



THE WAY OF THE FIVE ELEMENTS

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

SINGING
DRAGON



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1 Water



The nature of Water

The movement of Water is inwards. As the most yin of the Elements, Water will always find the lowest point and come to rest there.

The various ways that water behaves offer insights into the qualities of the Water Element. It is the only natural substance that is found in all three physical states – liquid, solid, and gas – at the temperatures normally found on Earth. Thus, we all have direct experience of the changing nature of water to ice and steam and can observe its indestructibility.

In all its forms, water reveals its power, from the capacity of ice to gouge gorges and sink ships,

to water's power to erode land and turn turbines, to steam's capacity to drive engines and cause explosions.

In its liquid state, water takes many forms that are very different from one another. Think of the parts of a river, from its beginnings as a spring in the hillside, as a gently babbling brook, as rapids and waterfalls in the mountains, to the broad, powerful, meandering river of the plains and finally to the vast moving depth of the ocean. Think too of puddles, ponds, lakes and wells which show other characteristics of stillness and depth.

In short, water appears in the form of its container, whether it be as a river, lake or ocean; a cup of tea, a bath or a swimming pool; or displaced by a hand, a body or an ocean liner. Water is nothing if not adaptable.

The Chinese character for Water is *shui*. The central stroke represents the main flow of a river while the other four strokes are the whirls, eddies and back currents of the river.¹

Resonances

of Water

Season

Winter

The Water Element is most easily observed in nature as the season of winter. It is the time of year when there is little or no growth, a time of waiting, resting and hibernating. Nature has retreated to its lowest ebb, shrunk to its most minimal, conserving its resources through the long cold night of the year. Temperatures are much lower and in some locations drop below freezing, producing ice and snow.



Winter is the coldest time of the year because at this time the sun's rays hit the Earth at a shallow angle. Also, the long nights and short days prevent the Earth from warming up. Cold and dark are yin qualities and therefore intrinsic to Water.

When does winter begin? This depends on your location and your prevailing climate. In temperate zones, you can expect to feel the beginnings of winter in early November or early May depending on your hemisphere, a month earlier than what is traditionally regarded as the beginning of winter. Yet the first hints of a season tend to have a greater impact upon us. Many people struggle with this transition from autumn to winter which is indicative of an imbalance in the Water Element.

If you live closer to the equator, winter will come later, while if you live closer to the poles, your winter will be earlier. You can look for the signs of winter within yourself: a desire to spend more time indoors where it is warm and cosy, more reluctance to get out of bed when it is dark and cold, reaching into the closet for scarves, gloves, hats and extra layers.

The sense of hearing is closely related to the kidneys which are organs of the Water Element. It is said that if the kidneys are healthy, the ears can hear the five sounds.² The tendency of hearing to deteriorate with age is a result of the lifelong decline in Kidney Qi.

Sense
Hearing

Hearing is a sense of rapid response. While it might take a full second to notice something with your eye, turn towards it, recognise and respond to it, the same reaction to sound happens at least ten times as fast. This is because hearing has evolved as our alarm system, operating below consciousness and even during sleep.

Listening is different from hearing. Hearing is simply the act of perceiving sound by the ear. If you are not hearing impaired, this just happens. Listening, however, is something you consciously choose to do. Listening requires attention and concentration in order to derive meaning from hearing. While hearing is a sense, listening is a skill, and both are resonances of Water.

The ears are the sense organs of Water and any conditions that affect the ears such as tinnitus, hearing loss, ear infections and dizziness are indications of an imbalance in the Element.

Colour

Blue (Black)

Some authorities say blue is the colour of the Water Element, others say it is black, while still others call it blue-black, or even a dark, purplish colour. All agree it is a dark shade.

Water in large quantities, such as rivers, lakes and oceans, is blue because the water reflects the blue of the light spectrum, and also reflects the sky which is often blue. No light penetrates into deep water so there the water appears black.

What is your relationship with the colour blue? How do you feel when you wear it? Do you wear



it at particular times? Does it alter your mood? How much do you have in your wardrobe? How much blue is in your home? Too much blue can be depressing for some but it is good to have some of this colour. According to *feng shui* principles, it is beneficial to have something blue on the Water wall of a room, the one in which the entry door is located.

In Five Element diagnosis, blue or black at the sides of the eyes or under the eyes can be indicative of a Water imbalance and may derive from Kidney deficiency. People can get this look when they are very tired, run down or depleted, or if there is some pathology of the kidneys. People of a Water constitution will display this colour even when they are well. Sometimes it looks as if the person is wearing a mask, the dark colour completely surrounding the eyes. It is often dark blue to black, but can appear as a lighter, sky or powder blue.

The sound of voice that represents the Water Element is the groaning voice. This is a sound that is sinking, falling in tone, and which can be indicative of stress or strain. It is a deep note, and one which has little modulation. Of all the sounds of voice, it shows the least variation. It is as if all the inflections have been flattened out. It can sound like water running over gravel. Sometimes it is as if the voice has been drawn out into a longer sound like an old cassette tape that has stretched.

Sound
Groaning

The sound of the groaning voice carries fear, the emotion of Water. Imagine how it is to dread something happening. The groan is the feeling of dread being expressed as a tone: ‘Oh no, not that.’

The sound can also reflect an imbalance in the Kidneys which store the *jing* or Essence of life. When there is insufficient energy to power action, a groan of effort is the result. Imagine the sound you might make when getting out of bed after insufficient sleep or anticipating the arrival of a person who is difficult to deal with.

The sound of a person’s voice is diagnostic of their Constitutional Element. People who are of a Water constitution will demonstrate this long, low groaning sound in their everyday speaking voice. Like water, it is a sound that finds the lowest level.

Odour

Putrid

The resonance of odour is the third of the diagnostic tools in determining a person’s Constitutional Element. Those of a Water constitution have an odour emanating from their skin that is described as putrid. When the person is in good health, this odour is slight and resembles the smell of fresh water. When there is ill health, the odour is stronger and can be like a stagnant pond or even the smell of urine or ammonia.

The odour arises from the organs of the Constitutional Element not doing their job adequately – in this case, the bladder and kidneys



not functioning well enough to manage the fluids of the body, resulting in the putrid odour.

The movement of Water is inwards, so it is natural that its emotion is one that sinks and contracts.

Emotion

Fear

Fear is deep, visceral and is experienced low down in the body, affecting the low back, pelvis and legs. In cases of extreme fear, the force of descending energy is irresistible and a person can lose control of bladder and bowels.

Many of the idiomatic expressions for fear are suggestive of its cold, watery nature: a chill down the spine, bowels turning to water, breaking into a cold sweat, blood turned cold, frozen with fear, shaking like a leaf.

All humans experience fear in some way at some time. It is a normal and natural response to danger or threat. It is an instinctual emotion that has helped us survive as a species. However, when fear becomes extreme, goes beyond a reaction appropriate to the circumstances, becomes paralysing or traumatising, or interferes with normal functioning, then this indicates an imbalance in the Water Element.

Imbalance also occurs at the other extreme. When there is a conspicuous absence of fear in circumstances where it would be normal, or when the person repeatedly engages in risky activities without regard for common safety, this is also an imbalance in Water. The legendary daredevil Evel Knievel who holds the record for the most broken bones in a lifetime (more than 433) was a classic example of this type of behaviour.

Emotion is the fourth diagnostic tool in Five Element work. A person of Water constitution will exhibit a relationship to fear that is unusually significant. Fear becomes the predominant emotion of the person's life. The fear will be either very evident or notably absent. Overall, there is something that strikes the observer as not quite right or 'off note' around the emotion of fear.

It must be noted that people who have experienced severe shock or trauma can seem to be Water types. Unresolved traumatic experiences that are held in the bodymind can profoundly affect the Water Element. The emotion of fear can appear to override the emotion of the Constitutional Element. In such cases the other diagnostic tools must be relied upon.

Organs and officials

The organs of Water are bladder (yang) and kidneys (yin), the organs that comprise our waterworks. The kidneys are responsible for controlling the composition and volume of blood by retaining or expelling fluids and minerals, and excreting toxins such as ammonia. The excesses are passed to the bladder which stores the resulting urine until it is expelled from the body. The adrenals are small glands that are located on top of each kidney. While they are a part of the endocrine system, they have an important relationship to the kidneys and the Water Element.



In Chinese medicine, the Kidneys are far more than a filtration plant. They are the storehouses of our *jing* or Essence, both our original Qi inherited from our parents and the Qi we derive from food and breath. The Kidneys also have a direct influence on urination and are seen as the 'gate' which controls this function. Moreover, they control all fluids in the body including the fluids required by other organs such as the intestines, spleen and lungs.

The Kidney official is known as the Controller of Fluids. Kidney is the creator of power, the origin of skill and ability, and the repository of knowledge. This is the yin aspect of wisdom. Its yang counterpart, expressed through the Bladder official, is the clever utilisation of resources stored in the kidneys in a way that will most optimally support progress through life. When these two officials are in balance and harmony with each other, the deep, innate knowing is resourcefully translated into wise living in the world.