

# Learning from the East: the Cycles of Life

by Vicki Martin

*Although I chose not to complete a full professional training in traditional acupuncture, I have continued to study Chinese medicine, together with the related areas of Taoism and the internal martial arts. I often find myself making useful parallels with biodynamic theory. This article is part one of a two part exploration of these interconnections.*

Acupuncture is often seen as a means of pain relief, or at best a way of treating specific medical complaints. However, it is much more than this, being at heart a complete system of health care. Especially when taken in the context of its Taoist roots, Chinese medicine offers an understanding not only of the body but also of life itself. You could even say that it proposes a model of how to live.

Traditionally, it dealt with the maintenance of health rather than the treatment of disease – so much so that, in ancient China, patients only paid the doctor when they were healthy; if they fell ill, the doctor was obliged to treat them free of charge (1). A passage in the Huang Di Nei Jing (Yellow Emperor's Classic of Internal Medicine), compiled somewhere between 200BC and AD800 (2), compares the initiation of medicinal therapy only after someone has fallen ill to digging a well after one is already weak from thirst, or forging a spear after the battle is already underway. It poses the question: is this not too late? (3).

If only we had such powerful and historic statements to fall back on in our own marketing! Yet both therapies are based around cyclical movements of energy which in health provide the force which motivates our behaviour and sustains our bodily functions and when disrupted cause disease. So, what can we usefully learn from the East?

## Working with energy

Let's look at some of the more obvious similarities, at the same time providing a very basic introduction to acupuncture. Please note

that I am specifically describing traditional acupuncture as opposed to the westernised form offered by some GPs, physiotherapists and other medical professionals.

Simply stated, acupuncture aims to balance Qi energy (pronounced chee and sometimes spelt Ch'i). This is achieved by the insertion of sterile needles into several carefully selected points chosen from the 365 located on the meridians or channels in which Qi flows (3).

As an energy medicine, acupuncture shares with biodynamic therapies the common ground of working with a client in the here and now – since this is the only way to work with energy, by its very nature. Historical information is important as a guide, but it is only the patterns found on the day, in the moment, which form the basis for the treatment given.

Acupuncturists are forced to work with energy in a more precise and definable way than biodynamic massage therapists because they have to choose specific points to use. A diagnosis is made after talking with the patient and examining their behaviour, as well as more specific signs such as the appearance of the tongue and the qualities of the twelve pulses on the wrists – but the form of this diagnosis and the points used will vary depending on the style of acupuncture practised. The response to treatment can be monitored after needle insertion by reviewing the pulses and observing the patient, much as a biodynamic massage therapist adjusts his or her approach according to the feel of the moment and the client's responses.

In Chinese medicine, an organ, its meridian and all associated tissues and aspects of function are collectively known as an Official, although sometimes the word Charge is preferred. These terms describe a particular title and its role within government, which is exactly how the coordinated functioning of the body is portrayed in the wonderfully titled 'Secret Treatise of the Spiritual Orchid' (chapter 8 of the Su Wen, part of the previously mentioned Nei Jing) (4). The different understanding of the body is frequently distinguished by use of capitalisation to denote (for example) the Heart Official as opposed to the physical heart organ.

## Yin and Yang

In the UK, two major styles of traditional acupuncture are found. The style referred to (perhaps a little confusingly) as Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) focuses on the relative balance of Yin and Yang energies in the body.

Some argue convincingly for the existence of exclusively Yin and Yang Qi; Kosta Danaos's extraordinary experiences with a master of Nei Kung (an internal martial art which uses various meditative exercises to develop inner power) leads him to propose that Yang Qi is the bioenergy which fascinated Reich (5).

The usual viewpoint, however, is that Yin and Yang are opposite stages of a cycle or states of aggregation and therefore indicate relative stages or states rather than absolutes. Yin and Yang are thus interdependent (Yin depends on Yang, and Yang on Yin), they mutually consume one another (a weakness of Yin indicates

a relative excess of Yang and vice versa) and they inter-transform (when one reaches a maximum it will naturally swing back towards the other, the point at which this occurs being dependent on appropriate conditions and timing) (6). These relationships are all contained within the familiar Yin/Yang symbol (right).



The original appearance of Yin and Yang in Chinese literature describes the sunny and shady side of a hill or mountain:

|             |             |
|-------------|-------------|
| <i>Yang</i> | <i>Yin</i>  |
| Light       | Dark        |
| Activity    | Rest        |
| Hot         | Cold        |
| Dry         | Damp        |
| Expansion   | Contraction |
| Upward      | Downward    |
| Outward     | Inward      |

Just as the sun moves across the sky so that the sunny or shady parts of the hill are not static during the course of the day, the concepts of Yin and Yang can readily be applied to the seasons – a cycle very similar to that of the vasomotoric cycle (*see figures below*) and giving a connection with the biodynamic technique of polarisation. Note that the application of Yin and Yang to represent female and male came into use only rather later in Chinese texts (7).

In Yin/Yang style acupuncture (an alternative title for TCM) imbalances are seen to result from lifestyle, diet, emotions, climatic extremes and other influences – yet the important issue is just that the imbalances are there (e.g. Heart Yin Deficiency, Wind-Cold Invading the Lung, Liver Yang Rising). You don't need to prove how the problem came about –

what sequence of events took place, when the person was exposed to Heat, whether they were affected by anger or grief – in order to treat it (although lifestyle changes can be an important part of treatment). This is illustrated nicely by the title of a popular book on acupuncture, 'The Web That Has No Weaver' (8). The practitioner obtains what information he needs from the patient (from the pulses, the tongue etc.) and he does his work to rebalance the Qi. Once the pattern (the glitch in the web) has gone, it matters not who or what the cause (the weaver) was.

Some of the drive behind my continued exploration of Chinese medicine has been the desire to find justification for just doing bodywork, rather than perhaps attempting to push biodynamic massage therapy into something akin to a poor relation of psychotherapy. TCM would seem to back the idea that actively exploring a client's emotional process is not always necessary. I have written before about my dilemmas regarding the talking part of my practice, but also of my quest to more confidently work with energy (9). The most effective guide to improving my sensitivity has turned out to be the natural world on which much of Chinese medicine is based. Taking the opportunity to connect with the energy of different trees, the seasons, the weather etc. has brought a notable increase in my ability to 'sense' clients.

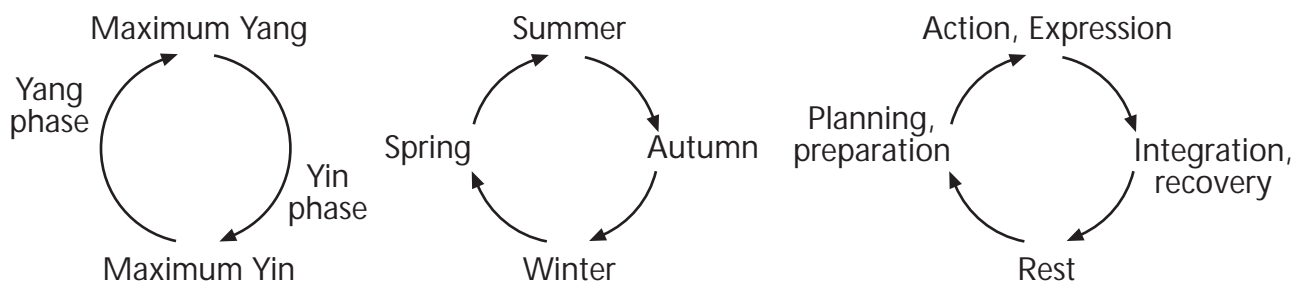
### The Five Elements

This style of acupuncture, the other main one found in the UK, provides the structure for my description of Chinese medicine's view of the body because I feel that the Five Elements offer insights into unique flavours within different stages of the vaso-

motoric cycle. A key feature is that diagnosis is partly based on a client's patterns of emotional expression; Five Element acupuncture is often described as being based on emotions as the cause of disease.

The four seasons are related to the four directions in Chinese philosophy, four regions of land (North, South, East and West, South conventionally being placed at the top of Chinese maps). This represents the distribution of life – how it is divided up – yet it does not convey its organisation in the sense of its movement. For that we need a central axis, or a person in the middle of these four regions. Then we have five (the number appropriate to the organisation of life in Chinese numerology) and the means for movement, for life to take place. However, if these five truly make up the organisation of life they must also be in an equal relationship; five in a circle, rather than a kind of 4+1 pattern. This means that there has to be two equally valid arrangements (10). The way these are related back to the changing seasons is through the addition of an extra season, late summer (*see figures overleaf, left and centre*), although some also interpret the fifth 'season' as being the last 18 days of each of the seasons of spring, summer, autumn and winter (6) i.e. as a time of transition.

*While through Yin Yang one can discern rising and falling, day and night, movement and rest, through the Five Elements one can distinguish emergence, unfolding, regulated return, burial to preserve deep forces, and the centring responsible for co-existence, permutation, exchange and fruition. (11)*



|                      | Wood                                  | Fire  | Earth                              | Metal                     | Water                                    |
|----------------------|---------------------------------------|---|------------------------------------|---------------------------|--|
| <b>Season</b>        | Spring                                | Summer  | Late Summer                        | Autumn                    | Winter                                   |
| <b>Climate</b>       | Wind                                  | Heat  | Damp/humid                         | Dry                       | Cold                                     |
| <b>Colour</b>        | Green                                 | Red   | Yellow                             | White                     | Black/blue                               |
| <b>Odour</b>         | Rancid                                | Scorched  | Fragrant                           | Rotten                    | Putrid                                   |
| <b>Sound</b>         | Shouting                              | Laughing  | Singing                            | Weeping                   | Groaning                                 |
| <b>Emotion</b>       | Anger                                 | Joy   | Sympathy<br>Worry<br>Over-thinking | Grief                     | Fear                                     |
| <b>Virtue</b>        | Benevolence                           | Propriety   | Integrity                          | Righteousness             | Wisdom                                   |
| <b>Power</b>         | Birth                                 | Growth  | Harvest                            | Decrease                  | Storage                                  |
| <b>Yin organ</b>     | Liver                                 | Heart<br>Pericardium  | Spleen                             | Lung                      | Kidneys                                  |
| <b>Yang organ</b>    | Gall bladder                          | Small Intestine<br>Triple Burner                            | Stomach                            | Large Intestine           | Bladder                                  |
| <b>Other tissues</b> | Tendons<br>Ligaments<br>Eyes<br>Nails | Connective tissues<br>Blood vessels<br>Complexion<br>Tongue | Flesh<br>Fat<br>Mouth<br>Lips      | Skin<br>Body hair<br>Nose | Hair on head<br>Teeth<br>Bones<br>Marrow |

It is a mistake to see the Five Elements as building blocks. An alternative (and perhaps better) translation is the Five Phases. Just as the seasons are not totally discrete categories because they flow almost imperceptibly into one another, so are the Five Elements – yet there is also a sense of these five unique qualities which can be distinguished.

The Five Elements are Wood, Fire, Earth, Metal and Water. Everything in life is a manifestation of these five. They are naturally balanced by relationships known as the Sheng (generating) and Ke (controlling) cycles (*see figure bottom right*).

Just as Water is required to sustain the growth of Wood (which equates to all plant life and not just trees), just as Wood combusts to create Fire, just as Fire creates ashes (Earth), just as Earth conceals (creates) Metal ores and gold, just as Metal forms a surface on which Water appears as

condensation – so the Elements create each other (the Sheng cycle).

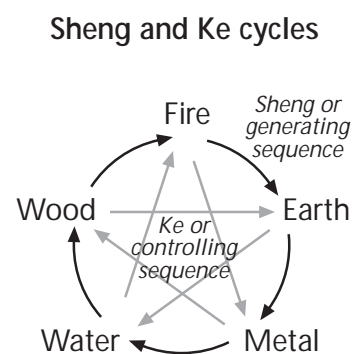
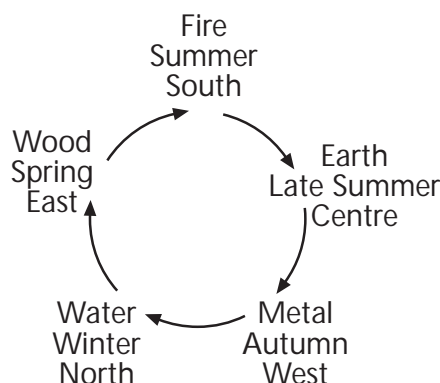
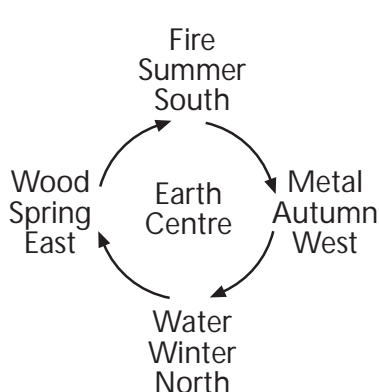
Just as Water puts out a Fire, just as Fire melts Metal, just as Metal cuts Wood, just as Wood holds together Earth (via roots and ground cover), just as Earth in the banks of rivers controls the flow of Water, or a more free draining Earth absorbs it – so the Elements control one another (the Ke cycle). This is not controlling in a destructive way but more in the sense of keeping one another in check in order to maintain overall balance.

### The Five Elements in the body

Each Element has what are often referred to as associations but are better described as resonances with body organs, tissue layers, emotions and a range of other characteristics (*see table*). These are not simply symbolic representations, the resonances are that Element, that energy, in a particular manifestation.

A Five Element acupuncturist sees a person as having one consistently weak Element which is at the root of all presenting complaints (possible since any Element can potentially affect the others through the Sheng and Ke cycles). This Element, known as one's CF (constitutional or causative factor) forms the basis for all treatment; CFs are held by most (but not all) practitioners to be kept for life. Emotions are an energy movement, so a person's pattern of emotional expression – which emotion is notably absent, over-emphasised or just doesn't flow very smoothly – is a very good way of determining CF (and as treatment progresses, these abnormal patterns of expression resolve). In practice, four indicators of CF are used in combination; colour (on particular areas of the face), odour, sound (the energetic characteristics of the voice) and emotion. A tentative diagnosis is confirmed by the response to treatment.

Although each Element is associated with a specific emotion rather than a stage of emotional expression or action, the resonances also include the description of a particular power which generally fits in well with the vasomotoric cycle. Having recently left the acupuncture training, I used to secretly amuse myself by trying to diagnose my CBPC training group's CFs. When we came to discuss where on the vasomotoric cycle we tended to have problems, it did indeed seem that my proposed CFs had good predictive value. Note that if a particular Official is Qi deficient, it may manifest as a weakness but conversely it may also show up as an inability to control its own power.



In ancient Chinese there is no character which denotes any particular equivalent of what we call time – the closest being ‘Shi’, the term used for the seasons (7). In talking of the seasons, we are therefore also considering the notion of timing – whether something is appropriate in that moment, whether the energy has built sufficiently to sustain forwards movement. This makes intuitive sense; whilst the upwards surge in energy prevalent during the spring is conducive to planning and preparation, it is not the case that this is the only time during which we become motivated to do new things and thus when plans may effectively be made.

I think biodynamic therapists will quickly have a rather better intuitive understanding of the flow of the Five Elements than perhaps some acupuncturists. Wood may precede Fire on the cycle but, as I know from bitter experience, the last thing one needs when in a rage following a recent injustice is the instruction that the purpose of anger (the emotion of Wood) is to be converted into joy (the emotion of Fire), as an acupuncturist once rather bluntly told me. Energy has to build naturally and flow into the next part of the cycle in its own rhythm. Meet the client’s energy, respond to it in the moment and then change will come; so often our heads just get in the way. Some books (12, 13) propose strategies for making use of the Sheng and Ke cycles in order to manage emotions, for example within family therapy (13), but I can find such suggestions rather too contrived.

The following descriptions of the body as seen by Chinese medicine are not exhaustive and are most certainly not intended to equip readers to be able to diagnose a person’s CF, but are provided in the hopes that they may provide sufficient information to stimulate interest and perhaps to give inspiration when working with clients. Whilst making use of the Five Elements for my structure, I have also drawn from references within TCM texts; whilst the two styles are

different, their understanding of the body is not entirely contradictory, as evidenced by the fact that many acupuncturists practice in an integrated way which draws equally from both styles.

### **Wood**

Wood is associated with spring, a time of birth for many living things which has an upwards and expanding energy. The emotion of Wood is anger. As with the experience of blowing our top or letting off steam, it is said that anger makes the Qi rise (14) (a common factor behind headaches). The Chinese character for anger is Nu. It is used at the start of the key Taoist text Chuang Tzu to describe the moment at which in the ocean of the north a great fish bursts through the water and transforms into a great bird which flies off into the south. This is the violence proper to all beginnings (15) and is a tale I have found useful to share with clients who see anger as bad; helping them to appreciate that the same energy movement underpins the ability to assert oneself and to produce transformative changes can be helpful. It also illustrates very nicely how the individual words used for the emotion of each Element are also intended to convey an understanding of a range of associated sentiments and drives, including those which appear in states of deficiency or excess; assertion, aggression, frustration, irritation, annoyance, rage, resentment, timidity, resignation and apathy are all associated with anger and with Wood.

A connection with planning is self-evident; a sprouting acorn contains within it the plan to grow into an oak tree. This requires a certain sense of vision, and the Yin Official of Wood, the Liver, is connected with the eyes; someone’s quality of eye contact also conveys a lot about their ability to assert themselves. The related capacity of decision making (since you need to decide what to do in order to plan for it, and planning itself involves decisions) falls to an obvious partner for the Liver, the

Gall Bladder.

The rising up of emotions generally (i.e. not just anger), so obviously appropriate to the relevant portion of a vasomotoric cycle, is perhaps harder to tally with the usual portrayals in Chinese medicine, but descriptions are there. JR Worsley, who brought the Five Element style to the West, points out that all emotions go through a Wood phase as they arise within us (16). Other authors highlight the tendency of Wood CFs to hold back emotions (17). Healthy Liver Qi is associated with an upwards and smoothly everywhere direction, and stagnation of Liver Qi with depression and/or mood swings (6) (different CFs will however manifest different flavours of depression). It strikes me that our lifting technique holds the potential to facilitate this upwards and smoothly everywhere movement (depending to some extent on the manner in which it is done and how the client receives it), and my CBPC notes indicate that lifting is indeed enjoyed by those with depression. Martial arts expert Bruce Frantzis describes the release of stagnant Qi as making your belly feel like something is filling it (18) which is certainly a sensation I’ve had as a biodynamic massage recipient.

Whether we are born with our CF or whether it develops as a result of upbringing is a debate I don’t want to get into (probably both play a part), however a recent Five Element textbook describes how formative events for a Wood CF may include the way in which restrictions are made on an infant’s attempts to explore (14), explaining this in a way very similar to the formation of armouring. The Liver’s connection with movement is via the tendons and ligaments or the muscular forces (19). This relates to muscular tension, and perhaps says more about preparation for movement than movement itself (4) (fitting nicely with the vasomotoric cycle) however shakes, tremors and other effects on one’s quality of movement can result if Liver Qi is



*ABOVE: There may be no bamboo native to Britain, but on Wicken Fen in Cambridgeshire, we do have sedge – which behaves very similarly.*

imbalanced. Wood CFs often have particularly tense musculature, especially in the neck and upper back (consistent with emotional suppression), which can also present as a generally compacted or squeezed body (14) perhaps reminiscent of the rigid character structure. Alternatively, Wood CFs can be markedly flaccid.

Each Element has what is known as a virtue, which manifests when it is balanced, and the virtue of Wood is benevolence which relates well to flexibility. The ideal is illustrated by the plant so often associated with China, bamboo, which shows strong upward growth while retaining good flexibility. Too stiff and the cane might snap in the wind, too little stiffness and it bends under its own weight and fails to reach its potential height.

## **Fire**

Summer is the time of flowering and of sunshine, the season when we tend to relax – to just be – and to do things which are an expression of our selves; socialising, holidays and sport/leisure activities. Warmth is associated with friendship and intimacy, and flames with passion and sexuality; the Fire Element is about relationships and communication, both with self and with other. Even our Western understanding of the body leads us to make obvious associations here with

the heart and with the emotion of joy. The association of heart problems with the type A personality (20) is a nice portrayal of the Sheng cycle in action, many characteristics of type A's being consistent with imbalanced Wood which affects the nourishment of Fire.

When things get heated there is a sense of emotional expression or action being present – there are no problems relating Fire to the top of the vasomotoric cycle. Fire moves rapidly and can quickly expand into an all-engulfing blaze; when Fire is imbalanced, events can soon escalate, giving some Fire CFs the tendency to wear their heart on their sleeves or to need to be constantly in relationship with others, at the heart of the action. The light of a flame can however flicker and fade; if our Fire goes out we withdraw and feel little impulse to communicate with the outside world.

How can joy, the emotion of Fire, possibly be damaging? Joy is said to loosen the Qi (14) – a description which I have to say lends itself well to the outcome of a good biodynamic massage! Loosening also conveys a sense of opening up. Imagine too much of this, such as after an extended bout of silliness, laughter and frivolity (one author describes giddiness and hysteria as damaging the Heart (18)); there is a sense that we can be too loose and that we may

perhaps lose our mind (which might be associated with anxiety, sweating and/or palpitations, all symptoms of imbalanced Heart Qi). The character for Heart, Xin (showing the heart and the beginnings of its communications with the rest of the body), can also be translated as mind; the Heart forms a void which is the residence of our spirits or Shen, giving us the capacity of consciousness. It is perhaps due to the need to both protect the Shen and to be able to relay messages to and from it that Fire is associated with four Officials rather than the usual two. These form a hierarchy.



The Heart is like the Emperor, who ideally influences the nation simply by being there. The virtue of Fire is propriety; the ability to perform ceremony, assuredly and effortlessly doing everything at the right time and in the right place ... it is all about being present in the here and now (21). These qualities also extend to the other Fire Officials, though in slightly different ways.

The Small Intestine is nicknamed 'the sorter' (22) for its function of separating the pure from the impure (as in Western physiology). However, as is the case throughout Chinese medicine, the same function applies psychologically; the sorter acts a bit like the Emperor's personal assistant. It is unlikely that you will get an audience with the Emperor but your business will instead go via his PA who will sort matters into those which need to be referred to him and those which can be more quickly and simply dealt with. This protects the Emperor's safety and serenity (21). People with imbalanced Small Intestine Qi cannot sort out what is relevant, which leads to a general state of muddle and confusion. A client commented to me after a particularly pleasing stream of peristalsis that she had found herself contemplating various options about which she had been confused, but that it now felt as if things were sorted and much clearer. Sorting of course has much relevance to what we call gut

feelings (23).

The third Fire Official is known by various names (4). It ensures the appropriacy of our social interactions; how outgoing we are, how much of ourselves we reveal, the expression of our sexuality – in effect, how open or closed we are to human contact. Worsley refers to it as Circulation Sex, but its protective function – like the guard to the Emperor’s residence who decides who gets let in – is better described by the titles Heart Protector or Pericardium. Imbalance here can lead to over-vulnerability and an inability to either let the outside in or the inside out; or to being too open, which risks the Emperor himself – and if he is disturbed then everything falls into disarray. The final name relates to a function as the active part of the Heart, the Heart Master – the pump for the circulatory system. The Shen is rooted by the Blood, special fluids which are marked by the colour of the Emperor (red) during their passage through the Heart and are circulated throughout the body. Not surprisingly, the status of our Fire manifests in our complexion – in how pink we are.

Lastly, an oddity; an Official with a function but no form, unique to Chinese medicine, the Triple Burner. This divides the torso into three portions – the Upper, Middle and Lower Burners – and is associated with temperature regulation via the distribution of heat, and the opening up of passages of irrigation i.e. the regulation of fluids (4). The Triple Burner is the guard at the outer frontier gate, the face we present to the outside world. An interesting speculation is that the Triple Burner might be represented by the fasciae (24) (and therefore also with the blood vessels which run within this layer). Connective tissue is of course key to biodynamic massage, as we experience through work with transudation and distension pressures; our understanding of this tissue is also similar to the Triple Burner. Connective tissue is reported to change its conductive properties

depending on the amount of fluid it contains; one major reason for the difference in efficacy between acupuncturists is proposed to be the skill with which they manipulate points before needling (24), a good advertisement for the benefits of attuned touch which makes an interesting correlation with biodynamic massage.

A person’s preferences for specific seasons reveal a lot. I am a Fire CF and summer is my least favourite season; the looseness and exuberance creates a fullness of vegetation which I experience as oppressive, the heat is stifling and the harsh brightness overwhelming – yet for another Fire CF the light and warmth brings a special clarity and in-the-here-and-now-ness which makes it his favourite season. My preferences parallel experiences of social vulnerability; a key question for Fire CFs is “is it safe?” (21). I don’t believe there are fixed relationships between CF and character structure, however Core Energetics therapist and Chinese medicine practitioner Amadis Cammell (who runs seasonal Five Element themed experiential workshops – see [www.coreconnection.net](http://www.coreconnection.net)) links Fire with the schizoid personality.

## Earth

Mother Earth revolves constantly yet remains firm under our feet, supporting us and effortlessly providing us with the means with which to sustain ourselves. In this sentence we have everything which encapsulates the Earth Element.

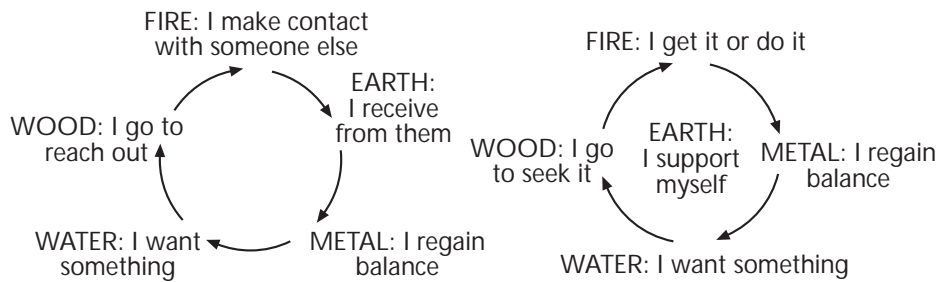
In Late Summer, energy turns around, moving inwards to the production of seeds and fruit which can add considerable mass to the plant; Earth resonates with our Stomach and Spleen which enable the rotting and ripening of food, and the transformation and transportation of energy around the body. The Spleen is said to control the muscles and the four limbs (6) through its effects on our ability to get energy out to the periphery. Poor Spleen Qi leaves us tired with weak, heavy limbs and cold extremities (the

heaviness being due to poor transportation of fluids), as well as poor appetite and problems throughout the whole digestive tract; I often think of the Spleen as to some extent ‘powering the rest of the gut.’

*The quality and function of the muscles and flesh depend on the Qi of the Earth Element. Poor muscle tissue will indicate a weakness of the Earth Element. Lumps and swelling under the skin indicate poor transformation and thus a weakness of Earth. The practitioner can feel the flesh for its smooth consistency in order to gauge the efficiency of the Stomach and Spleen’s transformation process ... The residue of Earth is fat and it is said to be a residue of flesh. (14)*

Of techniques focussing on the muscles, I would say that deep draining relates to Wood (and many of the possible adverse reactions to TCM Liver syndromes), and hypotonus work to Earth. The virtue of Earth is integrity, which speaks (amongst other things) of the connection between tissue layers – a consideration addressed by hypotonus work.

A distressed child naturally turns to his mother. Once satisfied, he moves on to other activities. What the mother provides might be attentive care (including physical holding and nutrition) or a thoughtful perspective, depending on his age and the particular circumstances. Sympathy, thought (over-thinking) and worry are considered to be the emotions associated with Earth. In their imbalanced state these can manifest as smothering (over-attentiveness, fussing too much), a tendency to reject or belittle others’ needs, a constant craving for sympathy and/or the rejection of sympathy (because it simply can’t be taken in). Worry is said to knot the Qi (14), something we feel physically in our stomach, yet which also describes an obsessive mental rotting and ripening, thoughts constantly churning



around and around like a cement mixer which goes nowhere. A knot implies too great a focus in one area, but healthy Spleen Qi enables us to concentrate appropriately on activities, thoughts or sensations; a weak Spleen is also responsible for the so-called 'cotton wool head' (18).

Mother Earth neither actively gives nor receives, she is just there, constantly available; it is up to plants to take what they need. We may not have roots tying us to her, but we do enjoy a constant attachment via gravity. Relaxing (into gravity), as is encouraged in tai chi and chi kung (internal martial arts), facilitates the flow of energy through the body (this is an effect at least partly mediated via reduced muscle tone, representing a release of the control of Earth by Wood). The internal martial arts also encourage the practitioner to maintain an awareness of the Dan Tien, an energy centre located a little way beneath the navel and the location of our centre of gravity. The belly is not only associated with the Earth Element (indeed the Dan Tien is particularly connected with the Kidneys and Water), however it does parallel the location of Earth in the centre, as the pivot that supports and enables rotation. This has much to do with the ability to have sympathy for, or acceptance of, our emotions (and indeed to calm and contain them, much as Earth controls Water in the Ke cycle), to be 'centred' and to use the transformative power of thought (rather than obsessing about things). This description also relates well to the role of a therapist! Both the Stomach and Spleen meridians run across the front of the belly and thighs, areas often weak in the oral structure.

The dependent child vs. the independent adult leads me to make a comparison of the two distrib-

utions of the Five Elements in what might be seen to be a rather good vs. bad fashion, but this is not my intention. Both are required for balance; in order to live within society we need to be able to both give to and receive from others as well as to stand on our own two feet. The diagram on this page shows two contrasting vasomotoric cycles which have many parallels with issues described by Kathrin Stauffer in a recent issue (25), and with the working through of transference in therapy. They also lead me to reflect on the highly polarised view of the media regarding the achievements of someone like Ellen McArthur, the round-the-world solo yachtswoman; are such acts overly self-centred and rejecting of society, or are they an inspiring and mature example of self-realisation and independence?

### Metal

Metal is hard to find, being hidden within the ground, and no easier to see (either in the context of understanding it or recognising it within a person) in the context of the Five Elements. What attracts us most to metallic objects is their shiny surface, as in jewellery and precious ornaments. However, this is also the material used to create sharp blades and other implements.

Autumn is the season of dryness, resulting from the movement of moisture from the air and its appearance on the ground as dew; Metal as a substance is a condensation of things within the earth. Autumn is the time of decline and death, when leaves shrivel and fall – yet when taken into the ground, the rotten vegetation replenishes the trace elements (mostly metals) which are required for healthy regeneration.

Metal is associated with grief (although the character, You, is sometimes translated as depression (18), worry or oppression (14)), said to make the Qi disappear – implying a withdrawal of the Qi leaving a void behind (14), which gives a feeling of emptiness, of loss. Grief, felt in the chest, can also inspire us to appreciate what is most precious in life, as does the sight of autumn foliage (or sunset, the equivalent time in the day) which can literally take our breath away – all hinting at a resonance with the Lung.

The virtue of Metal is righteousness, the ability to make and accept judgements about what is right or wrong, useless or useful, must die or will survive. In Chinese society, autumn is a time for balancing – for punishment, the cutting of cereal crops and the execution of criminals. In spring and summer there is scope for frivolity, but in autumn you have to be more careful because you need to concentrate your efforts in readiness for the hardness of winter. The vitality must not be scattered outside (26). In the body, this sense of balancing is represented by the Lung, the Large Intestine and the skin. Each of these involves a dividing layer such that inner and outer is kept separate yet precious things can be taken in and waste material ejected.

Metal CFs are notable for issues around letting go and quality; they may come across as cut off, precious and/or more actively rejecting, reminiscent of the hard, brittle nature of Metal. Their frequently pale skin (from Qi deficiency) can remind me of a surface from which life is withdrawing inwards, making them look particularly detached and inert. Their abilities to cut through to the key issues in a situation, and their strife for perfection, can nevertheless also make them truly inspirational people to be around – whatever their internal sense of self-worth may be.

As a biodynamic massage student I practised a range of techniques on a Metal CF and the one she felt the most rapport with was packing,

which acts at the level of the skin (I gather that the LSBP community call it palming). Her descriptions are still filled with the awe, wonder and respect with which we describe autumnal scenery or precious objects – she obviously hasn't let go of the experience! Our sessions also reminded me how the inner imagery and chosen vocabulary of clients is often reflective of their CF.

Worsley makes a strong association between Metal and our connection to God (16, 22). Certainly there is a connection through the Lung with air and therefore with Heaven (the Chinese are said to see the night sky as a huge metal colander, through the holes of which light shines as the stars (14)). However, the lack of self worth and sense of emptiness of imbalanced Metal can lead people to seek in many other ways – e.g. father figures, smart clothes, money, status and respect, or a constant movement from one thing to another in order to find that elusive and undefinable something that is missing (14). While Metal may inspire us to be seekers, my own sense is that all the Elements have a part to play in an embodied spirituality, but that the Official most relevant is surely the Heart, residence of the spirits. Located in the chest, next to the Heart, the Lung holds the office of minister and chancellor, assisting the Emperor with official duties like managing the distribution network (for Qi and fluids), and ensuring effective defenses (at the skin, via what is known as the Wei Qi) (4, 26).

The observed connections between Earth imbalance and issues with mothers (who provides nurturing) and Metal imbalance and issues with fathers (who provide a balancing discipline and inspiration) (17) are interesting; these Elements form the downgoing side of the vasomotoric cycle which is so often lacking. Spleen Qi deficiency (Earth) and Liver Qi stagnation (Wood) are probably the most common problems seen in TCM, along with Kidney deficiency – which relates to our next Element.

## Water

For rural communities in China, winter is the time when reservoirs must be filled in order that irrigation systems will be available for next year's crops, and when people and livestock are dependent on stored reserves of food for survival. This reality creates an obvious connection with the emotion of fear, which is said to make the Qi descend (14), as evidenced by the involuntary emptying of one's bladder in conditions of extreme terror. Not surprisingly, Water is associated with the Kidneys and Bladder – and with the climate of cold, which makes us shiver as if afraid; the experience of being very cold is very close to and easily merges with the experience of fear (27), something to be aware of in the treatment room!

The properties of water and the growth of plants are root metaphors for the Chinese philosophy of life (7) and represent the left hand side of the cycle of the Five Elements, Water and Wood, and the upgoing side of the vasomotoric cycle. How can an Element in such a position be associated with a descending movement?

Winter has conflicting aspects; retreat and stillness above ground, yet hidden activity under ground as water flows and seeds start to germinate. Herein is the key. The energetic movement of Water is like the withdrawing of an arrow on the bow. Occurring in the Kidneys, towards the bottom of the body, this creates a descending movement, a pulling in. Important functions of the Kidneys are to retain and store the Jing (Essences) and to grasp Qi from the Lung and pull it down into the body. Tension on a bowstring also creates the potential for movement in the opposite direction, however. A key role of the Kidneys is to create the possibility of producing something, an effect (an impulse). As well as the overall control of fluids in the body, the Kidneys provide the gentle warming which sustains all activity; they can be seen as the root of life. The

Official which makes the arrow leave the bow is, however, the Liver. The dual aspect explains why, even though we spoke of the Lung, we talk of the Kidneys (27). The movement described also fits with the arising of an impulse in the vasomotoric cycle taking place from a place of need, a kind of contraction (25) ... you might even say a fear.

Water models the Taoist principle of 'Wu Wei', an effortless spontaneity which is sometimes translated as 'action by non-action' or 'doing without doing'; water merely moves in the manner in which it is led by the force of gravity. It flows easily over or around obstacles, following the course of least resistance – yet it can produce a force of great power and potential destruction as evidenced by waterfalls and floods. From one perspective, it does 'act' or 'do things' – yet these do not represent willfully created 'actions' or 'doings' (7). It just remains true to its nature. This ability is reflected in the virtue of Water, wisdom. This is not an intellectual superiority, it is more to do with the ability to flow with life and to have a sense of 'savoir faire' which stems from that experience.

Although all the Elements contribute to Wu Wei, Water CFs in particular can totally lose their flow (flow being something I associate particularly with energy distribution). They can have the appearance of the rabbit caught in the headlights, wide-eyed, immobilised and frozen with fear, or be as unavoidably driven to activity (including extreme sports) as a fast-flowing river – in the process exhausting their stored reserves (this can manifest as over-concern about having sufficient finances). Their sensitivity to fear leads to a highly developed ability to assess risks, a quest for reassurance which can make them prone to over-intellectualisation, reclusiveness or excessive fantasy.

The only two people who have ever queried the safety of my massage table were almost definitely Water CFs! As the root of life, the Kidneys are well protected beneath

# 怒 思 憂 恐 悲

the lumbar vertebrae and much of this Official is relatively inaccessible to a massage practitioner. There is, however, an association with bones. For me, periosteal massage can be either a somewhat threatening experience or it can be pleasantly reassuring, depending on circumstances. Tension in the lumbar area or a weak back can reflect Kidney Qi deficiency, easily connected with the emotion of fear.

## Emotions and health

It is easy to see how emotions affect health – and, conversely, how health can affect our emotional state; for example, anger injures the Liver by means of resonance and Liver pathology can therefore make one prone to anger for the same reason, as illustrated by the angry or violent outbursts of drunks.

Dwelling mentally or emotionally on an element of the psyche that has caused problems may then make little sense at all; indeed, the ‘cure’ might cause the ‘problem’ (24). This view brings to mind the dangers of retraumatisation and is thus subject to criticism – perhaps it simply conveys insufficient understanding of the need to work sensitively with clients? Nevertheless it is also the explanation behind the comments that more than one acupuncturist has made to me lamenting the clients they have treated for Liver Qi imbalance following sessions of cathartic therapies in which expression has been forced. There is surely also a very valid point of view that if energy imbalances can be corrected through bodywork (with which I would obviously include acupuncture and biodynamic massage) then to what extent is the talking part absolutely necessary – other than, of course, to satisfy the monkey mind which wants to have something to cling on to?

If emotions can be the cause of disease, is any expression of emotion to be discouraged? Of course not!

Emotions are an entirely normal response to the stimulation coming from the exterior, a natural tendency and disposition of an individual person so that we may exist as

*LEFT TO RIGHT: the characters for anger (Nu), thought (Si), grief (You), fear (Kong) and sadness (Bei) all contain the heart radical (Xin) which was introduced earlier – graphically indicating the action of emotions at the level of the Heart. The characters for joy and fright will appear in part two.*

manifestations of our own feeling and sensation. We need to have emotions in order to be a fully alive human being. Although Five Element practitioners talk of the ‘emotions’ of each Element, classical texts include both the five emotions, inner tensions or wills (Wu Zhi) and the seven emotions (Qi Qing). The five (the emotions already discussed) could be thought of as what moves us in life; before you have what we might term anger you have a sense of life pushing upwards (15). The seven are these very same five plus shock or fright (which affects both the Heart and Kidneys), and sadness or melancholy (which affects the Heart and Lung) (14). Whereas five (*right*) is the number appropriate to the organisation of life and indicates a crossing between poles of vitality – Yin and Yang, Heaven and Earth – and the formation of a centre which allows for the building of something, the character for seven (*right*) conveys a penetration, something pushing itself up and springing forth, perhaps with a sense of danger (15). There is an important distinction here in terms of relative strength and the potential for damage.

The classical texts also speak of the seven orifices of the face (two eyes, two nostrils, two ears and a mouth) and the seven orifices of the heart (aorta, posterior and anterior vena cava, and both left and right pulmonary arteries and veins). In order for the Heart, the residence of the Shen and our conscious mind, to receive an accurate impression of the world and respond appropriately a) these seven must faithfully convey information and b) the Heart itself must be calm and tranquil. Emotions, as reactions to external circumstances, tend to distort our inner repres-

entation of reality much as do ripples on the surface of a pond. In fact, the majority of the characters for the emotions include a representation of the heart (*see figure above*). One way of understanding the CF is that it continually distorts one’s perception of the outside world and therefore one’s response to it in a particular manner (28), leading us to become rather like trees which grow in a particular direction due to the prevailing wind.

Whilst Taoist texts may appear to be wary or even damning of the emotions, Taoism does not encourage emotional suppression. Take a passage from Chuang Tzu in which Prince Mou of Wei explains that although he is physically here, his heart is elsewhere and he cannot overcome his feelings. Chan Tzu replies:

*If you can’t handle your feelings, how can you avoid harming your spirit? If you can’t control your emotions, but nevertheless try to stop yourself following them, you will harm yourself twice over. Those who do this double injury to themselves are not counted amongst those with long life. (29)*

Emotions are most harmful when they do not stop, as happens if we fail to do something to resolve a situation which repeatedly evokes an emotional response, or if we suppress an emotion – which then effectively lives on within us. As with the weather, extremes do not continue without end, they quite naturally come and go. Lao Tzu (to whom the famous Tao Teh Ching is attributed) reminds us that it is all a matter of balance:

*For a whirlwind does not last a whole morning  
Nor does a sudden shower last a whole day. (30)*

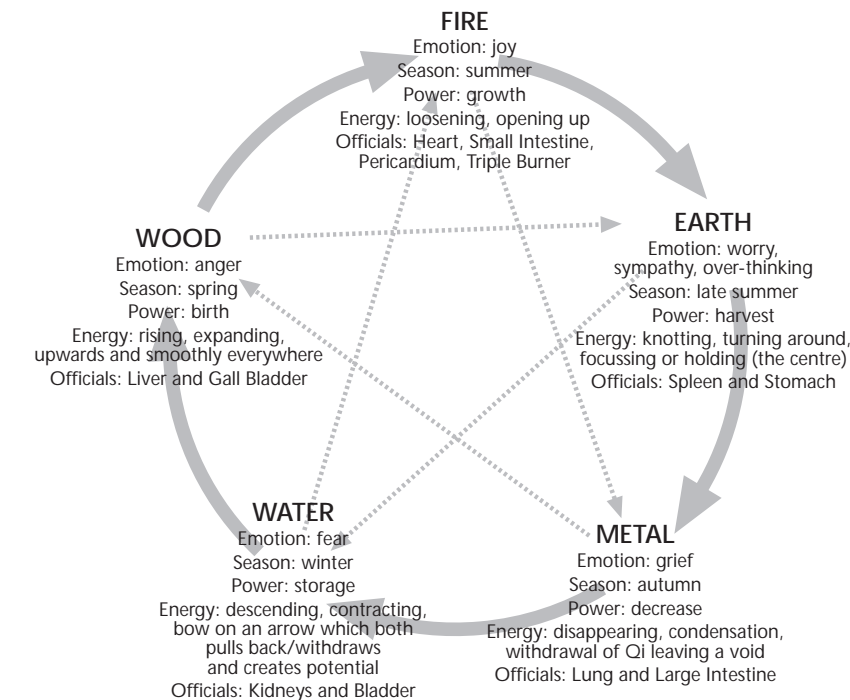
A tree does not close up in an attempt to stop the wind blowing through its branches, nor does it somehow attempt to artificially sustain the noise of the storm after it has passed by. Serenity is not freedom from emotions, it means not being disturbed by them – or, if disturbed, to be able to come back to a state where the emotion is felt inside one’s quietness (15). In biodynamic terms, this notion of rapid recovery is of course highly relevant to the vasomotoric cycle and especially psychoperistalsis.

The Taoist Sage is still (he appears to be free of emotions) not because stillness is good (or emotions are bad), but because he is so well centred in his life and in reality that nothing can disturb him. He already has found within him that which nourishes his life, so does not need to seek outside of himself and is therefore able to spontaneously respond to things in and around him in a calm and balanced manner. Nothing is left undone, nothing is suppressed (15, 31).

*The Sage falls asleep not because he ought to Nor even because he wants to But because he is sleepy. (32)*

### Learning from the East

Comparisons with the Five Elements make me appreciate more than I perhaps might otherwise that the downgoing side of the vasomotoric cycle is not just a kind of recovery mechanism which brings me back to a point of rest rather like a full stop. Earth and Metal enable us to take in Qi from food and air but also nourishment in a wider sense, without which our enthusiasm for life would surely be greatly diminished. Fire, at the top, is not only to do with action and expression, or indeed just with socialising and relationships (a criticism I sometimes make of Five Element acupuncture), it is to do with being present. We know this in our practice; peristalsis and breathing will be adversely affected if the client is



ABOVE: Summary diagram which in particular enables the pattern of energy flow around the generating (Sheng) cycle to be appreciated; rising smoothly upwards and expanding (Wood), loosening (Fire), coming together and turning a corner (Earth), withdrawing (Metal) and a concurrent contraction and creation of fresh potential (Water). Further contemplation will enable greater understanding of the controlling (Ke) cycle, shown in dotted lines, and of the feasibility of the cycle with Earth located in the middle, its energy then holding the centre around which all else revolves.

neither present to himself nor in sufficiently good relationship with us as therapist that he may receive our techniques – and surely it is here that verbal interventions, to bring awareness to his experience, are the most useful. The Five Elements put forward an understanding of energy and of life less to do with extremes of Yin and Yang and more to do with a balanced cycling of energies which however maintains me at the very centre of my life and the world.

To my mind, there are some potential holes in the Five Element model as it is often used clinically. For example, if the Fire Element has an aspect to do with getting something which is inside out, then what forms the inside – what is me, since the Shen has been defined as merely granting me consciousness and not a personality? And how does this all fit together with mental functioning, or indeed with a more embodied model of the body which includes armouring and startle

remnants? For a deeper understanding we need to extend our knowledge to the Taoist three treasures (Jing, Qi and Shen), the five spirits and a few other areas – which will come in part two, together with some tips for therapists from the 2,000 year old Nei Jing.

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(continued overleaf)

# Book Review

## **Body-Mind Psychotherapy; Principles, techniques and practical applications**

Susan Aposhyan  
Norton Press 2004

This is an impressive and clearly written account of the intentions, meaning and experiences involved in being a Body-Mind Psychotherapist. The author, Susan Aposhyan, first reviews in chapter one, the larger contexts which engendered Body-Mind Psychotherapy, including psychotherapy, somatic psychology, body mind integration, and Body-Mind Centering. In chapter two, she defines the theoretical and scientific basis for the body-mind connection as the basis of Body-Mind Psychotherapy (BMP). Chapter three includes the fundamental principles of BMP in order to give a foundation for part two of the book that moves into the realm of experience, examples, and case studies. Chapter four covers the basic tasks of psychotherapy involving healing development deficiencies, resolving trauma, and supporting psychological growth. Chapters five and six delineate basic BMP techniques. Part three introduces the reader to the BMP approach, observes the basic systems of the body, and offers ways in which this information may be used therapeutically.

Part four provides technical details of the BMP approach, including movement observation, early motor development, and cellular experience. Chapter twelve explores clinical situations involving birth, death, sexuality, bonding and trauma.

This book is written by a highly competent and experienced Body-Mind Psychotherapist primarily for Psychotherapists who may be interested in integrating the body into the process of their own work with clients. To this end, it is excellent. It carefully and clearly lays out the underlying philosophies of the work and then walks through a number of case studies whilst also integrating a full discussion of observations and suggestions along the way.

Susan Aposhyan works and writes from a psycho-spiritual point of view, thus integrating her Buddhist background into her Body-Mind psychotherapy work. Along with her background in development psychology, psycholinguistics and dance movement therapy Aposhyan has a wealth of experience in a number of related areas including performance art, modern dance, yoga, and meditation. She has worked in a number of clinical and academic settings involving social psychology and adolescents including trauma work, addictions, and chronic

psychosis; with inpatient and outpatient children and adults.

The term 'Body-Mind Psychotherapy' is actually a more precise title for the work of Body Psychotherapists. All that Aposhyan describes of the Body-Mind work is second nature to any practicing Body Psychotherapist since it is impossible to work without the mind as a psychotherapist who also works with the body. In this way, the book provides a refreshing reminder of all that Body Psychotherapists do and know implicitly in our practice and experience. In this way, it is lovely to see it spelled out so carefully and thoroughly. In its clarity it is truly a pleasure to read.

The author states in the book preface that "overall, this book is designed to give the reader a full introduction to BMP techniques and principles." I think that the author does far more than that by also conveying her belief in, and commitment to, Body-Mind Psychotherapy. Her perception, experience, and wisdom shine through in the compassionately balanced views she maintains in numerous situations and observations. In this way the reader is much persuaded by her intelligent and sensitive discussion.

Lorna McNeur

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