



The Five Element Cycles of Life

by Shoshanna Katzman, L.Ac., M.S.

The Five Elements or wu xing is an interactive cycle of energy serving as a representation of the physical universe. It is a comprehensive Chinese medicine guide that organizes all-natural phenomena into five master phases of fire, earth, metal, water and wood. This template categorizes the energetics underlying all things based on the laws of nature. According to this paradigm, each element is related to a specific vital organ along with its associated meridian pathway.

Furthermore, Five Element designations include association to a particular season, environmental condition, direction, taste, color, sound, odor, emotion, vocal quality, developmental stage, body type, personality, sense organ and to various tissues of the body. These inherent relationships have many practical applications to Chinese medicine diagnostics, daily lifestyle habits and health maintenance. This culminates in deeper understanding about how the elements interrelate - especially in terms of their similarities and differences, in addition to whether they are nourishing or controlling to one another.

Application of the Five Elements to daily living helps one realize why they behave the way they do based on the association of the prevailing element of their personality. It also assists them in

choosing things like the most appropriate foods, method of food preparation and environmental living situation. These elements also serve as a basis for the art of placement known as “feng shui,” therefore they are commonly used to determine how to arrange furniture along with many other aspects of their place of dwelling. In addition, it is used for guidance about when it is time to rest and hunker down, versus being outgoing and busy according to the energetics of a particular season.

Symbolically the Five Elements represent all phenomena, including the stages of life. They explain how the body functions and how it changes during health or disease.

This paradigm is further employed by a Chinese medicine practitioner as a method of diagnosis and treatment in terms of how the body functions and changes during health or disease according to the Five Elements. It provides a basis for energetic balancing with the goal of redirecting how energy flows between these elements. An acupuncturist employs this method in terms of the relationship existing between a vital organ system and a particular element. The multi-dimensional view of life provided by this approach offers a

diagnostic framework to recognize where imbalances exist within the body, mind, emotions and spirit.

The association of one’s emotional state to the Five Elements also provides key insight about how to initiate and strengthen a patient’s healing response. This includes the inherent relationship between emotions and vital organs which has many implications for quality of life and health. When deciding upon a Chinese herbal formula or dietary recommendation this includes matching the taste and color of an herb or food with a person’s prevailing Five Element constitution. Furthermore, the assessment of a particular movement in the Chinese exercise of tai chi involves how placement of the feet impacts energy flow from one element to the next. And the direction that a tai chi practitioner faces upon beginning their form is significant in terms of how qi flows within the body.

Each application of these Five Elements employs the seasons as a basis for recommendation of specific daily living habits. Overall, this approach offers a master blueprint showing how nature interacts with the body and how different dimensions of our being relate to and impact each other. Getting back to one’s inherent nature offers many ways for revitalizing and balancing body, mind and spirit. It



is an important aspect that needs to be continually nourished – empowering one to live life to its fullest. Take the initiative to learn more about this ancient paradigm to gain greater clarity and purpose in 2020!

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