the universal order of life. He advised further study and greater understanding of the order of the universe to overcome fear. Herman Aihara distinguished between one’s small self (ego) and Universal Self. He wrote: “As long as we identify with the small self, fear and



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worry are unavoidable...However, the universal self is eternal; so, there is no need to worry...We cling to a short existence as the small self but the Universal Self is forever...When you begin to understand that the Universal Self is the real you, fear gradually goes away; when you clearly understand, fear is gone.” *Kaleidoscope*, 213-216.

Peace: Freedom from disturbance or conflict; a state of calmness or tranquility. In the macrobiotic view, peace is a by-product of health established by using a macrobiotic dietary approach based on whole grains and fresh vegetables and understanding the order of the universe and the unifying principle. “Only those who see that the two sides of all phenomena, visible and invisible, are front and

back or beginning and end of one reality can embrace any antagonistic situation, see its complementarity, and help others to do the same, thereby establishing peace and harmony.” *Cancer and the Philosophy of the Far East*, 155. Peaceful individuals lead to peaceful families and peaceful families lead to peaceful societies, leading to a more peaceful world.

Primitive mentality: Ohsawa adored French philosopher Lucien Lévy-Bruhl’s concept of primitive mentality. After reading his books, Ohsawa traveled to France and was shocked to find that people in the West regarded the traditional “primitive” wisdom of the Far East as completely incomprehensible. Ohsawa writes: “The fundamental philosophy of the non-civilized primitive peoples was very

simple: Accept everything gratefully and without the slightest protest. It was modesty, unconditional humiliation [humility], the ‘me’ recognized as the smallest, the most miserable, the most ignorant, the most criminal, the most miserly. Without such understanding, no human being can attain awareness of the true Self (Oneness).” New translation from the 1990 French edition of *Cancer and the Philosophy of the Far East*—found in the current English edition on page 89.

Responsibility, individual: This is a difficult concept for some people to understand. Ohsawa felt that the first step in healing any disorder is to search for and recognize one’s own actions that contributed to the disease. The second step is to find the underlying cause of the disorder and to work on that rather than merely curing only the symptoms of it.

Self-Reflection: The ability to critique one’s current physical and psychological condition and choose helpful foods and actions leading to greater health and self-development. In macrobiotic thinking, honest self-reflection is especially needed during times of disease in order to discover and counter the underlying cause. Other benefits include strengthening emotional stability by becoming clearer about one’s core values and, with daily contemplation, greater confidence in oneself and an increased understanding of the order of the universe.

Supreme love: Supreme or universal love is unconditional love that embraces all things without question or distinction, distributing eternal joy of life to all. Herman Aihara describes George Ohsawa’s idea of supreme as

follows: “For Ohsawa, life was not worth living without supreme love. If one reaches supreme love, one can live forever. This was the foundation of his macrobiotic teaching. What is supreme love? No exclusivity, he said. Love sickness as you love health. This is his supreme love. Love poverty as you love wealth. Love inconvenience as you love convenience. Love materialism as you love spiritualism. Love the lazy one as you love the hard worker. Love the ugly one as you love the beautiful one. Then there is no divorce. Such was his supreme love.” *Kaleidoscope*, 76. Herman also provides his own view of supreme love in more personal terms: “Only when we humbly admit our own smallness, exclusivity, sensorial and sentimental love can we admit and accept the smallness of others. Then, we are able to embrace them. This is Supreme Love.” *Learning from Salmon*, 99.

Thankfulness: To be conscious of a benefit received and to express gratitude for it. Ohsawa believed that all things are given to us from the Infinite (Oneness) and that this sets up a debt. “In truth, you cannot pay all that you owe in this life, because you have nothing but what you owe. You will be freed from debt if you distribute infinite joyfulness and thankfulness to everyone you meet throughout your life. This amounts to a real understanding of the structure of the infinite universe and its justice. The Earth gives back ten thousand grains in return for each grain she has received. ‘One grain, ten thousand grains’ is the biological law of this world.” *Zen Macrobiotics*, 48.

Tolerance: Ohsawa taught that tolerance—kindness or leniency for people—beliefs, or practices that differ

from one’s own, is a virtue that is hard to achieve in everyday life. He maintained that one method for becoming more tolerant is macrobiotics, eating and living according to the order of the universe. Macrobiotic principles may be used to change one’s feelings of hatred to empathy, leading to greater tolerance.

Vivere parvo: Vivere comes from French/Italian and means “to live.” Parvo comes from Latin and means “small.” Ohsawa used the phrase to construct a principle of eating and drinking only what is absolutely necessary. He believed this principle helps one produce an independent life by reducing one’s desires for unnecessary things such as excessive luxury foods and drinks. Ohsawa further believed excesses to be the root of many diseases and that restricting unnecessary foods and drinks helps begin the healing process.

Waste nothing: One of many suggestions for macrobiotic cooking meaning to use whole foods as much as possible, for example throwing away the absolute minimum when cleaning and trimming vegetables. Herman Aihara called George Ohsawa “an original recycler” because he wasted nothing, including food, paper, money, or time, and encouraged his students to do the same.

Carl Ferré is editor of Macrobiotics Today and Essential Ohsawa and author of Essential Guide to Macrobiotics and Acid Alkaline Companion. He conducted the French Meadows Summer Camps for 38 years. Carl continues his work on the new online macrobiotic dictionary and various book projects. Email: gomf@earthlink.net.