

Philosophy...

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"The diet part of macrobiotics is a study of the relationship between an individual and his environment, realizing he is created by what he eats," Vasina said. "It's a very individual thing," Black said. "A lot of it (the diet) is observation of your body and its reactions to the foods eaten."

Although the macrobiotic diet is based on Oriental philosophy, persons following it need not eat seaweed and other such "foreign" foods, Vasina said.

"The principals of macrobiotics can be used anywhere without ever hearing of the Japanese," he said. "You don't have to eat any one particular food to be healthy. You can be macrobiotic without ever eating rice."

VASINA SAID there are four major points in the macrobiotic diet.

Eat a grain-based diet. Grain provides B vitamins, carbohydrates, roughage and proteins needed for good nutrition. These grains include millet, wheat, corn and rice.

Eat whole foods. This means eliminating adulterated, refined foods such as refined "white" sugar, refined flour and fruit juices drained of their nutritive values.

Eat natural foods. Natural foods are those grown without pesticides or chemical fertilizers. If you can't grow them in your own garden, several local stores sell natural foods.

Eat locally grown foods. The macrobiotic diet emphasizes eating what is appropriate to your environment. Tropical fruits would not be part of a Nebraskan's

macrobiotic diet.

"Man is an element of his environment," he said. "Animals eat out of their environment, but our diet today is without relation to our environment."

The result of such a diet is "physical chaos" created in the body, he said.

VASINA RECOMMENDED the books "Sugar Blues" and "Healing Ourselves" to those seeking further information about macrobiotics.

After the initial macrobiotic fast, described as "kicking cold turkey," tastes in food change.

"The diet is simple in taste, few spices are used and it is simple to prepare. The hardest part is cutting up the vegetables," Black said.

The art of cooking completely from scratch is not difficult once you get used to it, she said.

There are many good natural cooking guides available.

William Dufty, author of "Sugar Blues," offers recipes for the foods basic to a macrobiotic diet. Here is one for a non-sugared pudding:

"Soak a cup of dried apricots or apples in water with lemon peel and an uneboshi plum. Stew slowly over a low flame for several minutes, then cool. Put the mixture into the blender with several tablespoons of tahini and blend. Pour this into individual dishes to serve. I sometimes add a dash of coconut on top."

If we are what we eat, the proof may be in this pudding.

Spiritual path...

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Although it is time consuming, the organized pattern of Ananda Marga appeals to Tristani. He explained that he meditates before breakfast and before supper. The vegetarian diet also allows him implementation of his beliefs.

Brought up as a Catholic, he said he was told to follow God, but he couldn't understand that concept. He drifted from Catholicism before he heard about Ananda Marga, but he said he is certain he will re-examine the religion. Tristani said he thought he now would know more about what he was looking for.

Jensen said she has found what she needed in the group, especially in their

service orientation. The nurse has changed her lifestyle to the point that she seldom eats in restaurants, stays away from movies with violence and spends time teaching health classes.

"I SEE THE purpose in my life to try to follow these practices as closely as I can," she said. "This is the best way I see of getting closer to God. It feels like exactly the right thing."

Vegetarianism is viewed as a key factor to improve meditation. "People at work used to ask me why I didn't eat meat," Jensen said. "I talked to my meditation teacher and he told me that when meditating, you try to think of pleasant thoughts. Types of food are included in that."

The political consequences of consuming one pound of beef which requires the production of seven pounds of grain is overwhelming to Jensen and another reason for her choice of diets. Carcinogens existent in meat also add to an unhealthy situation, she noted.

Cook said vegetarianism has allowed her to appreciate what she eats. "Before, I never learned what things tasted like," she said "Meat drowned out the flavor of food."

EATING MEAT would make meditating difficult, McElravy said, but he does not degrade people who do not follow the practice. "I subscribe to the philosophy that what comes out of a person's mouth is

more important than what goes in. I do believe in the moral idea that where it's possible to eat without killing animals, it's better."

Converting the world to vegetarianism is not one of the goals of Ananda Marga, Cook explained. "I don't like people proselytizing to me, so we keep it on a level of, 'It's here, it's available if you want it.' At that point we leave it, because at some point each of us has to make his own choice of what he wants to do."

The two are so confident that they are convinced recruitment must be based on attraction, they said. "It's an individual journey," Cook said. "You can't force a social path on someone."



Photo by Tom Genser

Meditation is one of the pillars upon which Ananda Marga followers hang their beliefs. Steve McElravy, Cathy Cook, Mary Kris Albert Goode and Minguel Tristani are part of the group which gathers on Sunday afternoons to meditate.