



Enriching the Spirit Within: Understanding Metal Element

Vicky Iskandar

Autumn begins on August 7th in the Chinese calendar, a season dominated by Metal element. As we move into the height of the season in September, notice the subtle shift in the air, with the vibrancy of summer's expansive *Yang* giving way to cooling *Yin* that turns us more inward.

The Chinese Five Element system regards humans as part of nature. Each one of us is a unique embodiment of the five elements — Wood, Fire, Earth, Metal and Water. From the time we are born, the elements within are constantly adapting to seasonal changes in the external environment, affecting the state of our mind, body and spirit. We thrive when we follow the flow of nature.

Whereas summer, a season ruled by Fire element, is a time of joy and celebrations, autumn is a time of inner power and reflection as we harvest the growth of summer and clear away what no longer serves us.

The Qualities of Metal

The least understood element in the Chinese Five Element system, Metal is also the most out of balance in our modern society, in part because Metal itself is associated with spirituality and clarity of the mind. An imbalance of Metal in one's internal environment can contribute to grief, unhealthy attachments,

inability to focus, lack of empathy and sharpness of words. Metal is cold to the touch, after all. Imagine a sharp blade — you can use it as an effective tool to clear the path or as a weapon to destroy, but you will not be able to make much use of a dull blade.

When we think of Metal, images of steel and knives may come to mind. Hard and sharp, they represent the masculine quality of Metal. Shiny gold jewelry, on the other hand, symbolizes Metal's feminine quality and is associated with beauty and the planet Venus. Putting these qualities together gives us a sense that Metal is the element that cuts and clears but also charms and captivates. These are the more tangible aspects of Metal.

There is also a mysterious, spiritual quality to Metal. Metal element, which is produced by Earth in the Five Element cycle, surrounds Earth above and below. The I-Ching trigrams for Metal are most revealing in their meanings: Yang Metal is depicted by three solid, all-Yang lines, representing Heaven, light and the sky, while Yin Metal, which stands for the Lake, is one broken *Yin* line over two solid *Yang* lines — the lake's surface a reflection of the sky, and its bottom a portal to the depth of Earth.

A quote from mystic poet Kabir perfectly summarizes the heavenly essence of Metal: "God is the breath



inside the breath.” It is the breath that connects us to Spirit and calms the mind. In Traditional Chinese Medicine, Metal is associated primarily with the lungs as well as the head, nose and skin. Those with strong, healthy lungs are highly focused and able to fully experience grief, while those with weak, congested lungs, due to an imbalance of Metal element, usually tend to hold on to old grief and have trouble letting go of attachments.

Whenever you experience profound awe and wonder or feel a strong presence of Spirit, you are sensing Metal. A mountain covered by mist and clouds,

ary 5, 2018, has been dominated by Earth element, which helps us ground and manifest, but can also feel too oppressive and overwhelming when out of balance. Earth element is associated with sweet foods, muscle tissues, cancer cells and the belly — it is critical that we stay away from food high in sugar as the heaviness of the year easily affects the physical, emotional and mental body.

We can breathe a sigh of relief in the second half of the year, as starting in August, Metal’s enlightening quality lifts away Earth element’s heaviness, offering a time of clearing away summer’s excess.

We thrive when we follow the flow of nature.

where Heaven and Earth meet, is rich in Metal element. This is why ancient monasteries were built on top of the highest mountains in China — spending time on a mountain close to the clouds helps bring out one’s connection to Spirit to the highest.

Finding Clarity

As Earth produces Metal in the Five Element cycle, we must be grounded and centered before we can obtain clarity associated with Metal element. Studies have shown that gut health (related to Earth element) affects mental health. Eating warm, Earth-element foods such as carrots, squash, grains, rice and root vegetables not only nourishes the digestive system but also feeds the mind and spirit.

To harmonize with the energy of the season, add food associated with Metal into your diet and incorporate a mindfulness practice in your daily routine. Metal element foods are pungent in taste and can be found in ginger, garlic, horseradish, hot peppers, chilies, daikon, kimchi, scallion and herbs and spices such as cilantro, coriander, turmeric and paprika. Pungent spices wake up the senses and are used to move energy internally or disperse excess energy out of the body.

Elemental overview for September and October 2018

The Chinese year of the Dog, which began on Febru-

September 8th takes us into the second month of autumn in the Chinese calendar, a time of *Yin* activities, clarity and stillness. Metal element is now at its peak — strengthen the body with heartier foods that are cooked slowly to bring energy up to the surface. Protect the lungs from respiratory infections with pungent foods to balance the contracting, shifting energies of the Metal season. Adding spices to soups and stews not only enhances the sense of smell and improves flavors, but also helps clear up nasal passages.

October 8th brings us into the last month of autumn, when *Yin* dominates, a time to slow down and conserve energy. October is also when trees, associated with spring’s Wood element, shed their leaves to save energy and prepare for winter’s cold. As we are affected by the elements of the season, we must also let go of unnecessary activities. Include the taste of sour associated with Wood element from lime or lemon in your diet to strengthen the elements within.

Balancing the Spirit

Autumn is the season to slow down and tune in within, in preparation for winter’s cold and stillness. Self-care is key during this season of withdrawal: treat yourself well and retreat often to replenish your energy. Clarity comes only when there is inner peace.

Commit to a diet rich in Metal and Wood-element

foods to help feed the spirit within. Metal and Wood are the elements that lessen 2018's strong Earth energy. Metal enlightens and disperses, while Wood uplifts. Nourish the lungs with a regular Qigong practice or breathing exercises such as pranayama.

As the season progresses deeper, add more bitter, warming foods (associated with Fire element) and salty flavors (associated with Water element) to soften the hardness of Metal and prepare the body for winter, when the stillness of *Yin* takes over. €



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Reiki for My Mother

Carolyn Chilton Casas

Wishing to unwind her life,
unfurl her troubles and fears,
she lies down on a warm spring afternoon,
semi sleeping, hand resting on her beloved black cat.

Seated by her side, my hands radiate
warmth above the part of her where I was formed,
a conduit connected us then, her body offering
the nourishment needed for my unfolding.

Now, I seek to be the vessel that conducts
a flow of sustenance to her. Leaving the two
serenely snoring, I rise with care to allow their peaceful rest,
these minutes spent together a blessing surely long held in
my heart.



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