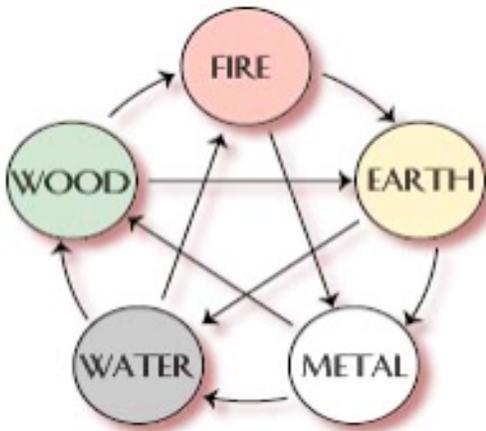


A Heartwood Experience

Hello, I am now back here at Warabe Mura after a very worthwhile educational 7- month jaunt in the US. The main part of my time there was spent studying whole food nutrition and health from both a western and eastern perspective TCM, (Traditional Chinese Medicine) at Heartwood Institute with Paul Pitchford and other instructors. The Asian Healing Arts & Whole Foods Nutrition Program covered various aspects of TCM that included five-element theory, eight principles and the twelve meridians, explained briefly in the following paragraphs.

Five elements theory has its origins in early Taoist philosophy, which divided the world into 5 elements. In TCM these five elements exist in everything, everyone, and are essential for life, with each element designated individual attributes and properties. The 5 elements are Wood, Fire, Earth, Metal, Water and are generally presented in a circle showing the interrelationship that each element has to each other, together making up an integrated whole. The two main cycles are the creation or generating cycle (outer circle of arrows) and the control cycle. According to the theory, Wood promotes Fire, Fire promotes Earth, Earth promotes Metal, Metal promotes Water and Water promotes Wood. In TCM each of the major organ systems is assigned an element. Wood is the element of the Liver, Fire is the element of the Heart, Earth is the element of the Spleen, Metal is the element of the Lungs, and Water is the element of the Kidneys.

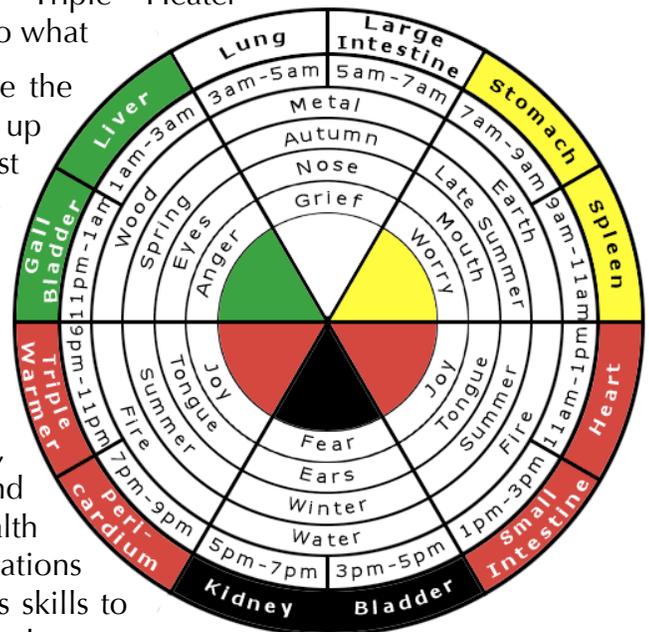


The eight principles is the most common method of diagnosis in TCM. The four Yin & Yang pairs are used help assess the nature and location of the disharmony in the client and then steps can then be taken to balance the disharmony; i.e. strengthen what is weak, cool the hot, moisten the dry, and so forth. The 4 pairs are: Excess & Deficiency – Internal & External - Hot & Cold - Damp & Dry.

The 12 basic meridians are the Liver and Gall Bladder meridians, the Heart and Small Intestine meridians, the Spleen (-Pancreas) and Stomach meridians, the Lung and Large Intestine meridians, Kidney and Bladder meridians, and the Pericardium and Triple Heater (Warmer/burner) meridians. The other 2 meridians belong to what

the Chinese call "The Strange Flows" meridians. These are the Governing Vessel - which runs from the base of the spine up the midline of the back and over the head to a spot just above the upper lip - and the Conception Vessel – that runs from the perineum up the midline of the front of the body to the chin.

In the programme various assessment skills and techniques were taught to assess imbalances and disharmonies within the body. That included full Zen Shiatsu bodywork skills, in-depth interview skills: lifestyle, diet, illness histories, etc., alongside pulse, tongue, face and nail diagnosis to give a more accurate overall picture of health of the client. The Zen Shiatsu, along with subtle palpations techniques, was taught not only as assessment tools but as skills to harmonize and tonify the imbalances and disharmonies found.



The Nutrition course covered foods, herbs and spices needed for balancing the eight principles and harmonizing the 5 elements and meridians. During the program emphasis was placed on the mindful eating of simple and wholesome foods and herbs as essential parts of the healing path. The foundations of whole foods nutrition were presented and taught, including the latest research on fats & oils, carbohydrates, proteins, sugars, super green foods and other topics.

Heartwood is located in a beautiful mountain setting. The location of the Institute is in Northern California 30 km from the nearest town. Isolated I was, I had no real distractions. It was study and more study. I do not think without living on campus and having my meals provided that I could have covered the amount of material that needed to be covered within the 6-month time frame given. Exhausting is the only word that comes to mind. The course has now been wisely extended to a 9-month program.

The food was excellent with at least 95% of the food served being vegan and organic. Our diet consisted mainly whole grains and local produce with some of the fresh fruit & vegetables being home-grown coming from the permaculture gardens at the institute. Most of the breads available at the school were whole grain, baked on the premises and varied from yeasted to the more complicated natural leavened and sprouted breads, even sprouted kamut and spelt pizza bases.

A typical school day for myself would start at 5:30AM with yoga, tai chi, or chi qong followed with meditation. That would take me to 7AM. I would then go and eat breakfast, generally an amaranth congee. Class started at 9AM so I would grab what books were needed and to class I would go! The school week would start from 9AM on Monday and finish Thursday 6PM. With Friday, Saturday and Sunday being free days to do assigned homework and bodywork sessions or if you felt inclined you could race southwards down route 101 to San Francisco for 6 hours for a weekend in the city. I often found very little time left for myself other than schoolwork so not much racing down to the city. The most demanding part by far was the human sciences; musculoskeletal anatomy physiology classes and digestive sciences. Tests were given most weeks.

There were daily classes in either yoga, tai chi or meditation offered that were open to all staff, faculty and students at different times of the day. Often on weekends adjunct classes were offered such as reiki, hot stone massage and Bach Flower Remedies, even sweat lodges.

For myself the most outstanding part of the course was the excellent shiatsu and the integrated TCM classes. My actual intention of attending Heartwood was to study whole food nutrition under Paul Pitchford. He has an amazing wealth of information and has blended the latest in Western nutrition and married it very successfully with 5 millenniums of Oriental healing practises. His book *'Healing with Whole Foods'* is testimony to that. I found myself very drawn to the bodywork modalities, shiatsu and the adjunct therapies that I took in Reiki and Cranial Sacral Therapy. I never imagined the changes that can take place simply by being present, holding space, and being immersed and focused on the task at hand of giving bodywork, could bring about such profound changes, and dare I say, healing in the recipients. I soon realized how closed my mind was to energy work, seeing it as no more than fluffy woo woo, new age nonsense. It was a humbling experience. There is so much to this life, to healing, to being vehicles, conduits for healing, I cannot find words to do justice to what I experienced and continue to experience. It reminds me of a sentence that I once read many moons ago that stated that *'It is the loving care of the caregiver that heals, not the medicines, potions or herbs given!'* Truly, we are spirits in the material world.