

Spirit – dictionary definitions...

- ❑ The vital principle or animating force within living things;
- ❑ Generally understood to refer to the path of awareness;
- ❑ (a) relating to spirit or sacred matters; (b) being connected to the essence of self, others and life; (c) an experience of coming home to self and connecting to others;

Harmonious Life achieved through Traditional Chinese Medicine by Lee Butler

Traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) is inextricably bound with Taoism - a philosophy which promotes living simply and in harmony with nature. Taoists' believe that by following the natural world, pursuing a healthy diet and practicing meditation and breathing exercises, we will attain a better state of health, develop greater self-awareness, and enhance our personal spiritual growth. This has been termed living a 'harmonious life'.

In Chinese medicine we believe that each of the organs is related to an element. Each element has an emotion and a spiritual aspect associated with it. Each of us has the five elements within us, though in different ratios – some of us might be more of a 'Fire' type person than any other element, whilst others might predominantly be a combination of two or three. This is known as 'elemental typing'.

| Element | Organs | Emotion | Spirit Translation |
|---------|-------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------|
| Fire | Heart & Small Intestine | Joy/mania | <i>Shen</i> Spirit |
| Earth | Spleen & Stomach | Worry | <i>Yi</i> Intention |
| Metal | Lungs & large Intestine | Grief | <i>Po</i> Corporeal Soul |
| Water | Kidneys & Bladder | Fear | <i>Zhi</i> Will |
| Wood | Liver | Anger/Frustration | <i>Hun</i> Ethereal Soul |
| | Gall Bladder | Courage & Decisiveness | |

In one respect, elemental typing is very similar to astrology, with each element type having specific characteristics and traits associated with it. However, within each of us, each element plays its part to a larger or lesser degree, helping to maintain harmony within the body.

In the above chart you can see that the word ‘soul’ appears twice. This is because there are two aspects of the soul recognised in Chinese medicine. Whilst the other ‘spiritual’ aspects are important to us, the focus of this article is the *Ethereal Soul (Hun)* of the Liver and the *Corporeal Soul (Po)* of the Lungs.

Keep a flexible mind for a healthy Liver (the *Hun*)

The way we regard the Liver in Chinese medicine is quite different to that of Western science. The liver is said to have many functions, one of which is to house the ‘The *Hun*’ or ‘*Ethereal Soul*’. The *Hun* is said to be the mental spiritual aspect of the liver, which survives death and flows back into the world of non-materiel, subtle energies. ‘*Here it reports to the spirits that preside over destiny, on the degree to which each of us has cultivated virtue in our time*’¹

Ancient texts suggest that if the liver is in disharmony, this may manifest with restless sleep with frequent, vivid dreams – essentially a restless spirit.

Flexibility is said to be the challenge for the wood element. Flexibility to recognise and accept the things we cannot change, flexibility to experience life, but not to become stagnant and let things fester. Just as in nature, the Wood tends toward hardness and inflexibility – anger and stubbornness. However nature has taught us that the tree that survives the strongest wind, is that which bends with the wind rather than standing solid and upright in its path. In humans the ability to know when to yield and when to press forward is the wisdom required to grow spiritually. This then is the life-challenge of the wood element.

‘Letting Go’ key to healthy Lungs (the *Po*)

The lungs are said to be home to the Corporeal Soul’ or ‘Po’. This part of the soul is said to be more physical and materiel than the Hun² and when we die, it dies too, leaving the body and rejoining the Earth.

The challenge of the metal element is to maintain an appropriate relationship with longing and grief. ‘...grief and longing drive the lung and large intestine officials to inappropriately hold onto or let go of what is valued in life’⁴ What do we mean by valued? What is important? ‘The Po gives us awareness of the physical body, of our own aliveness and the physical rhythms of our bodily life’³

Live Life ‘in the now’ to Nourish the Corporeal Soul

The above quote suggests that the awareness of being alive is what is important for the corporeal soul. The awareness of ‘being alive’ is quite different from being aware that we are still alive. The awareness of being alive means to experience to the full, that which is ‘here and now’ - whatever emotion we feel, should be expressed rather than repressed or ‘held onto’

If the Corporeal soul demands of us to ‘live life’ or even to ‘love life’, then this should not be too demanding for any us surely. However all too frequently we let everyday things ‘get in the way’ and forget to experience ‘the now’. The lungs extract

qi from the air we breathe. A deep breath into the abdomen- a breathing in of life – is essential to the harmony of the lungs, refreshing our internal environment and nourishing our Corporeal soul.

Think Positively and Selflessly Perform Good Deeds to Nourish the Ethereal Soul

How do we ‘cultivate virtue in our time’? The Oxford English dictionary defines virtue as ‘goodness’ or ‘moral excellence’.

In Taoist thought, the process of ‘doing good deeds’ for society (and for people) whilst not seeking reward or acclaim, is called Hidden Merit, also referred to as Hidden Virtue. The accumulation of hidden merits then, is the way to cultivate our virtue. Indeed, Ikuro Adachi, director of The Institute of Form-Undulatory Energy (IFUE), believes that our degree of harmony with the universe is measured by one’s selflessness – the more selfless the greater degree of harmony. Besides selflessness, Mori⁵ states that, the more positive thoughts we have, as well as the more good deeds we do, the higher our vibrational wavelength becomes and the closer we become to fulfilling our potential and nourishing our Ethereal soul.

Maintain a healthy Qi (pronounced Chee)

As our vibrational wavelength becomes higher, our *qi* is clear and flows freely. We may though, find it hard to keep up the momentum of positive thought and good deed, and thus prevent further spiritual progress, or we may become ‘bogged down’ with feelings of frustration or resentment toward someone or something. Both of these scenarios will create stagnation in the liver and generalised stagnation and pollution of our *qi*.

As we become ‘bogged down’ our vibrations lower and our *qi* stagnates, ‘polluted’ by negative feelings. Left untended this disharmony will lead to illness.

For those used to the practice of meditation, this discipline can provide a way of ‘moving on’, though in some cases a little external help may be required. Acupuncture helps move liver *qi*, restoring the body’s natural rhythm and our ability to ‘move forward’. As our *qi* starts to flow smoothly again, we are more able to gain a fresh perspective on the issues that first caused our disharmony and once again proceed on our journey.

The inappropriate holding onto what is of value in life, will lead to a disharmony in the lungs. Again, acupuncture can help one to ‘let go’ by nourishing the lungs and restoring their harmony. Abdominal breathing exercises, such as those practiced in Yoga and Qigong, encourage us to drink deeply from the cup of life, and the ‘out breath’ teaches us to let go. This enables us to regain a state of harmony, and brings our intention to being fully alive.

Increase the awareness of being alive

In *qigong* (Cheegung) - the practice of Chinese meditation and energy cultivation exercises - we believe that one of the easiest ways to nourish our *qi* (and our soul) is

to look at each day as if it were the first we had seen, smell each smell as if for the first time, hear the subtle noises of birds and trees and relish the sensation of touch.

Whilst meditation is of great benefit to many, the word appears to alienate and confuse some of the patients I see, who tell me they do not 'know how' to meditate. My advice to them is to sit or stand quietly, clear their mind and then practice the above. No effort is required, no mantra's, no special positions or locations. In this way we each can nourish our spirit, regardless of where we are. The essence is not to 'do', but rather to 'be'. Be present in the now, in every single aspect, let the sensation wash over you like a fresh shower on a warm day. This then, is practicing the 'awareness of being alive'.

The challenge is not to 'do' meditation one or two days a week, but to make 'the awareness of being alive' a part of every day and of every opportune moment.

The essential message is, that we should do all that we can to embrace life fully. But we should also not forget that an essential part of our 'journey' here on Earth, is to help others, to contribute positively to the world we live in. As we help other people, we cultivate virtue, but importantly we also help them in their own journey, to experience their 'now' and cultivate their own virtue.

Being fully alive and selflessly helping others can be seen as practicing Love – Love of life and Unconditional Love of others. Hardly surprising then, that Ikuro Adachi believes that love increases our vibrational wavelength.

Now when you help someone, think about that warm feeling you get – that's your Ethereal soul finding nourishment. Never miss an opportunity to nourish your Souls, this is our life's work, the work we were meant to do

"...we live in a universe where the whole is in all the parts, and therefore all parts are as important as the whole. Everything affects everything else. This is a basic reality that we need to understand. We cannot grow by hindering the process of others.⁷ *Mayumi Mori*

¹ Jarret L (1998) *Nourishing Destiny*. Massachusetts. Spirit Path Press

² Maciocia G (1989) *The Foundation of Chinese Medicine*. London. Churchill Livingstone

⁴ Jarret L (1998) *Nourishing Destiny*. Massachusetts. Spirit Path Press

³ Leggett D (1999) *Recipes for Self Healing*. Totnes. Meridian Press.

⁵ Mori & Debuque (1995) *From I to We*. Yokohama. New World Group