

***Some basics about the 5 Elements ...*** The 5 Elements are a crucial building block of acupuncture theory. It was originally a philosophy on life and how the world works before it got integrated into medicine by the ancient acupuncture philosophers. The philosophy follows the cycles of the seasons, taking into account that we are a part of nature and have the nature of energy flow through us. To understand this idea a bit deeper, please read my primer on fractals.

***Wait, 5 elements but only 4 seasons?...*** In acupuncture we recognize the 5th season as “late summer” which stretches from August to September in the northern hemisphere. You know the season has arrived because the air gets very humid and many plants begin to bear fruit. I like to think about how the first tomatoes tend to come in around mid-to-late July here in the northeast of America. I’ll explain soon how this is representative of resonating with the energy around us.

***Emotions, flavors, virtues, organs, and other associations...*** If you look in any 5 Element acupuncture textbook, you would read about each element and the ways that they resonate their energy. There are many of these associations, but I’ve tried to limit them here so as to not overwhelm you with things that aren’t readily useful. It’s wonderful that the color of the Water element is blue, but that isn’t immediately useful when it comes to your quality of life. Sure you could use a blue gem or blue tapestry to enhance the water areas for feng shui purposes, but that’s something for another article.

***The cake is your constitution and the icing is your trauma/learned behavior...*** There is a popular style of acupuncture on the east coast of America called Constitutional Five Element Acupuncture. In it, the goal is to determine the patient’s constitution and treat there, helping bring the entire person into a better place. This constitution is the lens through which we view life. It helps explain why one person may prefer a certain flavor or another person may have their body weakness in their colon. Our constitution gives us our base. It’s who we are deep down.

The issue is that despite our constitution, life happens and we are forever scarred in good and bad ways because of it. Due to trauma, we may present very differently, purposefully hiding our constitution because we seek to hide the trauma. You may be a Fire constitution and desperately want to connect with a partner, but a sexual trauma may cause you to present as Water, causing you to live in fear. This is just one example.

You are your constitution deep down, and it’s our dream to live through our “first” element. It’s where we feel the happiest and most comfortable. It’s our greatest strength but also our greatest weakness. The layers of icing on top are there because life is complex. Under stress we tend to live in our “second” most comfortable element and in even more stressful situations we can flip our lens into the other ones of the hierarchy. This information can be very useful when trying to figure out why a partner or friend is stressed or not acting like themselves.

***The Fractal Energy Balancing system focuses more on the icing than the cake...***

Determining someone’s constitution can be a great piece of information, and for many of us, our constitution tends to match our first layers of icing. When someone needs help or is in crisis

mode, I've found it more productive to treat/help people with what element is presenting at the exact moment, and that many people purposefully protect their constitution when meeting me for the first time. If you are talking to a friend and giving advice, you'll want to help them with the problem at hand. Treat what is happening in the here and now.

***The organs of the body resonate with the elements...*** There are 12 traditional acupuncture organs. The Fire element has 4 organs and the rest of them have 2. Why? I have no idea. In my book, I've also included 2 more organs but gave them no elemental association. Each organ represents the yin and yang of the element. For example, the organs of the Wood element are the Liver and the Gallbladder. Both have to do with growth and forward movement. The Liver is the yin organ and represents the planning and the Gallbladder is the yang organ and has to do with executing and acting in this moment right now. Please read my primer on yin and yang if you need more clarification.

***A corporate analogy to help you understand the role of each organ...*** In certain modern versions of acupuncture, the role of the organs focus on how they interact with energy in the body. For instance, the Liver is in charge of the smooth flow of qi and blood. If you are stagnant and have pain or irritability among other symptoms, stimulating Liver qi can help with that.

In the Fractal Energy Balancing system, I chose to focus on how the organs interact with our everyday emotional lives. How we interact with the world. In some of the first ancient acupuncture writings, the organs were given a role. For instance, the Liver is the "General of the army" and the Heart is the "Monarch". This felt very antiquated to me so I've updated this analogy into a modern corporate structure. The Liver is the "CEO" and the Heart is the "Owner." The owner is the Heart and soul of any company, and the CEO makes the plan for the direction of the company.

### **Let's hear about the elements already!**

***Water...*** The Water element represents winter, fear/vigilance, wisdom and where ideas germinate. If you were to walk out into the cold, all thought goes out of your head and the only thought is "it's cold." Now imagine trying to survive a long cold winter in a small village without heat or other modern amenities. This is the energy of Water and why it resonates with the emotion of fear. There's fear of physical safety, which is the job of the Urinary Bladder – Head of Security. It makes sure you and those you care about are safe and resonates with the emotion of vigilance. Without vigilance, someone is likely to do something unsafe and hurt themselves. The other organ is the Kidney - Accountant. The accountant's job is to make sure the company doesn't run out of money. They approve ideas that generate money and negate ideas that take a loss, at least to the best of their ability. Now imagine trying to survive a winter with only a certain amount of stored food. That's resource fear. The most common resources that create Kidney disharmony in today's society are money, energy, and time.

The wisdom and idea piece is based on the idea that the Water element is the beginning and end of the cycle. We are born in water (the uterus) as was life on earth. Wisdom comes from the

fact that after a cycle, you have gained experience and extracted valuable lessons. This helps you do it better the next time. If you were running out of food in the winter you would be planning on how to do it better the next year, yes?

**Wood...** The Wood element represents spring, anger/frustration, kindness and growth. Think about the excitement of that first warm spring day. You walk outside and see the first flowers coming out of the ground. The sun finally feels warm enough to melt the snow. You survived the winter and now it's time to get working on next year's harvest. This is the energy of Wood. Anger and frustration come in when your work and growth get blocked. You want to move forward and someone is not letting you. GET OUT OF MY WAY! This is more the energy of the Gallbladder – Branch Manager. It's trying to execute the plan of the Liver - CEO, but something is not letting them. This frustration is more in the moment and tends to resolve once the block is removed. Anger is more about altering the plan of the Liver in order to spite someone else. Anger is a more deep-seeded energy, typically starting with a traumatic event in our life that gets warped until it gets taken out on other people in different ways.

The kindness piece is based on the idea that our growth can be mutually beneficial if we help others and vice versa on the way. You might hold a grudge on someone but once you take the perspective (another key Wood resonance) that they are struggling to make it just like the rest of us, that anger and frustration dissolves and you may even help the other person. Competition can be good but cooperation can be better.

**Fire...** The Fire element represents summer, joy, propriety and communication. The weather has become hot, the crops are flowering, it's time to relax. We might even bust out the instruments and play a little concert! This is the energy of Fire and why it resonates with the emotion of joy. The Small Intestine - Director of Talent Acquisition, has done its job of making good choices. We worked when it was working time, so now it's time to relax. If we continue to make the right choices, we will sleep properly and wake up refreshed and ready for tomorrow. If we make poor choices, like drinking too much alcohol, we will suffer the consequences tomorrow. The Triple Warmer - Public Relations Officer, helps us utilize this joyous time to spread our warmth. We make sure all of our loved ones get the love and attention they need. Everything is in balance. This helps the Pericardium - Executive Secretary, to find the emotional trust with those around us to truly enjoy the moment. We might share a deep thought, or find a life partner. These are the wondrous things that can happen when we allow ourselves to open up and fully trust someone. To truly find peace, the Heart - Owner, must be present and in a good place. Then our spirit can find it's own peace and that feeling can resonate to those around us.

The Fire element really is about that flowering time of life. We go out and party a little too hard, dance like we mostly don't care who's watching, and are not only trying to find the love of our life, but also trying to find out who we are deep down. What makes our spirit feel both alive and settled at the same time. Imbalanced Fire can cause people to be too open or too closed. The communication becomes inappropriate, opening us up to criticism or shame. This is the propriety piece, which is doing the right thing at the right time. Imbalanced Fire has a tendency

to have poor timing, or saying one too many things, or making an inappropriate joke. This can cause the emotion of joy to become imbalanced. Yes, you can have too much joy. In context this looks like someone who goes on binges, whether it be partying too much, spending too much money, doing too many drugs. They are looking for that endorphin release but nothing seems to make them feel fulfilled, just temporary excitement followed by emptiness.

**Earth...** The Earth element represents late summer, worry/overthinking, boundaries and caretaking. The plants have borne fruit and it is time to harvest. All that hard work is finally going to pay off. Very few things are perfectly ready to go right off the vine. Many foods need processing, and this is the job of the Stomach - Warehouse Manager to do this processing. This processing may look like husking grain to make it edible, or it may be pulling the cart of fruit to market to turn it into money. Processing takes one thing and converts it into another. In the body, the Stomach helps break down and process food so energy can be extracted. The Spleen - Office Manager, on the other hand, processes as well, but solely focuses on the self and family. Loved ones. It doesn't worry about making money or the outside world. It makes sure people are fed, well rested, and taking care of themselves. The Spleen understands that the best tool we all have is our bodies.

Boundaries can be difficult for the Earth element. When we deeply care for a loved one (especially a dependent like a child or pet), we worry about them constantly, hoping they are in good health and good spirits. Their attitudes and struggles very frequently breach the boundary between us and them, ruining our day and causing us to forget who we are. Our happiness runs in line with their happiness. In balance, we should be there to support them and catch them when they fall, but also give them the freedom to run and be their own person. Worry has the ability to cripple us, causing us only to think about that one issue in a circular pattern with no breakout in sight.

**Metal...** The Metal element represents autumn, grief, acknowledgment, and inspiration. The crops have been harvested, the leaves are starting to fall, it's time to clean up and prepare for the winter. This is the job of the Large Intestine - Cleaning Crew. Finding waste and shedding it, hopefully in the proper manners. There is grief in this cleanup because the season is now gone, we must live with the outcomes, those moments are now gone. Still in cleaning up, we find inspiration for how we can do things better the next time around. This is the job of the Lung - Head of Human Resources. We acknowledge the things we did well and the things we did poorly. It's not an act of self-deprecation, but rather an act of reflection, trying to be better the next time around.

Acknowledging others is a critical role for the Metal element. Ultimately, people want to know their lives have meaning, and acknowledging with gratitude is one of the best ways to do this. As well, it's an important role of a balanced Metal element to do it because it's simply the right thing to do, and for no other reason at all. The most common imbalanced way this comes across is for personal gain and greed. Think about a time someone gave you a kind word, or even a small gift, just because you've been doing a great job or being a good human. That's the power of acknowledgment for the right reasons.

***The Elements in Action...*** Thinking about the elements on a theoretical basis is wonderful, but the idea of farming is probably going to be foreign to many people. How do these elements show up in our everyday lives? As people, we resonate the elements, and we should resonate them all. Most people have one or two elements shine through on a normal basis. It is the lens in which we see the world. As I mention them here, note that this could be a constitutional way it shows through or a person simply living in a moment where the element is coming to the forefront.

Watery people will be intense. Fear drives them. Running out of money or food is a very real thing to them. The world ending is a very real possibility to them. On the other hand, they may have no fear at all and a full blown live-for-the-moment attitude that is all about finding an adrenaline rush.

Woody people will be motivated or unmotivated. They will wait for their opportunity to grow and seize it with the ferocity of two lions competing over a gazelle. The world is one big competition to them, and they will win. On the other hand, without anything to gain, Woody people will choose to walk away and find another place to get their dopamine fix.

Fiery people will be fun and playful or sad and lonely. Life is about finding pleasure and having a good time. They will work hard in order to play hard on the weekend. They will buy their friend that extra drink when their friend won't indulge. They will think that the love of their life is just around every corner. Fiery people will be the ones playing music to liven up the party. On the other hand, being alone can be very difficult for them, as they need a warm body to feel loved and happy. The endorphin rush is real for these people and they will get it somehow.

Earthy people want to take care of you and be taken care of. They want a good meal to go with some snuggling and a strong community. It's about helping each other and being there to support one another. They want reciprocity too: I do for you and you do for me. That way, everyone wins and grows strong together. There's comfort in a strong community and a good serotonin release makes you feel that satisfaction.

Metally people will be respectful. They will honor tradition because that's the way it's done. They will find meaning in everything they do, even if it's why they watch a particular movie on a particular day of the year. They will not understand when other people do not have respect for the rules and traditions and they may tell you about yourself. Metally people also have a healthy respect for being clean and organized, and the GABA release from cleaning up is cathartic to them.

***Summing it up...*** The 5 elements are a fractal and hopefully you can see how I'm using a few key energetic resonances and scaling them up in all the ways. All the Earthy things go together. It's the Earth's energy resonating in all the ways. It's the same for the other elements. You may know someone who is very Earthy as a constitution, but you also may know a Water constitution

who has little kids and a dog who is going through their Earth time of life. The pattern is the same no matter what and our bodies, emotions, and even living spaces will reflect this.

The 5 elements is one of the key energetic pillars from which many other energetic lessons stem from. Learning them in depth can help make sense of this crazy world we live in.

***Want to read more?...*** Please order my book, Fractal Energy Balancing, to read more on the 5 elements and how they relate to the organs and your body, mind, and spirit.