

Basic Study Course

Class 7

Understanding Natural Agriculture

Please write your name: _____

1. Meishusama's Teachings on Natural Agriculture

fundamental The principle of Natural Agriculture is an overriding respect and concern for nature. Nature teaches us everything. All of the manifestations of nature are created and formed from the three basic elements: fire, water, and earth, which, respectively, correspond to the spirits of the sun, the moon, and the earth. . . . If they get enough sunlight, if their water supply is adequate, and if the soil they grow in is pure, there will be enough crops to satisfy the needs of humanity, and even a surplus. See how the soil is covered in a deep rich blanket of withered grasses and dead leaves as autumn deepens into winter every year. This blanket is there to make the soil fertile, and this is what we should make the natural compost from. You may think that natural compost supplies nutrition to crops, but this is by no means the case. The essential effect of natural compost is to keep the soil moist, to warm it and keep it from becoming compacted. Thus the soil absorbs heat and water, and does not become hard. . . . If you want to increase crop yield, you must strengthen the soil itself as much as possible. To do this, you must avoid mixing anything impure into the soil; you must use only natural compost. That is, you must purify the soil as much as possible, and this will be enough to ensure wonderfully good results. — *Natural Agriculture Revolution. Essential Teachings of Meishusama*

What is Natural Agriculture?

- General Description

Natural Agriculture is an approach to agriculture in which the natural capacity and wisdom of nature are respected. It is more than a system of food production and gathering – it is a way of life. Natural Agriculture eschews the use of all chemicals, fertilizers, pesticides and other additives. This approach was developed in Japan in the 1930s by Mokichi Okada, the founder of Shumei. Today, it is practiced around the world by thousands of participants in the Shumei Natural Agriculture movement.

— *Shumei's Guideline for Practicing Natural Agriculture (North American version 1)*

- Spiritual Basis

Spirituality is at the heart of Natural Agriculture. According to Meishusama, there are three spiritual elements that underlie all of existence, the spirits of fire, water, and earth. The spirit of fire is a luminous,

immaterial dimension, the spirit of water is a semi-material dimension, and the spirit of earth is the material dimension. — *Shumei's Guideline for Practicing Natural Agriculture (North American version 2)*

Underlying the practice of Natural Agriculture is the perception that Spirit pervades all things. Everything in nature has both physical and spiritual elements, or matter and consciousness. Plants, soil, and insects are all innately aware and are capable of responding to the thoughts, feelings, and actions of humans. Natural Agriculture encourages an attitude of reverence toward the soil, vegetation, and the surrounding environment. As a caring person will refrain from hurting others, so too will Natural Agriculture farmers avoid damaging the soil, water, air, and crops. The more love and respect farmers have toward the natural world, the more nature responds with good harvests. This reverent attitude nourishes the spiritual essence within crops, thereby producing food that is exceptionally nutritious and delicious.

— *Shumei's Guideline for Practicing Natural Agriculture (North American version 2)*

- **Advantages of Natural Agriculture**

Some of the great advantages to farming according to Natural Agriculture are that it: 1) produces high-quality food, 2) conserves the natural environment, and 3) reduces labor and costs. These results depend upon the soil becoming sufficiently purified and the seeds successfully adapted to the local environment. To accomplish this, the farmer must develop a close and respectful relationship with nature. Over time, as the condition of the soil and plants continue to improve, farming should become easier and more rewarding. — *Shumei's Guideline for Practicing Natural Agriculture (North American version 2)*

- **Three Important Factors**

Shumei Natural Agriculture does not stress specific farming techniques, but rather focuses on the ability to understand and work with the individual conditions of a particular locality. The farmer is guided to understand the farming method that would work best in a particular soil and climate, taking into consideration a vast array of conditions.

The health of the soil and seeds are two essential ingredients for healthy crops. The third essential factor is the attitude of the grower. A positive, caring attitude will yield positive results. A skeptical or indifferent attitude will lead to difficulties. Thus, these three factors are the basic conditions of Shumei Natural Agriculture:

- **Pure Soil** (without fertilizers, manure, or agricultural chemicals)

Soil is composed of two elements: spiritual and physical. The physical element is the substance we perceive with our senses as soil. Although the spiritual element of the soil is invisible, it is the essence of the soil. — *Natural Agriculture Teachings of Meishusama* (Eiko Vol. 141 – January 30, 1952)

- **Pure Seed** (harvested and saved from Natural Agriculture crops)

As the amount of *hidoku* (fertilizer poison) accumulated both in seeds and soil decreases, the soil begins to return to its full potential. — *Natural Agriculture Teachings of Meishusama* (Paradise on Earth Vol.1 – December 1, 1948)

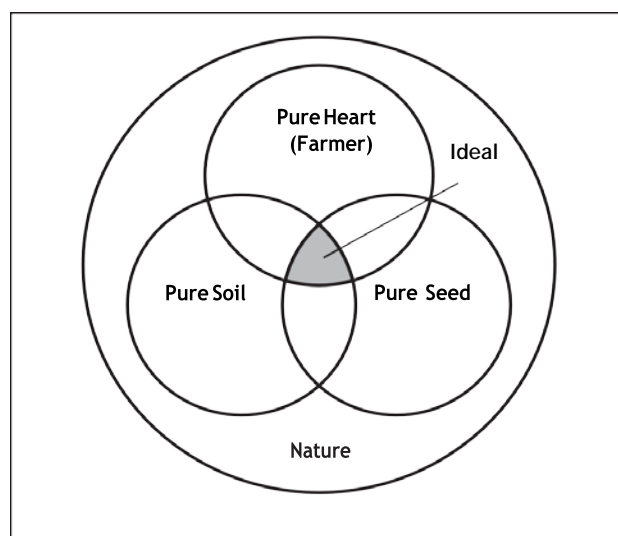
- **Pure Heart** (a grateful and caring attitude toward the soil and crops)

Respect and love toward the soil helps it draw fully to its potential in yielding crops. The key is to keep the soil free from contamination and to purify it. In response to such respect and care, the soil, with a sense of gratitude, will rejuvenate and revitalize itself. — *Natural Agriculture Teachings of Meishusama* (Eiko Vol. 245 – January 27, 1954)

The blend of these elements (pure soil, pure seed, and pure heart), with the addition of sunlight and clean water, generates the power to grow the highest quality crops.

— *Shumei's Guideline for Practicing Natural Agriculture* (North American version 1)

Three Essentials of Natural Agriculture



- **Saving Seeds**

According to Natural Agriculture, home-grown seeds from Natural Agriculture crops are the best seeds to use for the following year's crop. Each year the ability to harvest seeds will improve, as will the purity and the adaptability of the seed to the local environment. The second-year seed will be better than the first-year seed, and each succeeding year will continue to become even better.

— *Shumei's Guideline for Practicing Natural Agriculture (North American version 1)*

- **Continuous Cropping**

In the practice of Natural Agriculture, it is best to continuously grow one crop in the same field. Once the soil becomes free from fertilizers, it can fully exhibit its inherent capability to make it suitable to the crop being grown in it. With a single crop, the soil will exhibit its greatest vitality exclusively targeting that crop's needs. However, if another crop is planted on the same spot, the soil has to start over from the beginning, once again working to adjust itself to become suitable to the new plant. This will bring unsuccessful outcomes both to the original and new crops. I hope this explanation is clear enough for you.

— *Natural Agriculture Teachings of Meishusama*

Consciousness and intelligence permeate nature. Plants have the ability to sense conditions in the environment and adapt to them. Likewise, soil can perceive the plant roots growing within it and create a supportive environment for them. Plants support bacteria, mycelium fungi, yeast, and earthworms within the soil by providing sugars for them to feed on and by holding moisture in the ground. Soil that has been adequately nurtured can provide the correct density, minerals, and microorganisms that the plants need. The more soil, seeds and plants interact, the more they get to know each other. Life is about relationships, and because all of nature is conscious, intelligent and sensitive, these relationships will flourish if given favorable conditions to do so.

However, rotating crops disrupts relationships and interferes with the mutual adaptability of seeds, plants and soil. Multiple cropping sacrifices long-term success for short-term advantage. Farmers may think they need to rotate crops to prevent the soil from becoming deficient of certain nutrients caused by single cropping. They also may want to grow different kinds of crops at different times of the year in the same location in order to maximize output, especially in temperate or tropical climates that allow for year round growing seasons. Although this might benefit the farmer at the beginning, over time it creates weak

plants that cannot easily survive floods and droughts. The food is not as tasty and nutritious as food grown the Natural Agriculture way. Plants, seeds and soil need time to learn from and adapt to each other. The farmer needs to respect the intelligence of nature if he or she wishes to be successful.

— *An Offering of Light* (3rd edition)

2. What is Health?

When we discuss health, the first thing we should understand is that the essence of health is to follow and respect the ways of Nature. We must ask ourselves for what purpose God, the Creator of all things, made humans. His purpose, according to my understanding, is that humans should create an ideal world of absolute truth, virtue, and beauty.

— *The Truth about Health. Essential Teachings of Meishusama*

A famous American philosopher in the 19th century, Ralph Waldo Emerson, once said, “The first wealth is health.” The idea expressed in this short and simple sentence has been universally accepted since the beginning of human civilizations. In ancient Greece, Hippocrates, the one who is often referred to as the “Father of Western Medicine,” stated, “A wise man should consider that health is the greatest of human blessings, and learn how by his own thoughts to derive benefit from his illnesses.” And Meishusama developed a deep insight into health through his own suffering from various diseases. Born as a sickly child, attaining good health was always a serious and real issue for young Meishusama. And it was his long-term experience of suffering that motivated him to pursue an effective healing method.

Health is one of the biggest concerns for people in our modern day world. A great number of books on this subject are printed every year. Some focus on food and diet, others on herbs, exercise, sleep, or preventing aging. And in recent decades holistic approaches have gained in popularity. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines health as “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.”

Healthcare is also how many make their living, especially in the United States, which has the largest healthcare services market in the world. “In 2010, the healthcare services industry accounted for

approximately \$1.75 trillion in revenues and employed more than 14 million people, or nine percent of the U.S. workforce. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that growth in the industry will yield 3.2 million new jobs between 2008 and 2018. Jobs in home healthcare services and diagnostic laboratories are expected to grow at the fastest pace – up to 40 percent during the next 10 years.” (Question: People are becoming healthier?) It is ironic that despite of the great advancements in science in recent years, healthcare service is becoming more and more prevalent (and also expensive). However, many people are now beginning to think more about their lifestyle and paying more attention to what they eat. Below is how Meishusama understood food and diet.

- **The Spiritual Energy of Food**

Nutrition science today is arguing about the efficacy of vitamins and one’s necessary caloric intake, but these are, in fact, not important issues. The most essential nutrition is the spiritual energy of food itself. Since the spiritual energy of food cannot be measured in test tubes, researchers, who simply rely on the current progress of science, cannot recognize its existence no matter how hard they study. Calories, vitamins, proteins, carbohydrates, and so on are just like the dregs left behind when the spiritual energy has been removed. — *Transcription of Lecture on Japanese Art of Medicine (1935)*

The life force that is emitted by all food is the essential source of nutrition.

— True Nutritional Science (1936)

Meishusama, through his highly developed psychic perception, was able to classify a wide range of spiritual energies that underpin our physical world. He used symbolic language to describe the nature and quality of these unseen energies. In particular, he claimed that all creation is generated by and composed of three great elements: fire, water, and earth. Physical matter is but the outer manifestation of these energies. The complex and balanced interaction between these three invisible elements infuses the life force into all creation. In other words, when the two spirits of fire and water intermingle with the spirit of earth, physical matter is imbued with life-energy.

Life is a mystery that science cannot entirely explain. It is beyond the reach of microscopes, telescopes, test tubes, and measurement. Yet life’s reality is undeniable. Life’s energy is responsible for all plant and

animal growth and therefore all food production. Our food supply is entirely dependent on life's vital forces. The physical components of food are also perfect amalgamations, in varying proportions, of the three spiritual elements of fire, water, and earth. Thus, apples, bananas, carrots, and rice each have a unique energy. — *A Guide to Diet and Health – According to Meishusama*

- **Locally Grown Food**

Foods produced by nature are best for sustaining human life. Though different from region to region, foods in each local are consistently suitable for the people native to that climate. Therefore, we are better off trying to live in accord with nature and eating what is harvested in our own regional environment. — *Man is born to be healthy. Essential Teachings of Meishusama*

Locally produced food tends to be fresher than food shipped from distant locations and thus people gain more energy when eating local fare. Moreover, locally produced foods are more nutritious because nature makes them best suited for the constitutions of the people living in those regions and climates; and being fresher, such foods tend to be better tasting.

- **Seasonal Food**

Seasonal bounties such as vegetables, fish, or any other that are naturally available in a particular season should be consumed more than those that are less abundant in that season.

— *Principles and Methods of Diet (1936)*

From one season to another, depending on our individual health conditions or needs, our diet should be in harmony with the yin-yang principle. For example, yin foods harvested during the yang season of the summer, such as beans, eggplant, tomatoes, and melons, are much more suitable to eat than those that can only be grown in yin season. In contrast, during the winter season when the energy is yin, people require more yang foods such as carrots, yams, radishes, and other edible roots.

- **Food and Nutrition**

Nutritional science is widely regarded these days as a practice that merits unquestioning belief. But, in fact, it is no more than a huge fallacy. Despite the fact that this mistaken nutritional science has brought much damage, but no benefit, during its existence, it has been practiced as if it were one of the most advanced aspects of our culture. The huge monetary expense and effort it has cost are, even by generous interpretation, a waste. . . . All the nutrition necessary for us to sustain our lives is contained in the food that we eat. There is an almost infinite variety of foods, and each includes reserves of nourishment for humanity. The amount a person wants to eat, and what kind of thing he or she feels like eating, will, of course, vary according to the occasion, as well as the needs of the body. . . . What makes the process of producing nutritional elements from all foods possible is the life-force inherent to all humans. In short, life is an active process of transforming imperfect matter into perfect matter. . . . By this principle, if you take nutritional supplements, which are at high levels of concentration, the internal organs that produce nutrition are no longer needed and naturally become sluggish. When the nutrition-producing organs atrophy, the other organs, which are all intimately linked with them, also decline, and the body steadily becomes weaker.

— *The Comedy of Nutrition. Essential Teachings of Meishusama*

“Little data, if any, shows that ingesting more vitamins or antioxidants benefits health or changes the effects of free radicals in the body. I am not aware of any clinical trial demonstrating a general health benefit to taking supplemental vitamins and have in fact come across some disturbing negative effects found in some studies. But I’ve found that studies tend to conflict so much with one another to be meaningless. I believe that this harkens back to the original premise of the book: The Body is a Complex System.” (*The End of Illness* by David B. Agus, MD)

“The assumption of nutritionism—such as the idea that a food is not a system but rather the sum of its nutrient parts—pose another set of problems. . . . The problem starts with the nutrient. Most nutritional science involves studying one nutrient at a time, a seemingly unavoidable approach that even nutritionists who do it will tell you is deeply flawed. ‘The problem with nutrient-by-nutrient nutrition science,’ points

out Marion Nestle, a New York University nutritionist, ‘is that it takes nutrients out of the context of the food, the food out of the context of the diet, and the diet out of the context of the lifestyle.’” (*In Defense of Food* by Michal Pollan)

4. Group Discussion

- What is the main principle of Natural Agriculture?
- What are the three purposes for covering the soil with compost, or mulch?
- What are the three essential factors of Natural Agriculture?
- What kind of experience have you had with Natural Agriculture?
- What do you think constitutes a healthy lifestyle?

5. Assignment (Essay writing) for Online Course participants

Please write a short (one page-length) essay on the following questions:

Q1: Have you experienced any health benefits from eating Natural Agriculture food? If you have, please share it. Or if you haven't experienced yet, please consume any Natural Agriculture product (vegetables, tea, etc) consecutively at least a week, and share your experience.

Q2: What are the three essential factors of Natural Agriculture?