

Autumn Season, Metal Element

August 7th - November 6th 2017

Background: Chinese Medicine and Daoist philosophy looks to nature to understand health and harmony. The ancients witnessed that all living things are dynamic and interdependent. The seasons progressing naturally into one another is the basis of the Five Element Theory. The five elements, or active phases, are Wood (Spring), Fire (Summer), Earth (Late Summer), Metal (Fall) and Water (Winter).

Autumn is the season of celebrating the fruition of summer's growth, as well as the season of turning inward toward winter preservation. It is a time to gather and enjoy the harvest, while it is equally a time to sort, organize and prepare for the cooler months ahead. The sun is more gentle, the air is more crisp and dry, the sky is at its most brilliant blue, and the leaves turn into colorful gems and then fall before our eyes. The languid summer months have come to a close and we return to our more rigorous rituals and consistent routines at school, home and work.

During this season, the *qi* of nature descends toward earth. The sap, the life-force of the trees, withdraws from the leaves and branches to return and collect in the trunk and roots. Likewise, the *qi* in human beings pulls inward from the extremities and descends into the **Lung Network**, which includes the Lungs, Large Intestine, nose, nasal passages, trachea, and skin. The function of the Lung Network is to regulate and distribute *qi* to the whole body (respiration) and to relate to the external environment-- bringing in what's needed, as well as defending against pathogens and toxins and eliminating that which we don't need. In the cooler days of Autumn, it is common for people to be more vulnerable to colds, bronchial infections and sinus issues. Also, people can experience bowel disturbances, particularly constipation, as the environment and our bodies become more dry. Therefore, during this time it is important to support our Lung Network by eating well, staying warm, engaging in regular exercise, practicing inward reflection and boosting our immune system.

In Chinese Medicine, Autumn is associated with the **Metal Phase**. Metals are formed deep inside the molten, pressurized earth through a process of separation and purification. The Metal Phase is a time of letting go of what's not needed in order to essentialize. The Chinese character for Metal, *jin*, represents a precious treasure or jewel hidden underground. In accordance with this phase of letting go and essentializing, Autumn is a good time to reflect on our lives, looking with discernment at what we choose to nourish. Are there any destructive habits we can become more mindful of so that their grip on us can lessen? Is there clutter in our physical space that can be sorted, or projects that can be completed? How are we living in accordance with our core values and how are we falling short? These are questions that can guide our process of refinement and individuation, getting us closer to our own inner gem.

Another aspect of Autumn and the Metal Phase is the emotion of Grief. Letting go of the expansiveness of summer as well as eliminating behaviors that aren't serving us can leave us with feelings of loss. Sadness, nostalgia and depression are all feelings associated with this time of year. The invitation of Autumn is to welcome our grief as a natural process. Remember this medicine: *Emotions are meant to be felt, not held onto*. So, if there is grief in your experience, honor it by giving it space to be and eventually, to move.

How to Live in Harmony with the Autumn Season

Breathe: Autumn is a time of cleaner air days here in the Bay Area. Appreciate the air quality. Can you feel the clarity with all of your senses? Inhale deeply and exhale completely.

Boost Your Immune System: The pollens, mold and colder winds of Autumn stress our immune reserves, making it a good time to support the immune system with a few herbs and supplements. Speak with your acupuncturist for suggestions.

Stay Warm: It is important to dress appropriately with warm layers for the season. The Chinese are particularly aware of the importance of wearing scarves to cover the neck, especially when wind is present. In Chinese medicine the wind is known as the 'carrier of one hundred and one evils' and invades the body through what are called the 'wind' points which are located on the neck and shoulders. Wearing wool socks to protect the ankles is also recommended.

Move: Take walks in nature to strengthen the Lungs and revel in the season's colors. Practice qigong or other mindful movement to turn inwards and sense what is present in your experience as you move.

Sort, Clear, Eliminate: During these months you will want to prepare for winter by completing unfinished projects, repairing broken items, clearing away clutter and debris from your gutters, garage, closets, desk, medicine cabinet, etc., bringing out the sweaters and scarves, canning or storing food, and making sure that you are prepared for the colder, darker months to come.

Meditate, Reflect, Journal: During this Metal Phase when essentializing takes priority, it is a time to turn inward and reconnect with something deeper inside yourself. Take time each day- in whatever way feels true for you- to turn toward yourself gently and with curiosity to notice what's there. Look and listen with your whole being.

Nutrition: Autumn is a wonderful time to reap the benefits of the warm growing season of spring and summer. It is a time to decrease the salads and increase the soups and stews. In general, foods should be cooked longer and at lower temperatures and cold drinks should be eliminated altogether. Avoid or reduce congestants: sweets, excessive meats, cheese and breads. Eat foods that nourish the Lung Network: Downward-growing roots and tubers like carrots, potatoes, yams, onions, turnips, beets; Foods that grow close to the ground like pumpkins and squashes; Seasonal fruits like apples, pears and persimmons; Some sour foods like yoghurt, citrus, sauerkraut, olives, vinegar; Dark leafy greens like bok choy and mustard greens; Pork and organic liver (beef, lamb, pork).

Hydrate: The Autumn season is marked by dryness. It is important to re-hydrate yourself by drinking plenty of water each day. Water helps our body eliminate what's not needed. So sip frequently! Eat foods that help generate fluids: turnips, honey, lemon, congee, sesame seeds, tomato, seasonal fruits, especially asian pear. Avoid foods that injure fluids, such as barbequed and spicy foods.

Sleep: Rise early and retire early to nourish yin.

Sources

<http://fiveelementhealing.net/>

Wood Becomes Water: Chinese Medicine in Everyday Life by Gail Reichstein

Qigong Through the Seasons by Ronald H. Davis

The Way of the Five Elements by John Kirkwood

The Way of the Three Treasures by Liu Ming