

Wholeness and Football

David Briscoe

Some macrobiotic people seem quite surprised when I tell them how much I enjoy American football, especially watching exciting games played by my former hometown team, the Kansas City Chiefs. I was delighted to discover that the late Herman Aihara loved football, too. It was a real surprise when I first visited his home and saw the beautiful natural wood Shinto shrine, and right there on the same wall was a pennant of the San Francisco 49ers! Herman told me it was his favorite team. This discovery and others made me realize that although Herman was Japanese by birth, he was a "Good Old American Joe" by choice.

Herman loved to go to coffee shops and barsbershops and talk about fishing and football with the locals. Here in Oroville, California, cashiers, waitresses, gas station attendants, and city hall workers still ask of him and remember him with fondness for his ease of being and his friendly, youthful openness. Whenever I see local men wearing plaid flannel shirts and blue jeans, a common outfit here in the fishing Mecca of Northern California, I think of Herman. That was one of



his favorite outfits to wear when teaching at the Vega Study Center or while on one of his Feather River adventures. He did not uphold the typical image of a seriously suited up macrobiotic teacher.

Herman loved to do what he wanted to do. He didn't claim to have a mission; he simply wanted to be a happy man with his feet on the earth. He taught us, through his example, that one's own happy daily life, including the difficulties, sorrows, and challenges that Herman included in his definition of "happy life," can be a great gift to others and to the world. He often said,

"We came here to enjoy the picnic of life." He didn't care much about being a public figure, investing in his own self-promotion, or being viewed as a popular teacher with a following that hung on his every word. It was those of us around him who prodded him in those directions.

Once, when I asked if he was disappointed or envious at not being referred to as the "leading teacher of macrobiotics," he told me with a smile, "Don't be afraid to be number two—it's so much more interesting because you still have room to learn and grow." Then, walking away he added, while laughing, "Plus it's far less stress when I can do what I want to do!"

Herman certainly loved to talk about Japanese tradition and the lessons he learned from World War II and George Ohsawa. He also enjoyed discussing aspects of popular American culture. He could explain traditional Japanese culture simply and understandably to Westerners and to the modern Japanese students who came to study at Vega, and he was quite at home when explaining American culture to visitors from overseas. His ability to see the deep-

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est essence of something or someone was inspiring. So it was during a private conversation we had about football. I was curious as to what Herman found so interesting in the game. I told him that I was interested in the traditional macrobiotic concept of "opposing forces" as friends rather than enemies, and that I saw this expressed in football. He said, "Exactly, football is a reflection of the nature of life itself."

The more I thought about this, the more I began to understand that life is always whole, never one-sided. In football, for example, there is the offense and the defense. The

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offense is trying to reach the goal and the defense is trying to prevent the offense from getting to that goal. The defense is maneuvering to get possession of the football for itself so that it can change to offense and proceed down the field to its own goal. If the offense loses the ball, it becomes the defense. And so the game goes. Without both sides playing their opposing part there can be no game, no wholeness. No one would enjoy watching an unopposed offense run up and down the field making endless touchdowns. The stadium would soon empty. To make a game there must be the

wholeness of both teams playing together. Without the challenge of the defense, the offense can't develop its skill and strength to succeed, and vice versa. The opposite team makes the other team more creative in its ever-changing plan for getting to the goal. So, the defense is not an enemy of the offense but an integral part of the offense's plan to reach its goal. The offense and the defense are one inseparable whole.

In daily life we often expect or hope for our attempt to reach our personal goals to go unopposed, and when opposition comes we get frustrated or we give up completely.

The modern media and popular culture has convinced us that there is a one-way easy street just around the corner that will speed us right to our goals and dreams. But if we understand the nature of the wholeness of life we begin to see that the difficulties, troubles, and challenges that come are an important part of find-

ing our dreams and happiness. To leave them out would be unnatural. Like the opposing team in football, they make us think, adapt, and adjust in order to determine how to best reach our goals and bring our dreams into reality. Without them there is no game of life that is enjoyable. How boring it would be if everyone had an unopposed field on which to easily make their way to their dreams.

The opposing forces are an intricate aspect of the wholeness of life. If we understand them, embrace them, and allow them to sharpen our wisdom and clarify our vision, we find that our goals and dreams not only come into view but are actually reached. A reached goal is enjoyed and a realized dream is celebrated to the degree that that person accepted and met all of the challenges that came their way in reaching the goal and realizing the dream. In the practice of macrobiotics a person faces

many opposing forces. These can be external and internal. Externally, there may be the challenges of daily schedule, family criticism, unfamiliarity with macrobiotic foods, etc. Internally, there can be one's own food habits, laziness, tastes, lack of confidence, etc. Each person encounters his or her unique opposing forces on the road of macrobiotic practice, but these forces are an integral part of a successful macrobiotic life. If we embrace them and understand them, we can see that these opposing forces make our pursuit of macrobiotic practice clearer and stronger. The people I know who have remained the longest with a macrobiotic practice are the ones who had to overcome the biggest challenges in the beginning. They embraced their opposing forces and as a result they reached their goal. They are happier today as a result, and they continue to meet the challenges that come their way. Herman once said, "If you think macrobiotics will make your life easier, think again. Actually, you have more difficulties come your way through macrobiotics! But difficulties are your gift to become happier and happier."

Sometimes I get calls from students who are ready to give up on macrobiotics because they just burned their rice for the fifth time. I invite them to join my "One Hundred Burnt Pots of Rice Club," because I am certain that I have done that over the past thirty years of macrobiotic living. Making mistakes is a big part of the process of learning macrobiotics. If you embrace your mistakes and let them teach you how to move forward, you will discover how much farther they have helped you go. "Enemies" are the same. You can view all opposing forces as enemies or as opportunities to grow deeper. One of the greatest joys is to discover that you have changed an enemy into a friend. You have embraced the en-

emy by allowing the opposing force to transform your own understanding and attitude. In healing, it is the same.

In today's world, illness and disease are viewed as enemies to be conquered. Cancer, for example, is to be battled against. We are in a war to rid cancer from the body. We think we can heal cancer through battling it. But in the macrobiotic view, it is cancer that heals us if we give it the chance. By understanding and embracing any illness we turn what we once saw as an enemy into a friend that can heal our entire way of life. The opposing force of that illness allows us to look deeply beyond the mediocre levels of living in order to transform ourselves.

If you are facing difficulties, challenges, and troubles have patience. Herman once said, "If you have no patience you will become a patient." Life is whole. What appears to be opposing you is a part of getting to where you are going. By embracing the opposing forces, you can understand them far better than if you try to shut them out or deny them. Perhaps the greatest source of our own suffering is found in our not realizing that wholeness is the reality of life. In every situation and every circumstance, the whole is revealing itself, even in a football game.

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