
The Sweetness of Life

Stability, Part IV

David Briscoe

In the first three parts of this series I focused on ways of creating stability in our lives by **establishing** stability at the physical level of glucose metabolism. I wrote about the importance of having a natural sweet taste at the center of a macrobiotic diet in order to create balance and satisfaction, and I introduced the first three of the "Four Heavenly Realms of Sweetness." In this final installment of the series I will write about the "Fourth Heavenly Realm of Sweetness."

One of the first things I try to determine during macrobiotic counseling is the health of the person's pancreas. The health of the pancreas is central to the overall health of the body. All other organs and systems of the body depend on a regular and steady supply of glucose from our food. Without a healthy pancreas the glucose cannot be properly assimilated. When the glucose supply is delivered properly the fundamental stability of the organs is established. Without a steady supply of glucose none of the organs can function properly.

In the macrobiotic understanding of Five Transformations Theory, the Soil element is the central, harmonizing element. The other four



elements, Metal, Water, Tree, and Fire, draw upon Soil's harmonizing qualities. Soil serves like a hub to which the spokes of the others are connected. Of the different food tastes that we enjoy, the sweet taste belongs to the Soil element. A natural sweet taste in our daily eating provides a steady and harmonizing foundation to all other tastes.

When applying the Five Transformations Theory to the human body, we find that the pancreas,

spleen, and stomach are the organs of the Soil element. Their proper functioning is central to the establishment and maintenance of the body's healthy foundation. This is especially true of the pancreas, for without the hormones it produces, glucose is not able to enter our cells. Even though the sweetness of glucose is circulating through the blood stream at all times, without the secretions of the pancreas that allow glucose to enter the cells, the energy and vitality of glucose is unavailable.

There are many health problems that arise as a result of a malfunctioning pancreas. With diabetes, the pancreas fails to produce insulin so that the glucose remains in the blood stream. In the case of hypoglycemia, the pancreas may over-secrete insulin or not produce enough insulin-controlling factors, causing glucose to be quickly squirreled away to the point where it is lowered in the blood stream and unavailable to the cells. So, among other symptoms of hypoglycemia, there may be a constant desire for sweets in order to produce readily available blood sugar that can be delivered to the hungry cells and organs.

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In the macrobiotic view, the contributing dietary factor for hypoglycemia is the overuse of the very yang foods such as eggs, chicken, cheese, beef, pork, canned fish, and baked flour products. These foods then cause attractions to the very yin foods such as sugar, alcohol, spices, fruit juices, maple syrup, honey, and tropical fruits. Hypoglycemia, which is usually subtle and undetectable in its less serious forms, is far more prevalent in our culture than is commonly accepted by the medical profession. Around 80 percent of the adults I meet show signs and symptoms of some degree of hypoglycemia. With any degree of on-going hypoglycemia, all of the organs will be laboring under the strain of an unstable energy supply. Fatigue is a common result as are depression and bipolar conditions. Many people are told they do not have hypoglycemia because the standard medical tests given to them are designed to detect only

the very progressed or "gross" forms of the condition.

Mentally and emotionally, hypoglycemia can manifest in patterns characterized by wide swings in behavior, emotions, and moods. There is an old saying in macrobiotics: Biology precedes psychology. The physiology of the body cannot be separated from the psychological state of mind. Wide swings in blood sugar levels will produce wide swings in organ function and brain function, forcing the person into an invisible energetic see-saw pattern that can be compared to that of a person on a boat in the middle of a storm. The rocking back and forth of the boat creates dizziness, confusion, anxiety, nausea, and an extremely unsettled and insecure state of mind. Anyone who has been through it knows how a violently rocking boat can make one feel more than a little uneasy. Being in an earthquake similarly causes anxiety and worry for days on end from the experience of having had the very earth beneath one's feet suddenly become unstable.

Of course, the destabilizing effects of blood sugar swings will not be as dramatic or so obvious as a storm at sea or an earthquake, but in a very subtle way they can produce similar results over time. Uneasiness, nervousness, dizziness, and anxiety can all result from swings in blood sugar and malfunctioning glucose metabolism. For this condition, I suggest a simple diet centered on whole grains supported by vegetables. Over time, the natural sweetness of whole grains and the steady burning energy of their complex carbohydrates provide the stability of the Soil element in our daily diet. By using them daily, a "solid ground" of energy and vitality is firmly established within us over time.

Emotional Stability

While I consider glucose metabolism to be a central factor for the

foundation of stable health, I have also come to realize that our physical condition alone is not the sole stabilizing factor in our lives. Over the years I have begun to notice that a person's relationship with his or her parents is also a major factor in their stability. Just as wide swings in blood sugar will cause destabilization of the cells and organs, so too will long-term exposure to wide swings in one's parents' behavior and attitudes cause instability in one's emotional life and state of mind.

If, during one's formative years, the parents' relationship is not harmonious or if it is deeply divided,

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an energy pattern is established deep within the child that is equally divided between extremes of feelings, thoughts, and emotions. When this happens, the parental stabilizing factors that normally would be in place become weak or are missing altogether. The stabilizing and harmonizing quality of a natural relationship with the parents is essential for allowing a child to become solid and secure, finally maturing into an adult who can take in and enjoy the "sweetness of life." The sweetness of life is the fourth of The Four Heavenly Realms of Sweetness.

Our relationship with our parents, which includes their relationship with each other, is the foundation of our emotional and psychological health. The centering and stabilizing quality that we need from this relationship at an early

age is the Soil element for our emotional well being. It is the harmonizing quality from this relationship that sets the psychological and emotional foundation of our whole life. You might even say that what we receive from our parents in terms of care and guidance in childhood is the "spiritual insulin" that allows us to absorb the fourth realm of sweetness, which is the "spiritual glucose," or the sweetness of life that is all around us. Mother's care and tenderness, her soft caress and words of love, have the deepest of stabilizing effects on her baby and young child. Father's words and physical affection are equally stabilizing and reinforcing. Both of the parents' guidance, example, and steady leadership are energetically absorbed by the child and become the background for his or her own outlook, attitude, and development throughout the years.

My observations over the last twenty years have brought me the understanding that a person is more or less able to absorb the sweetness of life depending on the degree to which their parents nurtured them and taught them by their example of how to be in the world. In cases where their example was steady and clear and their love openly given, the child flourished. When their encouragement was supportive of the child developing into a free and unique person, he or she naturally blossomed into an adult who could appreciate and be nourished by the unending supply of life's sweetness everywhere. Being a parent involves the creation of a stable energy foundation stemming from harmonious behavior, an example upon which the child can build a solid emotional life of natural self-expression.

Finding the Sweetness

Just like many today have difficulties with the pancreas such that their cells are not able to fully utilize the sweetness of glucose, so

too, many today have difficulty in absorbing and being energized by the sweetness of life that is all around them. What exactly is the sweetness of life? I cannot tell you; nobody can. Words cannot describe it. No one can give it to you. It is for you to discover for yourself. It is there in abundance ready to nourish us and to make life so satisfying.

The inability to take in and be nourished by the sweetness of life is due in most cases to the lack of a centered and steady example set by the parents while the person was young. Without this solid ground beneath one's feet, life can seem precarious and confusing. We become anxious about when and how we will be satisfied, or if we ever will be satisfied. We struggle to love and be loved. There is a grabbing, fueled by frustration and isolation, at the artificial saccharine of fleeting sexual affairs and superficial pleasures, and one succumbs to

the perpetual push to be entertained and distracted. Often, food becomes the means by which we try to fulfill the missing sweetness of life. Sometimes individuals tell me that it feels as if there is a huge hole in their abdomen and they are trying desperately to fill it by overeating or stuffing themselves with sweets. They are painfully aware that this hole cannot be satisfied by eating, but the nagging cravings and over eating go on and on. It is the sweetness of life that is longed for.

We are very blessed when we find a mentor, teacher, or some other adult who sets an example that inspires us and opens our eyes and hearts to living a life that is filled with the sweetness of personal accomplishment, self-esteem, and confidence. They can fill the gap where the parents may have fallen short. It may be someone who encouraged us to look at the stars or

to enjoy the friendliness of trees. We are so fortunate to have had these extraordinary "second parents" who opened the door and helped us discover the sweetness of life. If you stop now for just a moment and think about it, you can probably think of such a person, and you have a real sense of appreciation for what they did for you.

Practical Advice

Fortunately, we are not forever excluded from enjoying the sweetness of life just because our parents were weak in their example and guidance of us. No matter what kind of parents we had or whether or not we have been blessed with mentors and teachers, there are many things we can do for ourselves in order to become aware of the sweetness of life. I would like to share some of the things that I have created and some that teachers have given to me over the years.

• Herman Aihara said over and over, "You must find what you want to do." Do what you want to do with all of your might and gusto, and at the same time take care of your health through a simple macrobiotic diet. He said that we are free to do whatever we want, but not free to eat whatever we want. When we understand this, we become more spiritually free.

• Spend time with nature. This doesn't necessarily mean to go camping, etc, but maybe there is a tree by your house or a flower in the backyard or on the windowsill. Be aware of it, get to know it, be friends with it. For a moment, once in awhile, look at the stars at night. If you live in an urban environment, go to a zoo and meet the animals. Once, all alone by a monkey cage, I stuck out my hand and the monkey reached out and felt it very carefully. I will never forget the tenderness of its touch and the feel of its palm. The look in the monkey's eyes was one of immense curiosity and deep spirit. Being close to the wonders of nature is being close to your own humanity.

• Give some of your time to children. Be with them, listen to them, and watch how you react to them. They are so alive and so natural. They are so open to the sweetness of life.

• Write poems or letters to friends, former teachers, relatives, and childhood chums. Tell them how much they have meant to you. Even if you don't know where they live, just write the letters.

• Say, "Thank you," at every opportunity. This doesn't always have to be spoken; sometimes it can be thought quietly in your mind. Be gently aware of all there is to be thankful for at any moment. Thank you is a "spiritual condiment" that adds zest, ease, and steadiness to daily life. It tenderizes the hard edges of forgetfulness and self-absorption. It opens our channels and allows more sweetness of life to

stream in.

• Find ways of making peace with your parents in cases where there have been problems, resentments, or abuse. As long as we are at war with our parents we will not be at peace within ourselves. This can be easier said than done, but if you do, you will discover abundant sweetness of life. This may be accomplished by seeking some form of professional therapeutic support, or it may be as simple as doing it in your own mind and heart.

• Ask yourself the question, "Where is my anchor?" In the changing world of day-to-day life, where do you find a sense of solidity and stability? Is it in brown rice? Is it in a relationship? Is it in money? All of these come and go. Where is your anchor amidst all of the changing winds of the relative world?

The sweetness of life is available to us all without exception. It doesn't have to be fought for. It doesn't require a bank account. This kind of sweetness, the sweetness of life, needs no chewing in order to taste it or benefit from it. When we open to it, even the hard times of life will not be so difficult as before. We establish a philosophy of "happily unhappy," where even the sadness and troubles that come our way are accepted.

In the sweetness of life, we don't seek perfection or imitation, we don't become a "better" person. We relax into the ease of being who we already are. Let's support each other and promise to encourage each other as we seek, each in his or her own way, the sweetness of life.

David Briscoe is co-founder of Macrobiotics America. He provides counseling for the Foundation and has developed counselor training courses given over the Internet. David is the author of Personal Peace.