

The Four Heavenly Realms of Sweetness (Stability, Part III)

David Briscoe

The sweet taste is a natural part of our life. If you like the sweet flavor, join the club, for it is completely natural. Some of our taste buds are stimulated only by the sweet flavor. Not to have the sweet flavor in our daily eating would be unsatisfying and unhealthy.

In Part one of this series I wrote of the need for maintaining stability in our lives by establishing it at the cellular level. We do this by creating the steady and smooth digestion of the complex carbohydrates of whole grains as the most natural way of providing a stable glucose supply. Part two discussed how the modern diet of meat and sugar is so packed with concentrated solar energy that it is delivering an overload to the human body's unique energy circuitry. This overloaded circuitry causes the body to overheat, over work, and eventually age prematurely. This was followed by ideas to strengthen the function of certain organs that are involved in the digestion and assimilation of carbohydrates. By strengthening them, many of the allergic reactions to whole grains (and other problems related to glucose digestion and assimilation) can be minimized



or eliminated over time.

In this third part of the series I share how we can place a naturally sweet taste at the center of macrobiotic eating. Usually when "sweet taste" is mentioned we think first of "dessert," but in daily macrobiotic cooking the sweet taste is obtained primarily from the eating of whole grains and vegetables. Now you may think, "Grains and vegetables aren't sweet—sweet is apple pie, cookies, cakes, puddings!" We've

come to expect that "sweet" means added sweeteners, syrups, and fruits. It is commonly accepted that a dessert is the natural end to a meal. This has come about due to the fact that most meals in the modern lifestyle are centered on protein, not complex carbohydrates. A high protein meal gives the body little to immediately transform into glucose, so a sugary dessert is desired at the end.

Among those eating macrobiotic foods, especially in the first months, there is often the desire for a maple syrup- or rice syrup-sweetened dessert at the end of each meal. This may be a holdover habit, or it may be caused by some organic condition of the person. It could also be the result of how the person is cooking and eating their macrobiotic meals. In the beginning of a macrobiotic practice some do not find that grains and vegetables provide a sweet taste.

At one of the first macrobiotic cooking classes I attended the teacher announced, "For dessert we are having squash pie." I remember thinking how the "squash" part didn't sound so appealing, but I was ready for "pie." When she brought out the dessert it had the

shape of a pie, and it looked like a pie, except that the crust was darker on account of it being whole wheat. Everything about its appearance said "pie," but when I tasted it, I thought, "This is pie? It's not sweet!" It had no added sweetener, only butternut squash and a dash of cinnamon. On the way home I stopped and gobbled a piece of real pie at a restaurant. "Now this is sweet! Yes, this is pie," I thought.

Protein + Fat + Carbohydrate: The Triplets of Nutrition

In modern nutrition there are three nutrients known as the "macro nutrients." Macro here means "main" or most important. They are protein, fat, and carbohydrate—the "triplets" of nutrition. They go arm in arm and are very much dependent on each other. Where there is much protein and fat in the diet, there will be much carbohydrate. If the protein and fat is very concentrated, such as in animal flesh and dairy foods, the type of carbohydrate desired will be equally concentrated. Therefore, a person who has been eating meat and eggs will rarely find whole grains and vegetables sweet at first. A squash pie will be completely unappealing for many because the sweet taste and the concentration of carbohydrate is not enough. Only sugar, honey, sodas, candy, chocolate, and/or alcohol will be concentrated enough in refined carbohydrate to match the highly concentrated protein and fat of animal foods.

This theory applies to macrobiotic practice as well. If there are beans or other concentrated protein at almost every meal such as tofu daily, tempeh regularly, fish often, tahini sauces, nuts, and nut butters, then the person will sooner or later desire and be compelled to eat more macrobiotic desserts, rice syrup, maple syrup, beer, amasake, or other refined carbohydrates. In macrobiotic philosophy, there is a famous saying: "Everything that

has a front has a back," and "The bigger the front, the bigger the back." This also can be applied to modern nutrition. The more concentrated the protein and fat consumed, the more concentrated, simple, and/or refined the carbohydrate must be, and vice versa. They go hand in hand. Many times when the person changes to macrobiotic foods, he or she without realizing simply carries over the former way of eating large quantities of protein, fat, and refined carbohydrates, only now translated into macrobiotic foods.

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The complex carbohydrates of whole grains rather than the more protein-rich beans are the center of a macrobiotic approach to eating. All other foods are supplementary to whole grains. This is the traditional teaching of macrobiotic nutrition. When Ohsawa taught about the healing qualities of macrobiotics he was not talking about soy milk, amasake drinks, maple syrup desserts, fruit juices, tofu salads, tempeh sandwiches, etc.

Am I saying that these things are bad? Of course not, but I am saying that there is a foundation of understanding and eating that must be in place. If the foundation is not solid all the beautiful paint and interior decorations in the world cannot make a stable house.

When starting macrobiotics one has to be patient while the taste buds and the whole body are going through a period of adjustment. Herman Aihara used to say, "If you

have no patience, you will become a patient." He often said that modern people have no patience because internally the body has lost its patience due to the consumption of refined carbohydrates and other refined foods. Everything zooms through the digestive tract rather than going through the natural stages of digestion that whole grains and vegetables would require. Herman said that if we want to reestablish patience in ourselves we should take whole grains as our main food, and chew them very well. When the body regains its digestive patience, so will the mind and heart express patience and deep understanding. If you currently have allergic reactions to some whole grains, be very patient, and learn over time which ones you can use successfully.

The center taste of a macrobiotic meal is the subtle sweet taste of whole grains and vegetables. In some grains, such as corn, this sweet taste is immediately detected by the tongue, whereas with other whole grains we need to use cooking methods and recipes that bring forward the natural sweet taste that might otherwise remain hidden. The natural taste of grains and vegetables doesn't screech of sweetness, rather it is a subtle presence in the meal. When you achieve this taste on a regular basis, you will find that your appetite for whole grains and vegetables begins to open wider and wider and you are more regularly satisfied by macrobiotic meals. Again, please have patience. This is a goal achieved over time, not over night.

The Four Heavenly Realms of Sweetness, One By One

There are many different levels of sweetness that we can have in our lives. In order to understand them I have organized them into four levels or realms. I call them "The Four Heavenly Realms of Sweetness." The First Heavenly

Realm is that of the monosaccharides, glucose and fructose. These are the simplest sugars of all. They quickly digest and are rapidly absorbed into the blood stream. Honey is 39 percent fructose and 31 percent glucose. Amasake, the popular macrobiotic sweetener made from rice, is 80 percent glucose.

Many people are often surprised to learn that fruit sugar, fructose, is one of the simplest sugars of all. And they are more surprised to

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learn that the macrobiotic way advises us to use fruit lightly, as a dessert rather than a main food in the daily diet. Many wrongly assume that because of this, macrobiotics is implying that fruit is "bad." This is a misunderstanding. There are no good and bad categories in macrobiotics. Through our application of macrobiotic principles we learn about the qualities of food and how they can lead to health or illness. From there we make free choices. Fructose is a monosaccharide, and partly for this reason it is not the primary form of carbohydrate in macrobiotic eating. It is more useful to an adult who is healthy and hard working, especially in hot weather. It is also useful to include as a supplementary food in children's diets when they are healthy and active. Of course, organic fruit that is seasonal and local is recommended over sprayed commercial fruit.

In the macrobiotic view fruit is

classified as very yin mainly because it is rich in sugar, water, and potassium. Macrobiotic philosophy teaches us that the more yin something is the more it should be selected locally and seasonally. It comes as a surprise to many that macrobiotics doesn't recommend liberal amounts of fruit. We've all been prodded since childhood to eat more fruit and to think of it as just about as healthy a food as there is. As time goes by though, and the evidence emerges that eating a lot of fruit is not beneficial to everyone across the board, we will hear less and less about "eat more vegetables and fruits" from the government and nutritionists. It will become simply, "Eat more vegetables."

We do enjoy using fruit as a seasonal addition to a solid macrobiotic foundation of whole grains supplemented by vegetables. What are some delicious and healthy ways of preparing fruits? Raw watermelon or cantaloupe on a hot day is a real treat, but what are some other ways of preparing fruit and enjoying their use as the star of the first heavenly realm of sweetness? A little fruit once in awhile is hardly as concentrated in sugar as honey and amasake drinks consumed regularly. Of all the foods that contain simple sugars I consider fruit to be the healthiest when wisely used.

Lemony Apple Pudding is almost always a hit at parties, picnics, and potlucks. The refreshing lemon taste and the smooth texture of the pudding make it a perfect way to enjoy something fruity.

Lemony Apple Pudding

3 cups organic applesauce
4 cups organic apple juice
1/4 teaspoon sea salt
4 tablespoons kuzu
1/2 teaspoon grated organic lemon rind
2 teaspoons vanilla extract

1. Bring 3 cups applesauce and 3 cups of apple juice to a boil with sea salt in a covered pot. (Be careful:

boiling applesauce bubbles thick and it's hot!)

2. Dissolve kuzu in the remaining 1 cup of apple juice. Add to the applesauce mixture. Cook until kuzu turns clear. Add lemon rind and vanilla.

3. Cook 2 to 3 minutes longer. Serve in individual cups with a garnish of currants and chopped roasted almonds. For a cool dessert place in the refrigerator until chilled, then top with chopped almonds.

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The Second Heavenly Realm

The second heavenly realm of sweetness is the realm of disaccharides, sucrose and maltose. These are still very simple sugars, but not as simple as the monosaccharides. Sucrose, common white sugar, is a disaccharide. So too are the main sugars in rice malt syrup and barley malt. However, these syrups are not as concentrated in disaccharides as white sugar. Disaccharides take a little longer to digest and to be absorbed than monosaccharides, but not a whole lot longer. In macrobiotics there are many desserts that can be made using rice malt syrup and barley malt. Brown rice malt syrup is 40 percent maltose, a disaccharide. The brand I use is "Sweet Cloud." Be sure to make a distinction between "rice malt syrup" and regular rice syrup treated with enzymes. Enzyme treated rice syrup is 40 percent glucose, a monosaccharide. Barley malt is 76 percent maltose. Maple syrup is 88 percent sucrose. Of all the sweeteners containing disaccharides, I recommend using barley malt and rice malt syrup as the main choices.

They can create delicious desserts for special parties, holidays, and that "gotta have something sweet" moment when nothing but a really sweet taste will satisfy. Here is an example of a tasty recipe using both barley malt and rice malt syrup.

Pecan Nuggets

4 cups roasted pecans, pulverized
1 heaping teaspoon arrowroot powder
1/2 cup barley malt
1/2 cup rice malt syrup
1 teaspoon vanilla extract (mixed into the barley malt)

1. Mix pulverized pecans with the arrowroot powder.

2. Add the rice malt syrup and the barley malt with vanilla. Mix thoroughly until the pecans and sweetener are evenly distributed. You may need to mix it with moistened hands as it will be very thick and difficult to mix with a spoon.

3. Moisten your hands with a little water or oil. Pinch off a piece of the mixture and roll into a small ball. Repeat until all the mixture has been used.

The Third Heavenly Realm

The third heavenly realm of sweetness is the realm of the polysaccharides. These are truly "complex carbohydrates." We find them abundant in whole grains. Vegetables are the next best source of polysaccharides. When we chew whole grains well we find them becoming sweeter and sweeter in the mouth. Good chewing of whole grains is essential for extracting more of the sweet flavor and for full nutrient absorption. Digestion takes place by surface area, so the better we chew the more surface area of the food is exposed, and the more fully the food can be digested. There are many vegetables that have a naturally sweet taste like onions, carrots, parsnips, winter squashes, and yams. Using them regularly brings a nice sweetness to daily meals. There are "jams" and "butters" that

can be made with these sweet vegetables that are great spreads. They disappear quickly in my house! There are methods of cooking vegetables and grains that bring out their sweetness. For example, a quickly boiled salad can result in a sweet taste. If the vegetables are overcooked or undercooked, the boiled salad won't taste sweet. The "layering method" of cooking vegetables almost always results in a sweeter taste. There are many other methods of cooking vegetables to bring out the sweet taste. There are so many that I can't mention them all here. In the future, I will devote an entire cooking article to these recipes and methods.

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How To Bring Out the Sweet Taste of Whole Grains

Some whole grains are just naturally sweeter than others. Corn mentioned previously, is immediately sweet in taste because it is the grain highest in natural sugar. Cooking fresh corn with other grains is a popular summertime combination. Corn with short or medium-grain brown rice and corn with millet are favorites. Fresh corn soup is always welcome at our table. Fresh corn tortillas are another family favorite.

When cooking short-grain brown rice many people today do not use any salt. However, this usually means that their rice will taste somewhat bland and they will probably end up putting too much gomashio (sesame salt) or some other condiment on their rice, making it ten times saltier than if they had just used enough salt in the cooking process itself. When Cynthia and I were running our restaurant in Kansas City, we found that the cus-

tomers consistently commented on the sweetness of the rice when we used one half teaspoon of sea salt for every three cups of dry short-grain brown rice. Most of the time we pressure cook brown rice as this results in a much sweeter flavor.

Here is an all-time favorite sweet tasting dish using brown rice. Consistently it has been a favorite of people just beginning to include whole grains in the diet.

Sweet 'n Easy Brown Rice

2 teaspoons sesame oil (toasted or regular)

1 medium yellow onion, diced

1 medium carrot, cut into matchsticks

3 to 4 cups cooked short-grain brown rice
shoyu (natural soy sauce) to taste

2 teaspoons ginger juice from freshly grated ginger

1 scallion, cut into thin strips

1. Heat the oil in a skillet. Sauté the onions for 2 to 3 minutes. Add carrot matchsticks and sauté another 2 to 3 minutes.

2. Reduce flame. Place the cooked rice on top of the onions and carrots. DO NOT MIX.

3. Add just enough water to create steam. Cover and allow to steam for about 10 minutes on low heat.

4. Mix together. Season with a little shoyu, add the ginger juice, and continue steaming for another 3 to 4 minutes.

5. Remove from heat. Serve on an attractive plate with the scallion garnish.

The fourth heavenly realm of sweetness will be the subject of the next and final installment of this series.

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