



# New Year, New Beginnings: Flourishing in the Year of the Pig

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**F**ebruary 4th, 2019 is the first day of the year of the Earth Pig in the Chinese solar calendar. Based on the Chinese Five Elements system, the solar calendar has been used as a guide by emperors and royal advisors in ancient times and by the Chinese diaspora in today's world for insights into how to live in balance with the environment. The elements, which are Wood, Fire, Earth, Metal and Water, are dynamic and represent the natural world with constantly changing compositions that are specific to each moment in time. The lack or excess of certain elements and their interactions with each other during the year can provide us with stories and images to look forward to.

## Outlook for the Year Ahead

Whereas the year of the Dog in 2018 was dominated by heavy, pure *Yang* Earth, associated with mountains that also bring to mind images of blockages and stubbornness, the year of the Earth Pig in 2019 is a softer blend of *Yin* Earth on top (the “heavenly stem”) and *Yin* Water, the main element of the Pig, at the bottom (the “earthly stem”). In the Chinese Five Elements system, Earth and Water are not in a supportive relationship. Water becomes muddy when you put soft soil on top, indicating a year when conflicts and confusion easily arise. It is also a year to tread carefully and look before you step forward as

appearance can be deceiving.

*Yin* Earth is the element of Mother Nature. We can expect environmental issues to take center stage, especially those affecting our water supplies, oceans and forests, as the Pig also contains *Yang* Water — associated with oceans, seas and rivers — and *Yang* Wood, associated with trees and woodlands. Since we are part of Mother Nature, it is our responsibility to nurture and treat our natural resources with respect, instead of just seeing nature as something to exploit, so that we can create a sustainable life for future generations.

2018 was a transitional year for many, with changes starting to take place but the new has not fully arrived yet. The *Yang* Earth element within the Dog, after all, was a creature of habit and resistant to change. With the arrival of the year of the Pig, the first of five consecutive years dominated by Water element, these changes will be implemented throughout the year duration, leading the world to the beginning of a new phase. How it affects us individually, of course, will depend on our unique environment, constitution and our own free will.

Self-care for, and awareness of, our own bodies is equally important as our connection to our inner and physical selves reflect our personal relationship with Mother Nature. Maintain a diet of clean, organic food



to bring your spirit closer to the spirit of the land. Recent studies have shown that those who frequently eat organic foods have a lower risk of developing cancer, which in Traditional Chinese Medicine is associated with an imbalance of Earth — the dominating element of 2018 and 2019.

Since Water represents fear in the Chinese Five Elements system, it is essential that we work on cultivating inner joy (associated with Fire element) and transforming any anger into compassion (associated with Wood element) to keep the heart and mind open and our vision clear. A regular meditation

The month of the Ox is a transitional period of winter turning into spring. The elements are changing from late winter's mix of Water and Earth into spring's burst of Wood, with *Yin* (darkness) surrendering to *Yang* (light). To balance and center the body and mind during this changing of the season, add Earth element foods. Root vegetables such as burdock roots, carrots, sweet potatoes and sweet rice comfort the stomach and help bring warmth and grounding.

An imbalance of Water element, associated with winter, can bring fear, seasonal depression and moodiness. We all need a dose of fear to motivate us to act.

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practice will keep us centered and grounded, which is necessary for navigating through the year's challenges and confusion.

### **Winter Ends: Stoking the Inner Fire**

January takes us into the month of the Ox — the last month of winter in the Chinese calendar. While the rest of the world celebrates and makes their New Year's resolutions in January, those in the Chinese diaspora will be tending to end-of-year traditions in preparation for the Chinese New Year in February. In the last two weeks of the month, a thorough cleaning of the house will be done — a symbolic ritual of clearing away what no longer serves to make space for the new.

With the coldness of *Yin* starting to decline but still dominating the season, it is best to stay warm and keep the inner fire strong. Taking in some sunshine and cooking your food are two simple ways of bringing Fire element into the body. Warm the soul with hearty soups, stews and braised winter greens. Add Fire element foods that are bitter in taste such as dandelion greens, celery and bitter melon to help reduce coldness and strengthen the heart, mind and spirit.

Fear, after all, is what helps us survive. Too much fear, however, can harm the kidneys — the organ associated with Water element — and cause us to become stuck in a downward spiral, unable to act. Nourish the kidneys by adding salty flavors from miso, tamari, seaweed and gomasio (a blend of sesame seeds and sea salt).

### **Spring Begins: Reinventing the Self**

February 4th takes us into the month of the Tiger — the start of the new year — and the first day of spring in the Chinese calendar, which is a season ruled by Wood element. This is the time to get active again and do more *Yang* activities after winter's quiet.

If you have always found it hard to keep your New Year's resolutions, try changing your timing this year. Visualize and write down your intentions for the year ahead on February 4th. Observe how synchronizing with the elements can make a difference as January's Water-dominated month is a time of retreat and contraction, whereas February, the first month of Wood season, is a time of growth and renewal.


Wood is the element of vision, expansion and com-



passion. Associated with the color green, sour flavor and the liver, Wood has an upward energy that uplifts and supports; imagine a tree growing and leafing out toward the sun each year after being dormant in winter. We, too, tend to get more physically active as we shed the heaviness of winter and adjust to the brightness and expansiveness of spring.

Eat more greens to balance the body with the Wood season. Cook your food lightly at higher temperatures to enjoy the full vibrancy of spring produce. Sour ingredients such as vinegar, lemon and lime help boost the flavors and qi of seasonal vegetables. To bring harmony to the liver, add mildly pungent herbs and spices such as dill, basil, turmeric and ginger, associated with Metal element, and reduce the salty foods of winter, especially for those affected by anger-related disorders. A healthy liver helps bring a positive outlook, a calmer mind and better decision-making.

Having a clear vision, associated with Wood element, is key to growth in the year of the Pig as the prevailing Earth and Water elements are muddy and unstable. Wood also produces Fire in the Chinese Five Elements system, meaning everyone needs to turn any worries and fear into productive action.

2019 is the year to start planning for your own sustainability, gain a deeper connection with yourself and Mother Earth and do your part in contributing to the world at large. Every little step makes a difference. 



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