

Bridging the Great Pandemic Divide

Phiya Kushi

The 2020 pandemic and the global public health response has caused widespread confusion, doubt, criticism, fear, and divisiveness around the world. The macrobiotic community has become divided. Many are outspoken critics against medical and public health efforts, policies, and the science behind them. Some have gone so far as to insist that such actions are criminal and are part of a secret genocidal program to reduce the population. Others remain supportive of the public health efforts even going so far as to alienate and condemn those who do not embrace the science, policies, and efforts thereby causing further division.

It seems the pandemic has divided us ideologically and intellectually with no apparent resolution in sight. How did this happen? How do we reconcile the many conflicting polarized views? How do we unify our community? As students of Ohsawa's Unifying Principle, shouldn't we know how to peacefully harmonize and unify opposing forces? Isn't macrobiotics all about peaceful and harmonious resolutions from diseases to global conflicts? Have we lost sight of what macrobiotics is really about? Where is the humility and embrace of our own



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ignorance, the wonder and awe of nature, our endless appreciation for others, and our profound gratitude for our challenges and difficulties? Why do we allow ourselves to be so arrogant about our own experiences, opinions, rationalizations, and beliefs that we are so ready and eager to criticize, denounce, and attack others in the community and in the world at large?

THE LIMITATIONS OF MEDICINE

As macrobiotic students we are aware of the limitations of medical science. We've always known that

its primary focus is on emergency care and symptomatic relief. Its goal has been the saving of lives in critical condition through the treatment and elimination of life-threatening symptoms. Until relatively recently medical science paid little attention to the influence of diet and lifestyle on the prevention and recovery of diseases. We also know this neglect created a void that allowed for macrobiotics and alternative healing modalities to grow and flourish, promoting, building, and expanding upon the notion of "food as medicine." If we knew this then why should we be upset that the official medical response to a pandemic does not include macrobiotic ideas now?

Perhaps we are upset because in dealing with this pandemic public health officials, governments, and the mass media make little mention of dietary solutions. There are no mandates and mass media calls to reduce refined sugar consumption and other dietary and lifestyle measures that directly impact COVID-19 comorbidities. There are no mentions of natural methods to improve immune functions in the body. Instead, government mandates and the media focus on vaccines, social distancing, and masking to reduce the spread of viral infections

and the overburdening of hospitals. Is this why we are upset? Yet, who is really to blame for this? Who is really to blame for the lack of macrobiotic solutions adopted by governments and promoted by the mass media? Not them, it's us. We have no one to blame but ourselves.

After 60 plus years of effort the macrobiotic movement is still struggling to be acknowledged, appreciated, and accepted as a legitimate priority in public health and government policy. But is this reality? Today, local organic foods are available everywhere. Whole grains, fermented products, and many other staples (re) introduced by macrobiotics are readily available in any city. The World Health Organization and the Public Health Offices of many governments offer macrobiotically consistent dietary recommendations for non-communicable diseases such as heart disease, diabetes, and cancer. The macrobiotic movement has undoubtedly and positively contributed to the greater awareness and impact of diet and lifestyle.

Yet, when it comes to infectious diseases and this pandemic, the movement has made little impact. Why is this so? Why also are we so divided, as is the rest of the world, when it comes to this pandemic, vaccines and viruses? Can we bridge this divide amongst us and in the world? To solve this, it will be helpful to review the history of the movement to understand how we became so divisive today.

THE HISTORY OF MACROBIOTICS VERSUS MEDICINE

Since its inception macrobiotics has always and necessarily been defined and identified by comparing and contrasting it with medicine. In the preface of his book *The Art of Prolonging Life* (published in English in

1867), renowned German physician, Dr. Christoph Wilhelm Hufeland, introduced macrobiotics in contrast to medicine going so far as to write, "The medical art must consider every disease an evil, which cannot be too soon expelled; the macrobiotic, on the other hand, shows that many diseases may be the means of prolonging life." This definition of macrobiotics transcends the dualistic ideology of good versus evil by seeing value in and embracing that which is considered as evil.

As a teenager, Ohsawa discovered macrobiotics by curing himself of tuberculosis (an infectious bacterial disease) after modern "Western" medicine failed to save his mother and siblings of the same disease. It should be noted that Ohsawa was born during the Meiji Era of Japan where there existed a great divide between the East and the West and where Western colonizers of the East saw themselves as evidently superior, given their advanced technology, industrial achievements, and scientific knowledge. So, for Ohsawa, the division between macrobiotics and medicine also included the division between traditional Eastern and modern Western medicine. In essence, all medical practices that were considered "primitive" and not sanctioned by the Western medical orthodoxy became an integral aspect of Ohsawa's macrobiotic effort and part of a larger dialectical and ideological response to the aggressive global dominance of Western ideas, practices, and lifestyles. This effort included promoting Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), Yoga, Ayurveda, Herbology, and the folk medicines of indigenous and oppressed cultures around the world.

Ohsawa's macrobiotics became a vanguard for any type of practice or idea that challenged the established Western authority. This resonated well among the disillusioned anti-establishment youth of the 1960s

who found refuge in Eastern philosophy and spirituality including *Zen Macrobiotics*. With a decade of political assassinations, corrupt politicians, and the ever-looming threat of nuclear war, anything authoritarian was suspect as part of a cabal of greedy war-mongering elite who controlled the world. Meditatively chewing a bowl of brown rice with chopsticks while sitting on the floor for enlightenment and inner peace was a revolutionary act. Rebel rocker, John Lennon, with his Japanese wife, Yoko Ono, promoting world peace and introducing macrobiotic cooking on the Mike Douglas Show epitomized the pinnacle of the influence of macrobiotics. Today, many continue to view macrobiotics as a righteous life choice in defiance against the evils of greed, corrupt power, and authoritarian rule.

After Ohsawa and throughout the 70s, 80s, 90s and 2000s, Michio endeavored to show that macrobiotics could succeed where modern medicine failed. Recovery cases, like that of Dr. Anthony J. Sattilaro, from medically terminal diseases were celebrated and promoted as a testament of the superiority of macrobiotics over medicine. Michio's efforts to address the AIDS crisis in the 1980s was another attempt to demonstrate the superiority of macrobiotics over failed medical efforts and policy. The result is that the movement attracted and helped many who sought relief through macrobiotics where modern medicine had failed them. So, naturally, many in the movement today view macrobiotics and medicine as antagonistic instead of complementary to each other. The pandemic has only amplified a divisiveness that was already inherent in the inception and formative identity of macrobiotics.

In other words, for many followers, macrobiotics did not transcend the duality of good versus evil. Instead of

actual diseases as the evil to eliminate, greed, corruption, and authoritarian rule became the evil “which cannot be too soon expelled” and macrobiotics became the antidote. The overall good versus evil mentality did not change and simply retained its dualistic conflicted nature by replacing one evil for another. Today’s divisiveness is merely an extension of those fighting what they believe to be an evil that must be eradicated.

MACROBIOTICS USES FOOD AS SYMPTOMATIC MEDICINE

The movement developed its own form of expert care in the form of macrobiotic counseling services, which turned food into a new form of prescribed symptomatic medicine. Michio developed specific procedures and protocols to tailor one’s personal diet according to the disease they had. This became the central core of his work, spawning many books and a professional training that was the Kushi Institute. The basis of his work was the yin-yang classifications introduced by Ohsawa. Many thousands sought his advice and recovered from a variety of illnesses including those that were deemed medically incurable and fatal. A result of his effort was the best-case cancer study submitted to the National Cancer Institute in 2002. These were patients who, after being declared medically terminally ill with a prognosis of only a few months to live, consulted with Michio in the 1980s, recovered following his advice, and were still alive in 2002 at the time of presentation. Several are still alive and well today in 2022.

Michio greatly expanded on Ohsawa’s work and yin-yang classifications in ways that undoubtedly and positively impacted the world. However, his efforts were not without challenges. The complexities of the yin-yang classifications and the insis-

tence of utilizing one’s innate intuitive abilities made his efforts difficult, if not impossible, to replicate among his students. Without an objective framework to measure and correct one’s interpretation of yin-yang and intuitive prowess, macrobiotic student teachers of Michio’s attempting to develop and expand on his work resulted in a diverse variety of classifications and interpretations that sometimes conflicted with each other and with Michio’s own versions. Clients who consulted multiple counselors at the same time were bewildered by the conflicting advice and, in this way, Michio remained, intentionally or not, the final authority of his own yin-yang system of classification.

Without an objective framework independent of Michio (or any individual), the system of yin-yang classifications that he developed could not be sustained and grow beyond his years. After Michio’s passing, macrobiotic counselors had one of three options to pursue in order to continue their work:

1. To mimic Michio and continue their own subjective interpretations of his yin-yang classification system. Who had the right interpretation became a source of contention amongst counselors. As of today, there are few remaining counselors who follow Michio’s templates as many that did have passed away and many others have moved away from them.
2. To adopt the yin-yang classifications of Traditional Chinese Medicine as an objective and orthodox standard. Many who studied TCM and became acupuncturists did exactly this, relying less on Michio’s yin-yang classifications and joined the growing movement of Alternative Medicine.
3. To turn to the objectivity of science, specifically nutritional science, to inform their ongoing counseling practice. Over the years, even while Michio was active, many did this to gain wider acceptance and credibil-

ity and avoid any contentious differences with those who chose the first option.

From a larger perspective, the distinction that delineated macrobiotics from Western medical science evolved (or devolved) to become a branch of medicine, albeit informal, itself using “food as symptomatic medicine,” Traditional Chinese Medicine and nutritional science.

In the end, the mindset that transcends the duality of good versus evil where disease is seen as a means to prolonging life was never fully embraced by macrobiotic students. Food became a new weapon in the symptomatic arsenal that “considers disease as an evil that cannot be too soon expelled.” The larger macrobiotic ambition of changing every aspect of one’s life based on a new perspective of life was too much of a challenge and struggle for individuals to take on, especially when it meant going against the values and priorities of the world today. The transformative life and world that macrobiotics promised was never comprehensively adopted and thus food just became another weapon in the arsenal of symptomatic medicine.

FOOD AS LIFE, LIFE AS MEDICINE

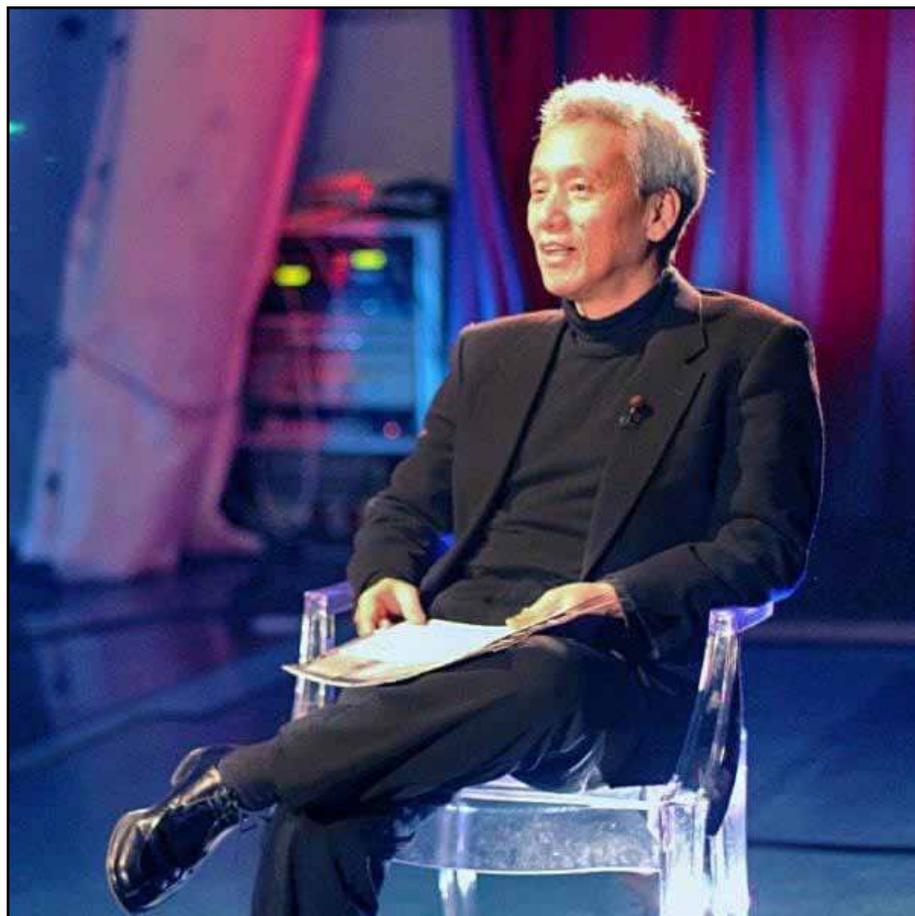
Instead of turning food into symptomatic medicine, the notion of “food as medicine” was meant to turn the entirety of our daily life habits, including what we eat, how we live, what we value and the everyday judgments that inform our moment-to-moment decisions in life into an ongoing nourishing, regenerative, healing, and joyful experience. Fasting, going for walks in nature, choosing to eat whole grains over refined grains and a productive, fulfilling occupation were all essential macrobiotic elements that turned ev-

eryday life into medicine itself. Food is not medicine but is life itself and living a joyful life is the medicinal practice of macrobiotics.

By reasserting macrobiotics as being primarily concerned with the mundane routines of daily life and living then, it can be clearly separate and distinct from medicine which, in contrast, is the entire domain of all symptomatic remedies and treatment including everything from home remedies like ume-sho-kuzu drink to herbal and nutritional supplements to over-the-counter and prescribed medications and to the more invasive and drastic treatments like surgery, radiation, and chemotherapy. By the clarity of this distinction we can understand and see that macrobiotics never was against medicine but instead complements and embraces it as an integral part of a much larger life. In macrobiotics food is life and is only used as medicine as needed along with all other forms of symptomatic medicine.

MEDICINE EMBRACES ALTERNATIVES

While macrobiotic counselors have now become more like nutritionists, dieticians, and TCM practitioners, physicians who studied and saw the value of what macrobiotics had to offer fully embraced alternative healing modalities under the banner of “Complementary and Alternative Medicine” (CAM) and “Integrative Medicine.” The inevitable future is that all of medicine will not only incorporate preventative dietary recommendations as it presently is doing but also incorporate all aspects of symptomatic healing whether it be indigenous traditional food-based and herbal remedies, nutritional supplementation, probiotics and antibiotics, immunotherapy, and more invasive treatments such as surgery, radiation, and chemotherapy. The distinctions



Phiya Kushi being interviewed in Moscow in 2012

that once made macrobiotic counseling unique is less clear today and will disappear in the future. It will all simply be known as “medicine.”

In addition to losing their uniqueness, macrobiotic counseling services have failed to remain socially relevant due to the fact that independent counselors have never gone beyond the subjective anecdotal personal experiences of themselves and their clients. An objective, collaborative peer reviewed infrastructure was never established to collectively catalogue, evaluate, analyze, nurture, sustain and develop the multitude of healing experiences they produced. Whatever important and valuable health improvements experienced by clients remained mostly unknown to even other clients of the same counselor.

Likewise, whatever possible lessons learned from the problems, failures, and errors that counselors and clients may have experienced also remain unknown. Without a collaborative infrastructure, counselors concerned themselves only with their own practice instead of coming together to hold each other accountable and responsible for the larger impact of its own collective industry. In the end, to remain socially relevant, many counselors discarded macrobiotic yin-yang rationalizations and turned to the already established peer reviewed infrastructure of nutritional and medical science to inform and validate their own recommendations and work. While the future of medicine will embrace all food-based remedies and alternative therapies, macrobiotic counseling services will

end and be fully absorbed by the medical and nutritional industry and science.

BRIDGING THE DIVIDE

The sharp social divisions of East and West and tradition versus modern that Ohsawa and Michio experienced in their earlier years are less significant today. The world has become global and integrated. Modern medicine has embraced traditional and alternative therapies as well as recommending whole-food plant-based traditional diets as a means of staying healthy and preventing non-communicable diseases.

Many macrobiotic counselors embraced nutritional science and have more or less become indistinguishable from dietitians and nutritional counselors. Others have become TCM practitioners. Very few have retained the yin-yang classifications and protocols developed by Michio. If the yin-yang classifications of macrobiotics are to become socially and universally relevant then it must embrace objective science and medicine as its complement instead of rejecting it as an antagonist. The subjective experiences of macrobiotic individuals are not socially relevant without the objective corroboration of scientific study and research. In other words, macrobiotics needs to return to a complementary instead of antagonistic relationship to science and medicine as it originally once was.

Other social divisions that do persist have less to do with macrobiotics but more with the anti-establishment sentiment that began as a reaction to the traumatic events of the 1960s and have been revitalized over the years with the events of 9/11, the Gulf War, global warming, and now the COVID-19 pandemic. Distrust in government, big business, and the mass media, and now the medical establish-

ment remains a thread among those in macrobiotics who continue to remain antagonistic to science and medicine despite all the above shifts in the culture of medicine and macrobiotics.

To bridge this divide it will be helpful to better understand how macrobiotic philosophy is not only complementary to medicine and science but can bridge and transcend all divides.

TRANSCENDING DUALITIES: MACROBIOTICS AS COMPLEMENTARY TO SCIENCE

To have influenced the world with so many great insights from the rise

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of organic industry to the acceptance and spread of traditional and alternative healing practices and to greater awareness and adoption of a whole-food plant-based diet for better health, the work of Ohsawa and Michio have clearly made its mark on the world through its many uncanny pioneering insights.

But where did these insights come from? They were not conceived and born from the results of scientific empirical evidence. Indeed, the opposite is true—they helped to inspire and guide future scientific research and discoveries. The idea to choose to eat, for example, brown rice over white rice was not originally based on any scientific finding. Medical and nutri-

tional science revealed the benefits of fiber in one’s diet many years after it was a common staple in macrobiotic circles. The idea for organic agriculture was originally not based on any scientific study but was a philosophical conclusion, as was the idea to eat whole, natural, and local foods in season. In other words, it was the philosophy that provided these insights, which then inspired scientific study, which then confirmed (or disproved) their validity.

Ohsawa called this philosophy “the dialectical conception of the universe” otherwise known as the “order of the universe.” He combined ancient Eastern and Western philosophies into a new yin-yang dialectic known as the “unifying principle,” which he then used to reinterpret all areas of academia and science including medicine and macrobiotics, which then served as the basis for all his teachings and insights.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

But what is dialectics? Dialectics originated in Ancient Greece as a method of discussion and debate to strive at finding the truth otherwise known as the Socratic Method. It was later revived by German philosopher, Hegel, who applied it to natural phenomena. Ohsawa likened the dialectical ideas of antagonistic yet complementary opposites to the ancient Chinese philosophy of yin and yang which then served as the basis of his macrobiotic teachings. The result became a complex yin-yang cosmology that few people understand fully.

A simpler way to understand dialectics in comparison to science is this: If science is the answer then dialectics is the question. Dialectics is the domain of questions and science is the domain of answers. The two have a necessary complementary relationship with each other. Questions inform and

lead us to answers and answers inform and lead us to more questions. While most are enamored by answers, few remember the questions that inform and define the answers we seek. Questions unleash the creative and imaginative mind while answers ground us in reality. When we stop seeking answers to our questions and stop asking questions about our answers then we no longer grow and develop. We need to continue to do both to continue to grow and evolve. Science is the seeking of answers, dialectics is the seeking of questions and they are necessary to and for each other.

The greatest thinkers, inventors, and scientists never lost sight of the value of repeatedly asking questions about the universe as we all did as children. Without the imagination and application of dialectical thought, Da Vinci could not have come upon his insights and inventions, Einstein could not have discovered that $E=mc^2$, Darwin could not have imagined the existence of animals he never encountered, and the genome, computer, and all breakthroughs in all areas of science and innovation could not have been made.

Ohsawa revered the inquisitive mind and called it “le grand appetit” and taught that preserving and developing one’s physical and intellectual appetite was key to a healthy and happy life. He called his centers “Maison Ignoramus” to honor our ignorance as the source of our questioning. He promoted the motto of “non credo,” not to be doubtful of others but to remind us to never stop asking questions.

The macrobiotic yin-yang dialectic is simply a more orderly way of asking questions. In this way, the insights of Ohsawa and Michio are not foregone conclusions but are inquiries to be explored and answered by scientific research, if possible. Indeed, all of macrobotics is not a solution but

a grand exploration and hypothesis conducted by those who find value in it. We have no solutions but instead offer insights into questions to be asked, topics to explore, and patterns and relationships we experience to better understand. Macrobotics is not a conclusion but is the start of a journey of discovery. The application of science is to validate those discoveries inspired by our imagination and inquiring minds.

Science also does not offer final solutions that are set in stone but ones that allows us to question further and objectively explore our collective subjective experiences. Between the dialectics of asking questions and subjective

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experiences of macrobotics to the unbiased objective research of science we can and will continue to develop ourselves as a species.

QUESTIONING THE PANDEMIC, USING SCIENCE TO FIND ANSWERS

Applying the macrobiotic yin-yang dialectic means asking relevant questions of the topic at hand which, in this case, is the pandemic. The following is a comprehensive list of questions inspired by the facts and science of the pandemic.

1. What is a pandemic? How do they arise and how do they end?
2. What were the conditions that caused pandemics to spread?
3. What were the conditions that cause pandemics to end?

4. What are infectious diseases? Are they really infectious or not?
5. What are bacteria, viruses and other microbes and parasites that cause infectious diseases?
6. What are vaccines? How did they arise? Do they work?
7. What is Germ Theory and what is Terrain Theory? Are they in opposition of each other or do they complement each other?
8. Can diet and lifestyle prevent infectious diseases? Is there a difference between bacterial infections and viral infections and how to treat them?
9. What specifically are viruses and how do they differ from each other? How do we know that the SARS-CoV-2 comes from bats? Why bats?
10. Are there plant viruses? If so, why don’t they infect us? Or do they?
11. What is COVID-19? How lethal is it?
12. Is it the virus that is the cause of COVID-19 or is it the body’s response to it that causes COVID-19?
13. Is COVID-19 preventable? Are any viral diseases preventable?
14. What are the treatments for COVID-19 and do they work?
15. What are the vaccines for the SARS-CoV-2 virus, and do they work?
16. How do these vaccines differ from previous vaccines?
17. What is mRNA technology? Is it harmful?
18. Is Genetic Engineering a threat to humans?
19. What can people do to minimize risk and death during a pandemic?
20. Are viral pandemics natural and inevitable? Are they part of the natural evolutionary course of humans? Can we predict pandemics?

These are just some of the many questions to explore and many have been asked already by others. Some have already been answered through the work of many scientists. Their answers give rise to many more questions. Some questions have yet to be answered. This is the dynamic and

ongoing search for an order of the universe through the combined application of dialectics and science. Intuition and imagination alone cannot solve this and neither can unquestioned scientific results alone. They must work together as they have always done in the minds of great thinkers.

What is clear is that the pandemic has given us an opportunity to ask questions and to appreciate the rigorous investigations of scientific research to answer as many of these questions as possible. The answers will, in turn, lead to more questions leading to more studies and so on as we continuously strive to better understand ourselves and our universe. The greatest problem and threat to humanity is not the pandemic itself but is when we stop questioning our answers and stop answering our questions. Divisions arise. Distrust and fear set in and we lose the ability to embrace each other. We must not stop asking questions and we must not stop seeking answers. We are all in this together and we must all work together in this effort. This is how we can and will bridge this great divide of pandemic of 2020. Let us make use of and fully enjoy “le grand appetit”—our lives.

ADDENDUM: EXPLORATIONS OF POSSIBILITIES

Below are possibilities to explore based on preliminary reading done on the subject of this pandemic. They are not foregone conclusions but possibilities to consider.

1. Viruses may be both a precursor and end product of life. They are much more abundant than all life forms combined. They are necessary for the evolution of life. The majority of viruses do not cause negative reactions in humans, otherwise known as infectious viral diseases. Only a very select few do.

2. Viruses can be differentiated by the genetic content. Some mutate rapidly in their host, like RNA viruses, while others do not like double stranded DNA viruses. Some respond well to vaccines, others don't, depending on their genetic content.
3. The origins of vaccines can be traced back to ancient China and India, the Middle East and later in Europe. (See: https://www.historyofvaccines.org/timeline#EVT_1) The idea uses a macrobiotic principle that views disease not as an enemy but as a useful ally to repel itself.
4. Viruses are not “alive,” Bacteria are alive. Bacteria are subject to the body's “terrain.” Viruses are not subject to the body's terrain but the response to the virus is. Bacterial infections can be treated either with antibiotics or with a change in the microbiome through diet. Viral infections cannot be prevented (except through changes in behavior) but the body's response to them, including risk of death, can be reduced through vaccines and through better diet and lifestyle.
5. Plenty is still unknown about viruses and bacteria including how they interact with each other, with fungi, with the human microbiome, with excesses in the body and so on.
6. The quality of one's blood is essential in dealing with viral infections. Red blood cells do not have nuclei and therefore no genetic material and cannot be infected. The quality of one's blood plays an essential role in the discharging of all excesses including all viral material.
7. Viruses, being products of life forms are geographic dependent and make up the larger differences of viromes of different continents. Infections happen at the intersection of humans being introduced to new viromes from different sources. Pandemics happen at the intersection of new viromes from different geographies. Pandemics are the product of human exploration and globalization, especially during warfare.

8. The present pandemic is made worse by the universal spread of poor diets of refined sugar and grain products and mass-produced animal products
9. Biomes and viromes that were dormant in polar regions will become active with global warming and may or may not lead to new pandemics.
10. Maintaining a healthy whole-food plant-based diet reduces risk of death at all times including during a pandemic.

Third son of Michio and Aveline Kushi, Phiya Kushi worked closely helping his parents in various capacities including at Erewhon Natural Foods, as General Manager of the East West Foundation, and twice as Director of the Kushi Institute. He developed and organized many programs and conferences that helped spread macrobiotics across the country and the world. In 2002, he presented the Kushi Institute's Macrobiotic Best Case Cancer Studies (initiated by Haruo Kushi) to the National Cancer Institute which was positively received. Since 2010 he retreated from macrobiotic educational activities opting, instead, for a simpler life with occasionally traveling to give presentations when invited to do so. In the past two years, seeing how the pandemic has created widespread confusion, division, misinformation, and fear in the world, Phiya has become interested in bringing together and harmonizing opposing views and opinions toward creating a unified macrobiotic science-based effort that transcends all differences for the future benefit and development of humanity.

