



THE WAY OF THE
FIVE
ELEMENTS

*52 weeks of powerful acupoints for
physical, emotional, and spiritual health*

SINGING
DRAGON



JOHN KIRKWOOD

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Notes on the Text

Throughout I have capitalised Element, Five Elements, Constitutional Element, Extraordinary Vessel, and the substances of Qi, Blood and Essence in order to distinguish from the more common usages of these words.

I have italicised Chinese words such as *shen* and *jing* but not Qi, yin or yang, which have more fully entered modern usage.

Preface

In 1991 I was very fortunate to study with Bob Duggan, Diane Connelly, Julia Measures and John Sullivan, teachers of the Traditional Acupuncture Institute (TAI) who were presenting their SOPHIA program in San Francisco. This year-long training, in five parts, introduced me to the sophisticated model of the Five Elements and to ways in which this perspective can be utilised in everyday life to bring health and balance.

I discovered that these Elements are not constituent parts like chemical components, but rather they are five unique vibrations that arise from the void, the Tao. Similar to the way light refracts into a spectrum of colours, the nature of the universe divides into distinct notes or vibrations. These vibrations pass through and inhabit all aspects of our material world. Everything resonates with these Elements.

One of the easiest ways to understand the Elements is through the qualities of the seasons which offer a direct experience of the nature of each Element. If we study the associations of an Element in its own season, there is an ambient energy that both highlights and supports the exploration.

I was so impressed with this model that I took it into my life and began to look at my own physical body, psyche, emotions and later my spiritual life from this perspective. Each year I delved more

and more deeply into myself, learning through the Elements about my functioning, my strengths and struggles, where I am out of balance and where I am balanced.

After the SOPHIA program ended, a number of us who had completed the course decided to carry on meeting to continue the exploration. Out of this arose the whimsically named Five Hands Clapping group. We offered our own experiential workshops to the public and found that real healing was taking place in the participants, including ourselves. When the workshops finally ran their course, we continued to meet seasonally, setting up an environment that would echo the qualities of the season and the Element in order to understand more about ourselves through this work.

After I returned to Australia in 2006, I brought this perspective of living with the Elements into my acupressure classes, a quinterly newsletter, a blog and now this book. At each stage I have found that in order to bring the work to others I have, of necessity, plumbed my own depths to deeper and deeper levels. My physical health is better than it has been in the past, despite my advancing age; I am far more aware of and comfortable with my emotions; I have deep understandings about the connections between the different strands of my life; and I have come to know my true nature more fully and how this manifests uniquely in this location.

I hope that in this Five Element work you will find understanding, insight, inspiration, healing and balance. As I have.

*Adelaide Hills
March 2015*



Landscape of the Five Elements

How to use
this book

This is a book that is meant not just to be read, but to be lived, explored, pondered and played with.

For the past 25 years, since I became closely acquainted with the Five Element model, I have been living my life as best I can by following the rhythms of nature, allowing them to teach me about myself. About my physical health, my preferences and dislikes, ideas and beliefs, emotions and even my spiritual journey. At the completion of each year, I come back to where I started in the seasonal cycle, but I am not the same person who started the year. I have changed at all levels, and the next cycle is altogether new. The work is not a repetition

but a widening, deepening spiral of experience and understanding.

This book has been written from this perspective and invites you to learn from the Elements in their own seasons. Rather than read the book from start to finish, I suggest that you read this chapter, then begin with the chapter that relates to the Element of the season where you find yourself right now. If you are in winter, dive into the Water chapter; if it is spring in your neck of the woods, look at the Wood chapter; if summer is flourishing in your neighbourhood, check out Fire; if it is the late summer or harvest time for you, savour the delights of the Earth chapter; and if autumn is falling all around you, appreciate the gems that Metal has to offer.

There are a total of 52 entries, one for each week of the year. Each entry introduces an acupoint (sometimes two) and explores aspects of the Five Element model while providing information on how to use the point for your own health. Each Element chapter has ten or eleven entries that can be read, explored and lived with over the course of that season. You can treat the points on yourself or on others. Why not find a partner to trade with?

What I know from many years of doing this work is that when we explore the resonances, qualities and issues of an Element during its own season, the work goes deeper. For example, holding Water points in the winter will tend to have a greater effect than at other times of the year. Exploring your fear, the emotion of Water, will be more supported then. At the spiritual level, the

truth that nothing is separate and that the Tao is the true nature of everything is more accessible in the darkest months of the year. The reason for this is that the energy of the Water Element is at its highest in winter and this ambient natural energy is available to support healing and growth in the Water realm.

Another way you might use the work is to consult the index for a particular condition you have and look at the acupoints that relate to that condition. But even using this symptomatic approach, you can consider the issues that relate to the points and their respective Elements in order to place your ailment in a wider, holistic context.

At one level you might use Gall Bladder 20 to relieve a headache. But you might also consider what is causing the headache. Is it that you are sitting under an air-conditioning draught at work and suffering from wind invasion? Perhaps you are angry and frustrated and the tension is concentrating at the back of your head. Maybe you didn't even realise you were angry. Possibly the headache stems from the fact that you can't see a clear path forward in your life because making plans and decisions is difficult for you. Going deeper still, you might ask yourself, 'What can I learn from this headache and how is it actually supporting my deepest unfolding?'

The Elements have so much to teach us. By paying attention to their lessons, particularly during their respective seasons when they are at their most potent, we have an opportunity to

become more aware of ourselves, more fully who we are as human beings.

The Five Element model

Throughout this book I use the term Element to refer to the five different vibrations of all things. Some scholars and practitioners do not use the term Elements but refer to them as the five phases. This more accurately describes the cycle as a series of stages and avoids confusion with the concept of an element as a component part. While I agree that ‘phase’ is a more accurate description of what is occurring, I use the word Element because it has so thoroughly taken root in common usage. As long as it is clear that we are referring to a phase of a cycle and not to a constituent such as hydrogen, then I see no problem using the word Element.

Origins of the Five Elements

The earliest developments of the Five Element perspective are lost in the mists of Chinese prehistory, since writing did not develop in China until about 1200 BCE. But it is clear that this way of viewing the world was based on a close observation of nature. The perspective of the simple farmer who was in close contact with the rhythm of the seasons informed the development of the Five Element model.

The first articulation of this nature-based perspective was in the 3rd century BCE by the School of Naturalists, or the Yin-Yang school, which attempted to explain the universe in terms

of the forces of nature: the polarity of yin (dark, cold, female, receptive) and yang (light, hot, male, assertive); and the Five Elements of Water, Wood, Fire, Earth and Metal. The perspectives of this early philosophical school became absorbed into the later development of Taoism.

The principles of the Naturalist school were laid out in the great classic, the *Neijing* or *The Yellow Emperor's Classic of Medicine*. The *Neijing* explains how the natural forces of yin and yang, Qi, and the Five Elements can be understood and used to bring balance and harmony to life. Thus, the *Neijing* not only gives details of a system of medicine, but is in fact a model of holistic living in all realms of human life. It does not separate external changes such as geographic, climatic and seasonal from internal changes such as emotions and reactions.¹ In this sense it is the first book of holistic medicine.

During the Qing dynasty of the Manchus (1644–1911) acupuncture began a long decline in favour of herbalism. What is more, the system utilised by herbalism was not related to the Five Element system, but to one known as Eight Principles for Differentiating Syndromes. Not only did acupuncture suffer a decline, but also one of the fundamental principles on which it had been founded, namely the Five Elements, lost its influence.

Another historical development contributed to the overall decline in all kinds of traditional medicine, namely that of rapid Westernisation in the latter part of the 19th century. Once Western allopathic medicine was introduced to China, it

quickly supplanted the traditional medicine. This process was further accelerated by the collapse of the dynastic system in 1912. A law was passed in 1929 prohibiting the practice of the old medicine. The period that followed saw China descend into the chaos of civil war, invasion by Japan and further civil war, culminating in the eventual takeover by the Communists in 1949.

Taking over a ravaged country, Mao Tse-Tung was eager to find a system of health care that would support China's vast, growing and impoverished population, and so turned to the traditional methods. He encouraged the development of a new system of medicine based on traditional methods but which was in alignment with the Communist principles of rationalism and atheism. What emerged was a system that became known as traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), a system that became codified and taught in colleges rather than by the old way of learning from a master.²

Five Elements go West

Such was the system that was in place when Richard Nixon made his historic visit to China in 1972, an event that radically opened China to Western contact and trade. The form of acupuncture and herbalism that was subsequently exported to the West was a system that had been carefully culled of anything of a spiritual nature and which contained little of Five Element theory.

However, the ancient methods that predated the development of TCM were rescued and preserved by Europeans.³ The French sinologist

Soulié Morant published works on acupuncture in French as early as 1929. His writings contain much that was to find its way into Five Element acupuncture but was omitted from TCM.

Another Frenchman, Jacques Lavier, was responsible for the spread of these ideas in Europe through his writings and the conferences he organised. Lavier exerted a particularly strong influence upon the early English acupuncturists and could be said to have been the principal cause of the early elevation of the Five Element method in England. English acupuncturists Denis Lawson-Wood,⁴ Felix Mann⁵ and Mary Austin⁶ all published books on acupuncture which focused on this method.

It was in this climate that J.R. Worsley, an osteopath, began to study acupuncture. He attended Lavier's historic 1963 seminar in London and later made trips to China, Taiwan and Japan to study with masters whose techniques were largely in alignment with the methods he had already learned from Lavier.

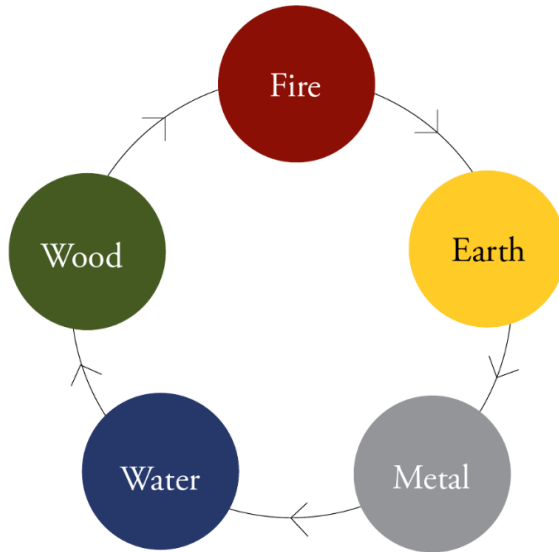
By the time Worsley began teaching in about 1966,⁷ his method of treatment, focusing on the Five Element model, was already established. What had happened was that the ancient methods that were abandoned by the Chinese in the 1970s took root and flourished in a most unlikely environment – England.

Worsley's method became known as Classical Five Element Acupuncture and spread to the USA through students who established the Traditional Acupuncture Institute. The lineage tree has since

sprouted many branches, with new masters arising to develop differentiations from this original teaching. J.R. Worsley died in 2003 and his work is carried on by Judy Worsley and a wide range of teachers, many of whose works are cited in the text.

Cycles of the Five Elements

It is important to know something of the movement of energy around the Five Element cycle. The fundamental cycle of the Five Elements or phases is known as the *sheng* or generation cycle (see below). It represents a cycle in which each Element gives birth to or generates the next, a cycle which can be illustrated by looking at the seasons in nature.



Generation Cycle

Winter is a time of darkness, coldness, stillness and waiting. Nature is preserving its resources, holding its potential for the appropriate time: the seed waiting to sprout. The qualities of Water are quiet, patient waiting, pooling and storing of energy, not rushing to act but waiting for the signal to move. These qualities are what allow the energy of the Wood Element to arise in the spring.

Then, as if a starting gun has gone off, there is sudden, dramatic, dynamic, upward rising and things grow rapidly as temperature and light increase. The seed quickly manifests its genetic blueprint, the map of where the plant is going, what it will become. These are all qualities of the Wood Element.

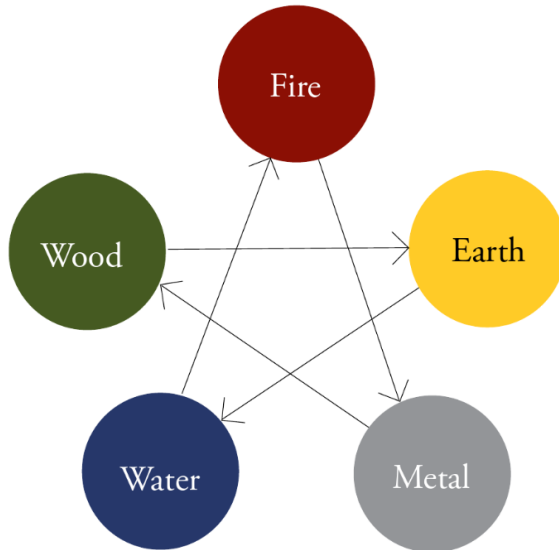
Wood moves upwards and creates a strong trunk, giving birth to the Fire Element which spreads outwards. This is the energy of summer when everything in nature is bursting outwards to its fullest expansion. Nature is a riot. It is the hottest, brightest, most happening time of year. And the expansion is possible because it has been generated by the Wood.

After the zenith of Fire, the energy of the year begins to descend and generates the Earth Element in the late-summer season. There is a rounding, drooping, sagging feel to nature, a pleasant heaviness. This is the time of harvest when the fruits of the year are made manifest. The extent to which the Fire has fully flourished will determine the bounty of the harvest and the fullness of the Earth.

As the energy of the year continues to fall, Earth gives birth to Metal and the season of autumn. This

is the time of year when nature discards what is no longer of use and retains what is of greatest value to life. Trees lose their leaves, plants die after dropping their seeds. There is a garnering of what is most precious. This gathering of deepest value is what generates the return to Water.

If the generation cycle was the only one operating, then the energy would spiral out of control. Therefore, another cycle operates simultaneously. This is the *ke* cycle, or control cycle (see below). Here, each Element exerts a restraining or controlling influence on the next but one in a clockwise direction. This provides checks and balances that ensure dynamic equilibrium among all Elements.



Control Cycle

By looking once again at nature, we can find analogies for this. Water controls Fire the way a bucket of water douses a fire; Fire controls Metal in the way that heat softens and shapes the hardness of metal; Metal controls Wood in the way a knife carves wood; Wood controls Earth in the way tree roots hold soil together; and Earth controls Water in the way banks shape a river's course or create a dam.

When these two cycles are taken together, there is the opportunity for perfect balance and harmony among the Elements. Each Element has a relationship with every other Element. The Five are entirely interwoven and interdependent.

The concept of the Constitutional Element is perhaps J.R. Worsley's most significant contribution to the field. Worsley discovered that every person has one Element that has the greatest tendency to go out of balance and that this is also the first Element to go out of balance. Further, he realised that this imbalance causes other Elements to go out of balance in a kind of domino effect. He also concluded that this Element, which seems to be present at or soon after birth, does not change during the course of a person's life. Worsley called this the Causative Factor (CF), namely the Element that is the original cause of imbalance and disease. Some later Five Element practitioners have referred to this as the Constitutional Element, which is the term used in this book.

Constitutional
Element

This Constitutional Element is not always easy to discover. There are many things that obscure it. Symptoms can be a compelling distraction. So too can behaviours and the stage of life the person is in. To find this Element, the practitioner focuses on four main diagnostic tools: the colour in the face, the sound of the voice, the subtle odour of the body and the predominant emotion in the person's life.⁸ Each Element has a particular expression of colour, sound, odour and emotion, and ideally these four all appear in the patient. It is enough to have three of these factors to be sure of the diagnosis, but it is seldom easy and sometimes the Constitutional Element is deduced from fewer than three.⁹

When we do find the Element that is the root of all imbalance, then treatment focuses on that Element to bring it back into health and balance. The result of this is that all the other Elements follow it back to balance. During treatment, the other Elements are not ignored, but the treatment keeps coming back to this core Element.

When I refer to treatment, this is usually seen as a patient receiving acupuncture, acupressure or some other Five Element modality. But what I am offering here is a perspective in which all of life can be a source of treatment. You can become practitioner to yourself such that every aspect of your life, including what you eat, what you like to do, your preferences, your emotional reactions, your spiritual beliefs, everything, can become a rich source of inquiry into who you are and why you are the way you are.

In this way, we can come to find our own responses and our own relationship to each of the Elements, to see where we are flowing and where we are struggling. And as we discover the Element of greatest challenge, we find our Constitutional Element. While this Element is indeed a challenge, it is at the same time our greatest potential. It is our life's work. It is why we are here. It is the doorway to unearthing our greatest treasure, the truth of who we are.

Principle of resonance

Imagine a great gong being struck. Its powerful, sonorous note passes out into the universe and all things of a similar vibration pick up the note, vibrating in perfect resonance. Now imagine five great gongs sounding simultaneously, each with its own unique note. Imagine that, according to its nature, every single atom in the universe is resonating to one of these notes. Nothing is left out of this primal harmony.

Similarly, each of the Elements acts like the tone of one of these gongs, vibrating with its own frequency, a frequency that resonates precisely and profoundly in all expressions of that Element: a season of the year, a colour, a sound, an emotion, an odour, an organ of the body, a sense organ, a set of tissues, a psychological state, a spiritual state. They all pick up the note and resonate with its vibration like a great clan singing the same tone in harmony.

Each Element is like the plucked G string of a guitar in a room full of guitars. The vibration of that string causes the G strings of all the other guitars in the room to vibrate, allowing the particular resonance of G to fill the room.¹⁰ If we think of each Element as having a particular vibration, frequency or resonance, then we can understand how all of the associations and correspondences – in fact, everything associated with that Element – will have the same vibration (see the table at the end of this chapter).

When we look inside ourselves, we discover that we are not separate from the grand resonant frequencies of the Universe, and that, just like everything else, we too resonate to all five frequencies. When we are balanced, the five frequencies can find their exact vibration within us, and the result is harmony within and between the Elements.

However, if we are out of balance in a particular Element, there is disharmony not only between the Elements, but within all expressions of the Element, including the particular organs, emotions and aspects of spirit that are associated with that Element. If there is an off note in one correspondence, then all the other correspondences of an Element will also be off note.

The good news is that the corollary is also true. When we address one area of correspondence in our lives, all of the other correspondences will also respond. Thus, we can begin anywhere in our healing and the increasing harmony will flow through to all other areas of the Element. For

example, working on the emotion of anger will help to heal the organs of gall bladder and liver, and vice versa. In this example we are bringing the Wood Element into balance, and so all aspects and resonances of Wood will be influenced.

There are many resonances that we could consider, but I have chosen to focus on seven of them.

The seasons of the year are perhaps the most obvious expression of the principle of resonance. Each season has a particular vibration and the way we feel about the season has a lot to do with how its vibration matches our own. Most people have a favourite season and a least favourite season. Some people can't wait for summer to arrive, and feel a sense of loss when it departs, while others hate summer so much they migrate to a cooler climate for those months.

Seasons

On the other hand, there might be all kinds of reasons why people prefer summer to other seasons. Maybe that is when they go on vacation and get away from a boring job for a few weeks. Or it might be because they love summer sports and can't wait for the warm weather to get out there and play. Or perhaps they adore parties and summer is the time when there are lots of barbeques and get-togethers.

If we look at what is common to all of these activities – relaxing on vacation, playing sport in groups, partying with friends – we see that they

all have a similar vibration. They are vibrating in resonance with summer and its associated Element of Fire. The way in which you resonate with activities like these gives an indication of the state of the Fire Element within you.

As you move through the year and pay attention to your responses to the changes in the seasons, you will be getting direct information about the state of health and balance of each Element within you. Often, the vibration of the new season will become palpable even before the change in the weather occurs, so it can be very useful to pay particular attention to how you are feeling at the very start of the season.

Senses The five senses and the sense organs that are their instruments each resonate with an Element. When we focus our awareness on the sense that corresponds to the season, much can be revealed.

The sense of hearing and the ears are resonances of Water. Vision and the eyes vibrate in tune with Wood. Speech (a way we *touch* another's heart) and the tongue are in harmony with Fire. The sense of taste, which we get through the mouth and lips, is in resonance with Earth. Smell and the nose are instruments of Metal.

A heightened awareness of one sensory channel can illuminate our relationship with that sense. This in turn puts us more directly in contact with the Element of that sense. For example, focusing

on vision and the eyes puts us in contact with the Wood Element. We can learn things about the way we see and the way we look at and move through the world. These insights can bring healing that flows through to all the other resonances of Wood.

Colour is another expression of the vibration of the Elements: blue or black (Water), green (Wood), red (Fire), yellow (Earth) and white (Metal).

Colours

Take a look at the colours in your wardrobe. What is the most predominant colour? What is missing altogether? Do you tend to wear different colours in different seasons, or in different weather? Do you choose colours to match your mood for the day, or do you choose a colour to change your mood? These choices indicate the influence on us of the different colours and their vibrations.

You can also observe how you respond to the various colours of nature. Do you love the lush green vegetation all around you on a forest walk? Would you rather spend time at the ocean, drinking in its vast blueness? Is your preference for the stark colours of mountains, or the bright red sands of a desert? Perhaps you like many of these colours in nature, but at different times.

As you move through the year, you can pay attention not just to your colour preferences, but also to your response to the colours of nature around you as they change from season to season.

The colour resonance is one of the diagnostic tools of the Five Element practitioner. The practitioner looks for the predominant coloration of the client's face, particularly at the sides of the eyes. Finding this colour is one of the keys to discerning the client's Constitutional Element. The colour is best seen in good natural light, and is often a subtle hue that is seen with 'soft eyes' when the observer is not really trying.

Sounds of voice The human voice has a tone that reflects an inner vibration. This makes the quality of the voice very useful as a way of finding a person's Constitutional Element. The five voices are described as groaning, shouting, laughing, singing and weeping. Most voices are a subtle combination of these sounds, but everyone has one that predominates.

This predominant sound of voice bears a strong correlation to a person's habitual emotional expression. The way a person speaks has a lot to do with how she is feeling emotionally. Everyone has a predominant emotional pattern and this will be revealed in the voice which becomes a vehicle for the emotion. This is usually quite unconscious and influences the sound of voice whatever the topic of conversation.

Odours There are five broad categories of odour that correspond to the Elements. These can best be understood by reference to typical smells of the