

Excerpts from *Power of the Five Elements*

Excerpt 1

Chapter One

It was 1975, in a manor house hidden in the woods outside Oxford, England, far removed from the austere lecture halls of medical school, that I began my exploration of a unique traditional acupuncture system, the Five Elements. I'd come hoping to answer two questions that were never addressed in my medical school training. What makes a person vulnerable to illness and premature aging? What brings a person vibrant health? The insights gained in this first experience with the Five Elements, and during the next thirty years of practice, would alter forever not only my life, but the lives of thousands of patients.

From the first day of my studies, the message from the sages of ancient China was clear: learn to adapt well to life's changes and there will be 'long life and everlasting vision". Science defines adaptation as the ability to adjust to changing circumstances and the challenges of life without suffering the consequences. Most illness and premature aging are the result of failed adaptation, leading to elevated levels of cortisol, and other stress hormones, and changes in the mid-brain, setting the stage for chronic disease, including diabetes, heart disease, cancer, depression and autoimmune disorders. Ancient Chinese physicians, though not aware of the mechanisms modern medicine has since discovered, were still cognizant of the importance of adaptation in maintaining health and longevity.

Many people are asking the same questions today-how can I prevent stress induced disease and get older without aging prematurely? The answer is contained in knowing how to be, an ancient prescription for adaptation, as relevant today as it was in 200 BCE China. During the past thirty years I have combined Taoist ideas with modern mind body medicine and nutritional therapies to help my patients maintain their health and age well. Today's science identifies the management of cortisol, the main adrenal stress hormone, as a key ingredient in healthy aging. Knowing how to be is the path to manage the internal process of adaptation and create healthy cortisol levels.

Excerpt 2

Chapter Four

The Adaptation Type describes the abilities that enhance adaptation based on the unique characteristics of each Element as well as their specific tendencies for maladaptive behavior. Everyone has aspects of all the behaviors discussed here, yet each Type has specific patterns that can be more dominant. For example, the Wood Adaptation Type is goal oriented and hard driving, useful and effective qualities when appropriate. If maladapted, the Wood Type can be combative, abrasive and controlling. Each Adaptation Type has predictable behaviors under stress. Becoming aware of these patterns can provide a means of minimizing the impact of stressful situations, preserving adaptation and enhancing knowing how. Ultimately that is the goal of understanding the Adaptation Types.

One of the Wood Adaptation Type's underlying needs (which is stronger than other Type's,) is for a sense of direction in life and feeling in control over life circumstances. Maladapted, behavior can include poor decision-making, feelings of frustration and inappropriate anger. The Wood Type thrives on competition and achievement, however they can experience frequent conflicts in life. The Fire Adaptation's drive is for mental clarity and emotional protection, when maladapted leading to anxiety, vulnerability and shyness. The Fire Type, driven to find love and intimacy, might be most focused on relationships even at the expense of other aspects of their life.

The Earth Adaptation Type wants understanding, support and a sense of community. Maladapted they can be self centered and stubborn. The Metal Adaptation Type's drive is for deeper meaning and respect, when maladapted leading to cynicism, perfectionism and rejection. The Metal Type expects perfection, and is often disappointed in others' lack of moral fiber, as well as in their own achievements. The Water Adaptation Type's drive is for reassurance and knowledge, when maladapted behavior is avoidance, withdrawal and mistrust. The Water Type needs reassurance and a 'safe harbor', sensing danger in many areas of life.

In relationships, for example, each Type, if maladapted, would have a different 'lens' coloring their experience. The Wood Type might be in conflict over control in the relationship; the Fire Type feels emo-

tionally vulnerable and sensitive to possible abandonment; the Earth Type wants attention and security above all else; the Metal Type seeks respect and a deeper meaning from the relationship; the Water Type needs to trust their partner and feel protected so that life does not overwhelm them. The more out of balance, (or 'sick' as the Nei Jing would say) a person is, the stronger these tendencies would be, the more unhealthy the relationship.

Excerpt 3

Chapter Two

In Taoist thought, the Five Elements are more than basic constituents of Nature, but aspects of the whole that describe the energetic laws that govern Nature and man. Most importantly they are specific adaptive and transformative attributes of the cycle of qi energy that defines the physical, emotional and spiritual state of the individual. Worsley said, "Every living thing and person is a unique embodiment and combination of the Five Elements". The Elements include aspects of the movement of qi energy-from birth through death, from day through night and through all the seasons of the year. In the person they are interdependent, creating and controlling the flow of energy, through every aspect of body, mind and spirit, and organize faculties and attributes that allow one to meet the changing circumstances of life. (Figure 3)

Each Element, both in Nature and for every person, describes a phase of energetic movement and the qualities that belong to that part of the whole. Each season has its own energetic quality and Element correspondence. For example, autumn with falling leaves, and colder and quieter days, resonates with the attributes of the Metal Element- letting go, enriching (the decaying leaves add needed nutrients to the soil), pulling inward and finding value.

Arising in the primordial energy of yin (contracting, dark, cold) and yang (expanding, warming, activating), the Five Elements also resonate with cycles of birth, growth, decay, death and rebirth. Five Element laws are immutable: spring always precedes summer, the shady side of the hill is colder than the sunny side. They represent 'universal consistency of systematic links'. Correspondences for each Ele-

ment lead to practical application, both in understanding natural cycles and in maintaining health. The Five Elements (Wood, Fire, Earth, Metal and Water, (Figure 4) have correspondences with the seasons, climatic conditions, color and time of day. For example the Metal Element has the correspondences of fall, the climactic condition of dryness, the color white and the time of 3 a.m. to 7 a.m.

The cycle of the seasons demonstrates the different aspect of energy for each Element. Spring corresponds with the Wood Element, birth of yang, actively growing and expanding. Summer corresponds to the Fire Element, the peak of yang, upward movement, maximum energy state. Late Summer corresponds to the Earth Element, neutral between yin and yang, balanced. Autumn corresponds to the Metal Element, increasing yin, contracting inward and declining. Winter corresponds to the Water Element, greatest yin, maximum stillness. Energy transforms from newly born and expansive (Wood) in Spring to mature and flowering in Summer (Fire) to balanced and supportive in Late Summer (Earth), to diminishing and contracting in Fall, (Metal), to still and waiting in Winter (Water).

These energies operate within each person as well. Any aspect of this energetic transformation that is imbalanced can lead to maladaptation, poor health and premature aging. If the expansive yang energy of spring (Wood) is inadequate, there will be no planting of the seeds for change and renewal. If the contracting yin energy of fall (Metal) is not sufficient, then the release of decayed material (such as leaves falling off trees) will not become the basis for enrichment needed for growth in the following year. If a person is unable to let go of what is not needed or upsetting (a function of the Metal Element), and find what is of value in themselves, there will difficulty in changing and renewing themselves (Wood Element function) in the future.