

Wisdom from Traditional Chinese Medicine – the Five Elements Theory

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An excerpt from his book “*The Wisdom of Emotions - Building Genuine Happiness and Finding Inner Peace*,” copyright © 2013. Books available at the offices of Dr. Coppola, or purchase online: www.DrDavidCoppola.com

Traditional Chinese Medicine gives us what is known as the five elements theory to help us better understand the flow of qi (energy) and the flow of life. Presumably, the theory is about how to accept and appreciate change. The five elements theory presents us with an opportunity to reconnect to concepts associated with fire, earth, metal, water and wood. By learning the concepts that arise from the five elements theory, we can better shape our behaviors and more consistently perform acts of kindness and self-love in the New Year ahead.

The five elements are: Fire, Earth, Metal, Water and Wood.

Fire

The element of *fire* reveals to us the modus operandi for living a passionate, fun and exciting life. Fire is a source of rising energy to keep us enthusiastic and stimulated to learn and grow. The positive emotions associated with fire are joy and happiness. The Big Bang Theory, what can be likened to a giant explosion or ball of fire, helps us better understand the formation of this beautiful, breathing planet Earth. As we explode inside, our passions generate energy in the form of self-expression, and our passionate expression (our personality) spreads enthusiasm. Both our energy and our enthusiasm are capable of enlightening everyone who comes into contact with us.

Earth

The element of *Earth* reveals the challenging issues of self-worth and self-trust. When we are focused on what we *don't* want, instead of what we *do* want, we tend to become overwhelmed with anxieties and worries. There develops an intense wanting for things to be different. This whirling sense of longing leads to the depths of hopelessness sooner or later. One of the secrets to building genuine happiness is simply being happy with what you already have. Imbalances in our Earth element lead to feelings of guilt or shame. Guilt and shame are a result of living by someone else's values. Bring yourself to accept and appreciate who you are and what you bring to this world. Find a way to love yourself unconditionally. This is a healing practice that will nourish your heart and soul, and help keep you balanced and grounded on this magnificent planet we call Earth.

Metal

The *metal* element helps us tap into the characteristics of strength, durability, flexibility and longevity. Metal reminds us to be bright and shiny, which means to be smart and project a fun-loving, light-hearted attitude. Our immune system is linked to this element, so nurture your understanding of the concept of bending but not breaking. Viruses and bacteria will be opportunist when we are rigid and rusting with dogmatism.

The flexibility property of metal tells us to be open to what others have to contribute. When we are influenced by a hardened prejudice we are closed off from others and unable to embrace life—in this state, we inadvertently resist change. The characteristics and behaviors I am describing are warning signs telling us to let go and become more flexible with our views of what we consider right or wrong.

Rumi's mystical poetic verse states this eloquently:

*Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing,
there is a field. I'll meet you there.*

He goes on to say:

*When the soul lies down in that grass,
the world is too full to talk about...
even the phrase "each other" doesn't make any sense.*

Be less judgmental and let go of your dogmatic tendencies. Breathe new life as you become more aware of the benefits of accepting others' individuality and how we can cooperatively embrace each other's uniqueness. As we learn to accept others, we can truly appreciate our differences. As you become more accepting you start to be attracted to more and more people. Consequently, you welcome fresh, new relationships that help you learn and grow and ultimately feed your bliss.

Water

There is nothing on this earth that flows like *water*. When we think of the water element and what it can teach us, we need to acknowledge a sense of flow in daily life. Think about a tall cylindrical glass of water filled to the brim. Now, pour that water into a shallow bowl. If we look at the three-dimensional shape the water has taken, it now resembles a welcoming smile. The point is that it is the same water, just a different shape. This is a mental and visual lesson in authenticity. Water is true to itself; it adapts and flows like we do. Be yourself and act out of respect for yourself and those in your presence. There is nothing more beautiful in a human being than his or her ability to be authentic.

Wood

Picture yourself as if you are a tree. Your trunk is your body, you are rooted in your individuality, your branches are your friends and family, and your leaves are your experiences during this lifetime. Imagine now that these leaves

are reflecting upon months of exposure to troubling times, stressful situations and lack of light in your life. Take a lesson from nature. Like the leaves fall in autumn so that new buds can blossom in the spring, so too can you let go of negative experiences and detrimental distractions that block you from feeling joy. Spring will come. You can, once again, thrive. The most important thing I'd like you to take from this discussion is the understanding that your leaves can be transient relationships, exposure to incidents, and touch-and-go moments of awareness. These are processes that take place daily and that foster life. Let go of things or situations that are out of your control.

Make the conscious choice to let go of anger, fear, resentment, hate, jealousy and desire for revenge. These negative emotions will only prevent you from blossoming into the kind-hearted, compassionate, healthy, hopeful and attractive human being you were designed to be.