



Moving Through the Seasons of Life

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In every culture and in every medical tradition before ours, healing was accomplished by moving energy.

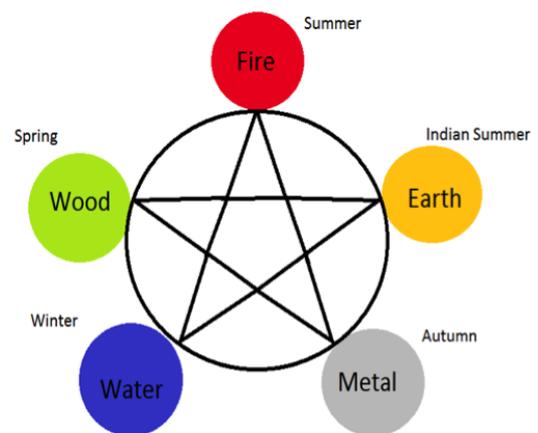
— Albert Szent-Gyorgyi, Biochemist and Nobel Prize Winner

I believe movement to be one of the greatest forms of healing. Memories of trauma can be trapped within our cells for years until they are released by some freeing cure. Yet, at other times, they may stay there forever, never inspiring us to learn our lessons, possibly leading to debilitating illness and perhaps even death. Pioneer dancer, Martha Graham said that the body never lies. Our bodies hold secrets to everything we need to know—they house our lessons and challenges in life. If we learn to listen to this sacred vessel and meet its messages, life can take on greater depth and fullness. We can be freed from our own limitations and evolve in life, flowing with more happiness and joy.

Our ancient ancestors knew that movement was a form of natural healing. As a community, they danced through birth, death and every emotional storm in their lives. They would embody and mimic the illness of the sick person within the tribe and then, shake and shimmy it out, releasing the demons of the disorder. Through every passing season, primitive people moved with the rhythms of nature, and in dancing prayer, they reached ecstasy to connect with their own Divine Source.

More than 5,000 years ago, the ancient Chinese knew this secret, too. They were so connected to nature that they began to acknowledge that there were five major rhythms, or elements, that we cycle through in life. When they followed the messages of these rhythms, they were able to

stay in healthy balance within their lives. The five rhythms they observed in nature were Water, Wood, Fire, Earth and Metal. They created a wheel, symbolizing the cycle of the seasons, as well as the cycles of life through death. Within the wheel, nature's rhythms flow from Winter, Spring, Summer, Indian Summer and Autumn and then continue all over again the following year. From this wheel, they began to establish the structure of the Five Elements used today in Traditional Chinese Medicine.



Looking at the Elemental wheel as a compass for our lives, we can easily move through these rhythms creating a flowing dance through life's cycles. Energy is always shifting



and moving; it is the way of life. If we get stuck at any stage on the wheel, we create blockages in our life, sometimes resulting in health issues. When we dance and move, we tap into the divine mystery that is connected to our own Divine Source. Using movement as a medicinal tool, moving through the Five Elements can be a therapy for staying healthy within our physical, emotional and spiritual being.

It was said that Socrates learned to dance when he was seventy, because he felt that an essential part of himself had been neglected. – Source Unknown

As a dancer, I have been teaching the Five Elements for over 17 years through the power of movement within the

to be reached. They go silent and feel alone and may have a hard time finding their words. Fear begins to rule their world and then they do not move forward, but freeze in their tracks. Working with the emotion of courage through organic movements like super hero poses, grounded stomping and stepping forward can counter-balance this opposing emotion for fear.

The natural movement for people who resonate with the Water element is inward-type motions, as they dive into their own expressive dancing prayer. They flow slowly and follow their own energy. The natural fluid movements for a Water Element are Tai Chi, lyrical and modern dance. Waters also gravitate towards the water as a physical element,

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international workshops and certification program of my mother, holistic health pioneer Donna Eden. Within this article, I would like to share with you the descriptions of the rhythms through their archetypal movements and how we can dance within our element in order to evolve and flow through the cycles in life.

We all have each of the Five Elements within us, yet one or two elements show up stronger within our own personality and reflect who we are to the world. Naturally, we may find ourselves gravitating to a type of movement that resonates with our own body type and rhythm. Sometimes, the challenge will be to dive into a rhythm that is unfamiliar to us or difficult, but if we do, we shift our consciousness and stay more balanced in health.

Water Element

Let's begin with the first element of Water. This is the beginning of life, where we all start as babies needing to be taken care of and supported. This is also the exciting place of beginning new projects. Like a toddler, we are learning to walk and move forward despite our fears. Fear is the ruling emotion for Waters—people who resonate most with the Water element—and can freeze them in their tracks so they do not move forward on their life's path. Like the season of winter, Water element people hold an inward nature to their personality; they are quiet. Everything may look still above the surface, yet so much more is alive beneath it. Being inward, they have incredible imaginations and can think creatively out of the box. However, many times they get so stuck in the depths of their souls, they cannot seem

as well. Swimming, boating, canoeing, water aerobics—any movement in the water is healthy for their well-being and can move their energy forward from a still place. Waters usually have a slow walk, as if floating down a river on a lazy day. In my dance workshops, we improvise and dance our emotions of life's experiences. With colorful veils, my Water students find this type of kinesthetic dance releasing for them as they find a form of moving expression to break free from their trapped depths. The organs/meridians that rule Waters are the bladder and kidneys. Waters usually hold water (edema) within their bodies and movement can help free their circulation.

Wood Element

Looking at the next place on our wheel, we come to the element of Wood. This is the stage in life that symbolizes the rebellious adolescent, when children are establishing their ego of who they are. This is also the season of Spring when nature's flowers burst forward from the earth with gusto. People who resonate with the Wood element are great at setting boundaries and can take care of themselves. Anger and frustration are the controlling emotions for Woods and the ruling organs/meridians are the gall bladder and liver. Woods tend to address issues quicker than most so anger does not stick with them, yet they can also hold grudges for a very long time which brings toxicity to the body. Forgiveness is a great lesson for Woods and can be an intention for channeling their expressive movements to counter-balance the emotion of anger. Martial arts can be a natural movement for them and is great for releasing inner frustration issues. This ancient art form also requires mas-



tery, discipline and a little competition, which Woods love.

Within my dance classes, I bring in strong world drum rhythms. To move with the clear drum beats, one needs to accent the beats with the body. This is not about flow and glide, like the Water rhythm—it is about setting boundaries with controlled movements. Woods like to have control in their world and move forward in their life, conquering their goals. Mimicking this, students move with strong hip movements, kicking obstacles out of their way, clearing a path before them. Wood bodies tend to have no curvature, but square forms and shorter legs. They make muscle easily but can also get tight and rigid in their body, especially in their joints. When they hold onto anger and frustration for too long and do not bend, flow and let go, they could develop arthritis later on in life. Woods need to move to release these emotions.

Fire Element

Coming to the Fire Element on the wheel is the place of high summer where everyone wants to be outside at summer parties and celebrations. Fires are like puppy dogs at a party, who flit from one person to another, joyously loving everyone. They really are the life of the party! Fire people love to move, dance, fly and jump. With energetic music or passionate Latin beats, Fires will laugh, smile and dance freely with wild abandon to salsa, African or energetic aerobic dance. This place on the cycle of the wheel is also the place of the teenager, who is a flux of mixed emotions. Fires are addicted to drama and when drama runs high, stress sets in and too much panic (their ruling emotion) can take energy away from the adrenal glands. Fires are the ones who juggle many things in their life. Like an octopus with many arms, their energy goes everywhere and they need to be aware of “adrenal burn-out” more than other elements. Joy is the counter-balance to this emotion and dancing is a natural joy and release for them. Rather than exploding with fiery dramatic outbursts, expressive movements help Fires free trapped emotions from their body. Fires’ bodies usually run high with heat naturally and they can get very hot when dancing. Triple Heater and Circulation Sex are the meridians (energy pathways) that the Fire element governs to regulate body temperature and hormones. Fires’ energy also governs the organs/meridians of heart and small intestine.

Earth Element

Let’s now talk about the Earth rhythm which arrives in Indian Summer, towards the end of summer. Imagine a

pregnant woman swaying with ease and groundedness as she walks. This is the energy of the Earth herself and the rhythm of the archetypal Mother. Earths take their time and like to hold a balance in their life. Like a good mama, they make sure everyone has what they need. Earths love medium-paced music and movements that are not too jarring. A nice reggae 4/4 beat makes them feel at home, where they can just sway to the music. Being barefoot and connecting to nature through movement is natural to them and makes them feel alive. Earths also like to connect to community through gatherings. Earths love world dances that include tribal connections that come from the everyday activities of people in nature, celebrating transitions in life. Cultural earth and folk dances, such as belly dance, contra dance, Hawaiian and even some easy African or Brazilian 4/4 beats, are perfect for them.

One of the governing emotions for Earths is worry. They worry for everyone and everything in their life and end up giving too much of themselves, forgetting to give back unto themselves. The mirroring emotion of worry is compassion for themselves. Signing up for a movement or dance class would be a great place to start, when they can take time away from their husband or families for some loving time for themselves. Earths, who have a little more curve in their body, also need to learn how to really love and feel good within their skin. Belly dance, African and Polynesian dance all are great dance classes for curvier Earth women. As I always say in my own belly dance classes, the more you have, the better you will move!

Metal Element

The final element we come to on our wheel is Metal, which arrives with the season of Fall when the leaves fall from the trees. Metal’s energy is about coming to the end of a project, letting go of a relationship and surrendering aspects of our life that are no longer needed. The Metal

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Element person gravitates towards movements that stretch their lean and thin bodies, such as yoga, ballet or meditation. Metals like to be still, organized and contemplate their inner thoughts, so yoga is perfect as it follows a series of set movements in stillness and breath work. The yogic connection to breath work consciously exhales anything that is not needed for them and deeply inhales clean, good oxygen to help detoxify the lungs. This is a perfect movement as lungs are the organs/meridians governed by the Metal Element.

The ruling emotion for Metals is grief and they can sometimes hold onto unexplained grief for the world, never finding joy in life. The mirroring emotion for grief is trust and to have faith on their life's spiritual path. Metals are perfectionists and it is very hard for them to let go of control; therefore, they can hold onto old patterns and beliefs. Movement can really help move this stuck energy out of their body. Metal also governs the large intestines, which is about release and holding on too tight. The movement and metaphor of stretching with yoga is perfect.

The ending stage of Metal, where we rebuild ourselves back up only to begin again in the new stage of Water, is one of the most difficult places in life to be. Many people struggle with this transition and cannot get back into the flow of new beginnings, only to stay in their old lifestyles, never moving forward in life, for years.

*Come dancing to divine knowledge. . .
and come, return to the root
of the root of your own self.
– Jellaludin Rumi*

Donna Eden tells us that movement creates more oxygen in our body and then our brain begins to create new synapses of new thought. Movement and dance used as a spiritual practice can help move our energy forward with consciousness. Dancing organically through the stages of life can connect us with our own essence of who we really are.

Within this article, we have observed, learned and danced around our Five Elements wheel. Now, you may have a feeling of the rhythm you are and may want to experiment with these tools of movement to help shift you in your daily practices.

Energy never stops—it is always flowing and changing

through the cycles of life. A moving practice can be used as a sacred tool for coming to know yourself and supporting where you are in the cycle of life. When we learn to move and flow, let go and begin again, dancing through the wheel of life without holding on and resisting, our lives become easier and we begin to know what it truly means to be alive.

Within this first article, we have explored each of the elements and their natural movements in the flow of the Five Elements cycle. In the next article, I will suggest exercises that will help balance your body rhythms. I will also talk about moving into rhythms that may be challenging to you but if practiced, will be very good for bringing balance to your physical, mental and emotional growth. As we learn to shift and stretch, we evolve and grow on our life's path. 



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