Exploring Qualities of the Metal Element during Autumn by Kate Mansfield

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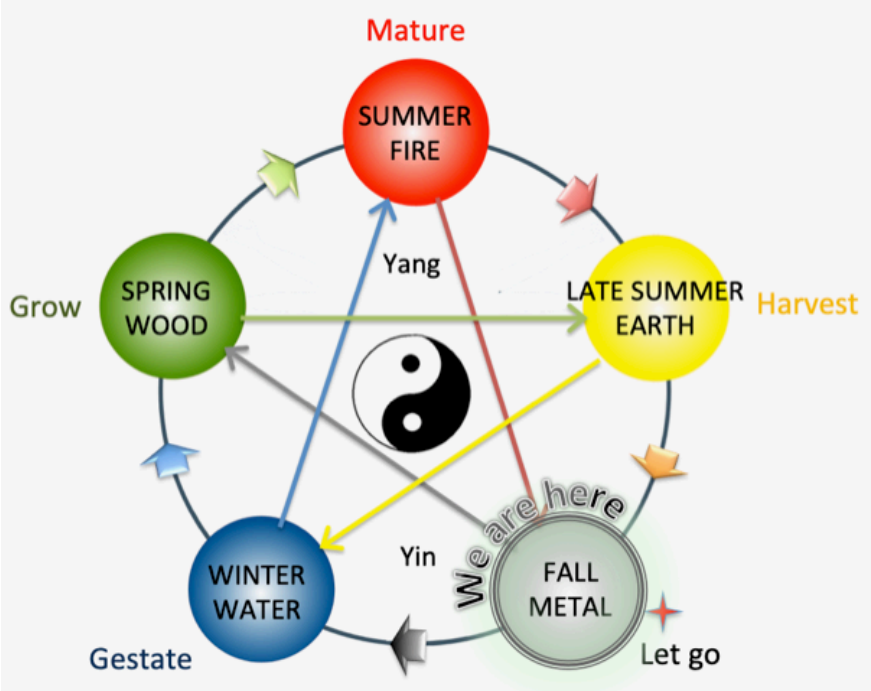
The 5 Element system tells us that in nature, water, wood, fire, earth and metal rotate through a 'creative' cycle, which can be observed through the seasons: winter, spring, summer, late summer and autumn. As we are part of nature, this same cycle exists within us. There is also a 'controlling' relationship between the elements, as indicated by the arrows across the circle in the diagram below.



Let's consider the relationships between the dominant metal element of autumn and other elements.

Earth creates metal – earth contains minerals from which metal is mined and extracted. It is the quality of earth that helps us to feel grounded, centered, stable and secure. If our earth energy is healthy and balanced, it will create the best conditions for healthy metal energy. Earth essentially 'nourishes' metal.

Metal creates water – you can think of this as water collecting on a metal surface as a result of condensation. The right conditions need to be in place for this to happen, so if our metal energy is healthy and balanced, that in turn will 'nourish' our water energy.

Fire controls metal - think of how metal, when heated, becomes soft and pliable. So, a little warmth can help soften us too when we are overly hard or rigid.

Metal controls wood – like pruning back something that has overgrown, or pruning to create new healthy growth.

Through the 5 element cycle nature finds balance by continually giving rise to change and transformation. When we understand this, we too can find more balance by embracing change and transformation in our lives.

To understand the metal element, we can observe how it manifests in nature. Right now, nature is preparing for winter. Trees are dropping their leaves, and sap is being drawn back inside. Nature is letting go of what it doesn't need, so it can survive through the long, cold, dark winter months. Yet the power of new life is within the tree that is prepared for winter, it retains the essence of life.

It is important to note that all the elements are functioning within us at all times; however, seasonally the energy of one element is dominant. When we tap into the seasonal energy and understand its place in the natural cycle within ourselves we can utilize this to support our health and wellbeing.

Our free drop-in qigong [https://www.taichifoundation.org/free-live-online-classes] classes and the 'White Crane Breathing' autumn tuning [https://taichituning.com/] are great ways to work with the seasonal element of metal. Rather than repeat what you may hear in these classes, I'd like to invite you to explore the quality of metal through the imagery of a posture called 'Astride the Tiger', and associated movement called the 'Jade Walk', both from our 5 Element Qigong practice developed by Gerrie Sporken and Pat Gorman. If you aren't familiar with these, come along to one of our qigong classes (link above) to learn them.

As the name indicates, in Astride the Tiger, we are riding a tiger. Our weight is fully in one leg spread evenly over the whole foot, and the other leg is resting on the ball of the foot, empty. We align ourselves between heaven and earth, feeling the stability of the earth beneath our feet, centered in the dantian, and connected to the heavens above by the bai hui point on the top of the head. One arm is positioned with the forearm upright, palm facing away, representing serenity & fearlessness.

Photo by Kartik Iyer on Unsplash

Metaphorically, the tiger can represent any situation we encounter. We are riding the tiger because we have tamed it, we do not need to fear it or control it, and we can let go and go along for the ride.

Consider a situation in your life where you are 'holding on'. It is likely that this is the sympathetic nervous system at work, attempting to protect us from a perceived threat, but is this helping? What ideas, beliefs about a situation can be released, let go?

Once we pay attention to our physical state we have the power to let go of unconsciously held tension, and the energy of metal can help us do this. Metal returns us to the intrinsic nature of things, the essence of life. It gives us clarity, and provides the space for inspiration.

We can hold 'Astride the Tiger' with the weight on the left leg or the right leg, and switch from one to the other. The 'Jade Walk' takes this into a continuous movement, but why does it have this name?

Jade is precious. It was traditionally collected by "jade pickers" in Asia who wandered the shores of dry riverbeds picking up stones washed down from the nearby Jade Mountains during the spring floods.

Jade is a symbol of serenity and purity, of wisdom gathered in tranquility. It helps you to let go of old ideas you may have been clinging to, and is associated with confidence, acceptance and health. You can have these qualities in mind while you practice the walk. We allow the empty foot to gently feel for the cool jade along the river bed. Perhaps the jade represents all that is precious in our lives.

With the help of the metal element we start to let go physically and mentally, and we feel lighter. Where there was striving there is now effortlessness, through alignment and unity. We are light and agile, we have internal balance, we are fearless, we are calm.

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