

Acupuncture and Chinese Medicine Newsletter

By Bob Shapero

Welcome everyone. This is the first rendition of a on-line newsletter that I hope will be useful and supportive in helping us stay balanced in a challenging world. I intend it to be brief (no one likes to read long pieces via e-mail) and hopefully available about 4 to 5 times a year. Those of you who are receiving this are mostly past or present clients of mine. If you find this worth reading and would like a friend or relative to also receive it, please feel free to forward their e-mail address to me (obviously with their permission) or have them send it themselves.

Most of what will appear here comes from the perspective and wisdom of Chinese Medicine. If there are certain topics that you would like to see addressed in this short format, please let me know. The same goes for suggestions for improvements. If after receiving this you prefer not to receive it again, simply reply by e-mail to that effect and I'll remove you from the list. I know everyone is deluged by e-mails so I hope this will be short and sweet enough to make it easy to peruse.

Chinese medicine utilizes several paradigms in helping human beings understand themselves in relation to their inner world as well as to the outer world. One of these major models is the cycle of the 5 Elements. These elements have correspondences with the cycles of the seasons as well as with different physical, emotional, mental and spiritual aspects of our being. It's useful to pay attention to the qualities of the element of the season. Currently we are in winter, which corresponds with the water element. Throughout most of human history we lived in agrarian cultures. Winter was a time of resting after the busy autumn of harvesting. Winter is a time for gathering reserves, going inside, being more quiet, like resting in the deep stillness at the bottom of a lake. The kidneys are associated with the water element. They have to do with both our deep reservoirs of energy as well as dynamism of energy in action. The winter is the time for the kidneys to gather the energies so that when the outward movement of spring comes, our tanks are full and available to fuel our creative activity, just like in nature.

In the Chinese medical classics it is said that in winter one should go to bed earlier and wake up later. One should act as if one has no interior plans or intentions. This obviously is not how we live our lives in this culture at this time, yet it is useful and important to honor these qualities in ourselves that are called forth by the season. Winter can be a time when we build in more meditation and contemplation into our daily lives. It is said that the virtue of the kidney energy has to do with our will. This refers to both our "active" will that propels us to act in the world and accomplish our inner intentions, as well as to our "receptive" will that allows us to listen to the depths of the unknown within us. We are said to "hear" our destiny in this silence. In winter the receptive will is emphasized. This is the journey into the darkness (winter is the darkest season), that place in us that has no words, that can only be heard by letting go of our preconceptions. It is learning how to rest in the

unknown with a presence and alertness that responds to the music of silence. This seeming oasis can be disconcerting to our hyperactive minds that churn out a seemingly endless cascade of thoughts, projections, concerns, worries, frustrations and fears. Winter can be a time to cultivate the “Tao,” or the ever present awareness that infuses all our activities yet itself is untouched by the outward swirl of life.

In closing, even if we don't chose to create longer chunks of time to meditate and cultivate stillness in this time of winter, we can touch that well deep inside of us many times during a normal day by utilizing our breath. One suggestion is to several times a day just stop whatever you're doing for a few moments, close your eyes and take a few slow, deep relaxed breaths. As you do this feel the quiet space between the end of the exhalation before the next inhalation. Wait in this silence for a moment. Let the urge to inhale arise naturally when your body is ready. This space between breaths is the same space between our thoughts and by some is seen as the same space between life and death. From this space, if we listen with sincerity, we will hear the singing of our souls.

By the way, don't forget to have a few good snowball fights, drink hot chocolate, maybe read a novel and even sip some brandy in the presence of good company.