

Using Colour, Sound and Odour in Diagnosis

Part 2 of a two-part series on Identifying the Constitutional Element

by John Kirkwood

Five Element acupuncture provides a unique and profound method of diagnosing and treating the core of a person's being. This article is about the use of Colour, Sound and Odour in this process. The method and its principles are readily applicable in the practice of both shiatsu and acupressure.

Introduction

The system of Five Element Acupuncture developed by J. R. Worsley has at its core the principle of identifying and treating what he called the Causative Factor, what others now call the Constitutional Element. This refers to the Element in a person's makeup that is the first to fall out of balance, which when treated, allows all the Elements to return to balance.

There are four diagnostic tools that are the pillars of this method. In the previous article published in *Pointers* Autumn 2011 edition, we looked at the use of Emotion in the diagnosis of the Constitutional Element. Here we will look at the other three tools: Colour, Sound and Odour.

Diagnosis by Colour

Each Element has a particular Colour that is associated with it. Diagnosis by Colour refers to the method of identifying a client's Constitutional Element from the colour in her face. There are a number of places where the Colour is observed — by the side of the eyes, under the eyes, in the laugh lines, and around the mouth.

Of these, the place lateral to the outer canthus is the most important because the Colour is seen there most consistently.

Wood ~ Green

Green at the side of the eyes indicates a Wood constitution, and manifests when the Liver and Gall Bladder organs are chronically out

of balance. There are many shades of green, but the most frequent are blue-green, yellow-green or bottle green.

Fire ~ Red or Lack of Red

Fire can manifest either as too much or too little redness beside the eyes. Lack of Red is more common than Red, and we see it when the usual pinkness in the skin is missing. The face appears dull, bloodless, drained of colour, ashen or grey.

Earth ~ Yellow

The Yellow Colour of Earth can appear as bright canary yellow, or as a somewhat muddy earth tone. It will appear beside or under the eyes and can look like a yellow mask around the eyes.

Metal ~ White

A white colour around the eyes indicates a Metal diagnosis. The White is often shiny and reflective, rather than simply pale. This shininess distinguishes it from the grey, ashen colour of Lack of Red.

Water ~ Blue to Blue-black

The Colour of Water is generally a dark blue, and can be almost black. Occasionally it will appear as a lighter, powder blue.

When there is severe kidney stress, blue will appear throughout the face and should not necessarily be taken as a Water diagnosis. People who are severely depleted by lack of sleep, overwork or kidney disease can appear this way. In such cases, look at the sides of the eyes for confirmation of the Colour.

Tips for Seeing Colour

Practice

It is helpful to practise looking for Colour in many faces. For example, sit in a café and look for the colour in the faces of the people around you. Or sit in a place where a steady stream of people is passing so that you just have a few seconds to register their colour. Sometimes, a quick 'hit' will give you the Colour more easily than careful scrutiny.

Soft Eyes

When we look at a star in the night sky, looking with 'soft eyes' away from the star actually makes it look brighter. The same principle applies when looking for Colour. Look with soft eyes a little away from the face. In the treatment room, the Colour often shows itself when we're not really looking, for example when we're moving away from the client and take a backward glance. As with all the other diagnostic processes, we do better when we stop trying.

Lighting

It is best to observe the client's face in good, natural light. It is much harder to see the Colour in dim surroundings and under artificial light. Position the client in such a way that the daylight shines directly on her face. Ask her to turn her head slowly from side to side so that the light glances off the side of the eye. Be careful not to be confused by the light reflected by clothing. If someone is wearing a bright red top, for instance, this red will be reflected somewhat in the face. Covering the bright colour with a neutral coloured towel can remove this distraction.

Difficult to discriminate

Some colours are very easy to identify and stand out immediately. At other times it's hard to discriminate between two colours. For example, is it yellow or green or a mixture of the two? In this case, we can try to identify the most predominant colour. It may also help to have another practitioner make a Colour diagnosis. If you cannot distinguish between two colours, then using the other diagnostic tools described below might help decide which is the Colour. Is the Voice singing or shouting; is the Odour fragrant or rancid?

Diagnosis by Sound

In Five Element diagnosis, Sound refers to the sound of the voice, which embodies the 'note' of the Element. The voice tone associated with each Constitutional Element carries with it the underlying Emotion (or lack of Emotion) of that Element (see *Pointers* Autumn 2011)

To identify this Sound, we must distinguish between congruent and incongruent sounds as a person speaks. You can hone your skills by listening for these incongruities in everyday life.

You may notice incongruities when the voice tone seems inappropriate to the situation. It may be odd, out of place, or lacking. For example, you may hear a laughing voice in a sombre situation, a lack of loudness in a provocative situation, or a 'singing' voice in a scary situation.

You may also notice inconsistencies between the sound of the voice, the content of the speech, and the emotional state suggested by facial expressions and body language. For example, your client is smiling but her voice contains an unusual amount of emphasis; or she is talking about physical or emotional pain but there's a laugh in her voice; or she talks of having an enjoyable time with family but in a groaning voice; or she talks about being angry but her voice is singing.

The aim in all this is to find the most inappropriate sound in the voice. This identifies the Element most out of balance, which leads us to the Constitutional Element.

Wood ~ Shouting

The Emotion of Wood is Anger, reflected in the forcefulness or emphasis of the Wood Voice. This emphasis comes in bursts like unpredictable gusts of wind, giving the voice a clipped, sharp, abrupt or jerky quality. The Shouting voice may be loud, but not necessarily. Even if the voice is quiet, it will still appear assertive.

Lack of Shout is also a Wood Voice, one which lacks strength and is unnaturally quiet. Significantly, the voice becomes quieter when the person is challenged or uncertain. This voice may not have the strength to reach the listener, and it may be hard to catch what the person is saying.

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Fire ~ Laughing

The Laughing Voice is not an actual laugh, but a kind of pre-laugh, as though the person is being tickled and about to break into laughter. As one would expect from Fire, whose Emotion is Joy, the voice has a bubbly quality, the sound rising upward in the body. Laughter can also reflect nervousness, so we need to beware of diagnosing Fire solely from nervous laughter.

Lack of Laugh is also diagnostic of Fire. In this case, the voice has a flatness, with no sparkle or animation, and can be mistaken for a Groaning Voice. However, Lack of Laugh often shows up as a croaky rather than groaning quality, as if coming from deep in the throat or chest.

Earth ~ Singing

The Singing Voice has unusually frequent and extreme variations in pitch, reflecting the underlying Emotion of Sympathy. For example, it may sound like a mother soothing an upset child, a rider calming an agitated horse, or a person trying to be ingratiating.

Metal ~ Weeping

A client with a Weeping Voice is not actually weeping, but sounds as if she is about to weep. The voice carries an air of sadness, and the underlying Emotion of Grief can create a catch or choke in the voice. The voice tends to tail off in volume at the end of sentences, as if there were not enough air in the lungs to complete the words, and can be light, airy, breathy, thin or quavery.

Water ~ Groaning

While the Singing Voice shows the greatest modulation, the Groaning Voice shows the least. It is often flat or expressionless, with the upper and lower ranges of pitch much reduced. It can sound like a recording on an old, stretched cassette tape, and the end of sentences can drag.

Another expression of the Water Voice is an intense insistence. Both monotone and insistence reflect the underlying emotion of Fear.

Diagnosis by Odour

Of the four principal diagnostic tools, Odour is often the most challenging to discriminate, yet it can also be the most accurate identifier of a person's Element.

Smell is vital to the survival of wild animals, and in humans, this sense is what connects us most directly to our animal nature. It is the sense whose perceptions go straight to the animal brain, bypassing the filters of interpretation that can operate with the other diagnostic perceptions of Colour, Sound and Emotion.

The more the Constitutional Element is stressed and out of balance, the stronger the Odour will be. In a person of balanced health, there is little or no odour.

Wood ~ Rancid

The Rancid Odour arises because the gall bladder organ is out of balance and fats are not being properly digested. The odour can be slightly sour, like sour milk or of butter that has turned.

Fire ~ Scorched

This is the lightest of the Odours. It is like cotton scorched by an iron, dry grass, burnt toast, or clothes fresh from the dryer.

Earth ~ Fragrant

This is not the smell of flowers, but more like fermenting grain. The Odour arises from the smell of incomplete digestion because the stomach is not processing food well.

Metal ~ Rotten

The Odour arises from a colon that is not eliminating properly. It may smell like rotting leaves in the autumn, or like meat that has gone off.

Water ~ Putrid

This Odour arises from the bladder and kidneys not functioning well. It may be like a stagnant pond, or stale wine or urine.

Difficulties in Using Odour

Many practitioners have difficulty even smelling an odour, let alone identifying its Element. As a result, there is often a greater reliance on the other three forms of diagnosis.

Some of the difficulties in identifying Odour are:

Unhelpful labelling

The labels of the five Odours (Rancid, Scorched, Fragrant, Rotten and Putrid) are not very helpful and need a lot of perceptual refinement. What is the difference between rotten and putrid?

Masking

There is tremendous masking of odour from the almost universal prevalence of perfumes in laundry and bodycare products. Even when we ask patients not to wear perfumed products on the day of treatment, scents still accumulate in clothing and hair.

Unfamiliarity

As practitioners in the modern world, we are often out of touch with our sense of smell. We can detect strong smells, such as leaking gas or a burning dinner, but lack of sensing subtler scents has dulled our finer perception. We need practice to get it back.

Strong odours

Strong odours can linger in the nostrils, making it difficult to get the more subtle diagnostic odour we are looking for.

Ephemerality

Odours are ephemeral. Unlike the other diagnostic tools, odour comes and goes. It's here, then it's gone. A number of attempts may be needed to even smell any odour.

Habituation

We habituate to smells very quickly, so if we don't get the odour in the first whiff, we may not get it with subsequent attempts.

Overcoming the Obstacles to Identifying Odour

Practice

Probably the most important activity is to deliberately develop your sense of smell. Smell as many things as you can. Discriminate between, say, the smell of the back of your hand and the front, between a pencil and a pen, or between the cover of a book and its pages. Or go out into the garden and note all the subtle differences in the smells of plants.

Catch it by surprise

It's best to catch the odour when your client first walks into the room, or when she takes off a jacket or sweater. You might also notice it when you lift a blanket that's been covering her. Another technique is to leave the room for a few minutes, sniff the corridor before you enter the room, then sniff the room as you enter, and make a comparison.

Between the scapulae

Most people don't wash very much between their shoulder blades so this is a good place to catch their odour.

Confirmed diagnosis

Try to get a person's odour once you are sure of their Constitutional Element by other means, and over time you will build a 'library' of subtle odours. These will serve as reference points when you are ready to use Odour as a primary diagnostic tool.

Pyjama top

If a client is willing, have her bring in her pyjama top or sleeping t-shirt. Get her to wear it the night before the appointment, and place it in a plastic bag as soon as she takes it off in the morning.

Minimise distractions

Ask clients not to wear scented products to treatment. Remove distracting scents from your office (e.g. candles) and use unscented laundry and bodycare products yourself.

Relax!

Stop trying. As with many of the

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diagnostic tools, we often get there when we are not really trying.

Application of Diagnosis

Treatment typically becomes much more effective when the Constitutional Element is correctly identified and treated. It is my recurring experience that clients who have not responded well to repeated treatment of the meridians of their symptoms can make rapid progress when they are treated in their Constitutional Element.

Classically, we need three of the four diagnostics to agree in order to diagnose the primary Constitutional Element. Once we are sure we have identified it, treatment focuses on the meridians of that Element.

In the early stages of treatment, points are selected almost exclusively from the meridians of this Element. Of particular value are the Yuan-Source points, Luo-Connecting points, Front Mu and Back-Shu points, and the Five Shu (Element) points.

Treatment does not ignore meridians of the other Elements. There is also a need at some point to address the Elements Within. An Element other than the Constitutional Element that is showing itself through a range of symptoms may also need attention. But these other Elements are treated within the context of treatment that focuses on the meridians of the Constitutional Element.

For many clients, treatment in the correct Constitutional Element

results in rapid, sometimes remarkable healing for body, mind and soul. Along with the healing of symptoms, they feel a sense of ease, harmony and relaxation. They feel that they have become more fully who they really are, and that they have truly come home to themselves.

Recommended reading

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