

Introduction to the Five Element Tradition Of Classical Acupuncture

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Five Element Acupuncture as presented in the Classics of Chinese medicine, is based upon the concept that the primary cause of any illness is a disruption in the harmony of the body/mind/spirit in that individual.

Therefore, great attention is given to the thoughts and feelings of the patient, their social and medical history, relationships with others, the degree to which they are realizing their goals in life, their personal self-esteem.

In the Ling Shu, Chapter 8 (Henry Lu's tr) Qi Bo says: "The laws of acupuncture dictate that needling should be, first and foremost, based upon the spirit..."

The five elements can be thought of as a mechanism for classifying all phenomena into separate categories, each of which share some kind of mutual resonance (similar to, for, eg. the way in which cold, dark and wet are all associated by resonance to Yin). Therefore, wind, spring, the color green, the odor rancid, etc. are associated by resonance to the Wood element. Each element has its own set of associations.

There is a Yin and Yang aspect to each element, each of which is referred to in Ch 8 of the Su Wen as "Officials of the realm". These officials govern not only the functions of the physical organs after which they are named, but also include a variety of non-material functions, such as our ability to make decisions, express love, have insight, etc.

In the modern world, where most of us have adequate food, clothing and housing, our persistent susceptibility to both acute and chronic illness is more a reflection of the emotional damage transmitted through our minds and spirits, than through whatever may attempt to attack our bodies. The factor that determines this susceptibility or lack thereof is the constitutional strength of the individual on a body, mind and spirit level and their subsequent ability to resist external influences.

Physical symptoms are regarded as red flags alerting us to a deeper imbalance which must also be addressed before health can be restored. Treatment planning involves choice of points based on the individual needs of that specific patient, rather than the use of formula points for specific conditions.

Consequently the role of mind, emotion and spirit is extremely important in the Classical System of Acupuncture.

THE MAIN CORRESPONDENCES OF THE FIVE ELEMENTS

ELEMENT:	WOOD	FIRE	EARTH	METAL	WATER
Yin Organ	Liver	Heart & Circulation/Heart Protector	Spleen	Lung	Kidney
Yang Organ	Gallbladder	Small Intestine & Triple Burner	Stomach	Large Intestine	Bladder
Season	Spring	Summer	Late summer	Autumn	Winter
Color	Green	Red	Yellow	White	Blue/Black
Sound	Shout	Laugh	Sing	Weep	Groan
Odor	Rancid	Scorched	Fragrant	Rotten	Putrid
Emotion	Anger	Joy/Lack of	Sympathy	Grief	Fear
Sense Organ	Eyes	Tongue	Mouth	Nose	Ears
Physical manifestation	Nails	Complexion	Lips	Body Hair	Head Hair
Nourishes	Sinews and membranes	Blood and Blood Vessels	Flesh & Muscles	Skin & Hair	Bones & Marrow
Body/Mind Affect	Planning & Decision-Making	Circulation, cognition, wisdom, meaningful relationships, homeostasis	Grounded, Centered, Digestion, Nourishment, thought, Qi distribution to muscles	Respiration, inspiration, receiving pure Qi, letting go of waste, immune defense	Fluid storage, energy reserves, controls 2 lower orifices, controls body fluids
Spirit Affect	Hun: smooth flow of qi; inspiration, insight, introspection	Shen: Quality of life, individuality, awareness	Yi: intent, meaning, sentiment	P'o: instinct, vitality, capacity for movement, balance & coordination	Zhi: Will, memory, data storage, drive, origin of skill & intelligence