



The Five Elements

The five element theory developed alongside um / yang (yin / yang) and provides further explanation of the way ki energy is manifested in the physical world. Ki occurs in five phases, characterised as Wood, Fire, Earth, Metal, and Water. The theory is a way of understanding how energy transforms from one state to another.

Each element is attributed various characteristics and is deemed to govern different aspects of the body and emotions. Both yin and yang qualities occur in each element.

Wood

Associated with rising yang, it is characterised by growth and upward movement. When wood predominates, a person is assertive and organised, but may be prone to anger

Fire

This represents the peak of yang energy. It embodies emotional warmth and joy, over excitability and agitation

Earth

Defined by increasing yin, the element is associated with ripening and nourishment. Predominance of this element gives a person the capacity for concentration and listening, which can lead to anxiety and mental anguish.

Metal

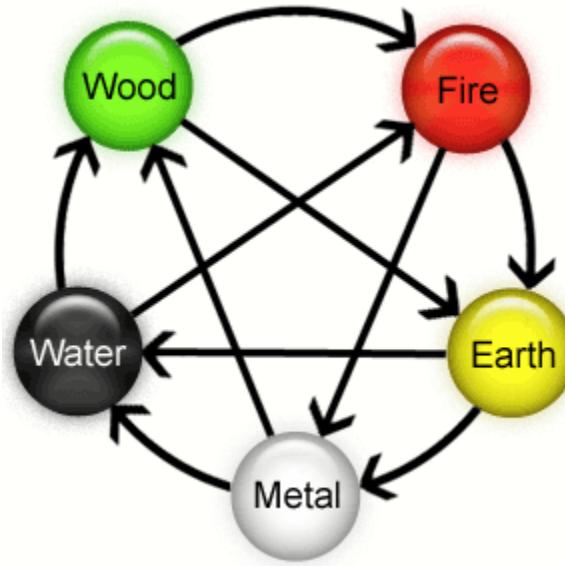
Predominantly yin, metal represents a boundary or point of change. In human terms this is positively characterised by good communication together with a sense of individuality, but more negatively, sometimes by reserve or withdrawal and defensiveness.

Water

The element of maximum yin, water always sinks to the deepest place. It stores power and the potential for growth. It can flow with great force and so implies strength of will and self sufficiency, but may also lead to fear.

The Cycles

The Five Elements also relate to each other in terms of cycles or phases. In a balanced environment, there are two cycles that work harmoniously.



The creation cycle

This is shown in the diagram by the arrows forming a circle through the elements. The creation cycle says that Metal creates Water which creates Wood which creates Fire which creates Earth which creates Metal. Various metaphors exist to explain this cycle (for example water droplets can form on a metal surface so we can say Metal creates Water in the form of condensation, Water is necessary for trees to grow thus it creates Wood, Wood is burned to create Fire and so creates ash which becomes Earth from which we mine Metal). Another way to think about the creation cycle is in terms of movement — as each movement exhausts its potential, it must transform into a different movement to avoid stagnation.

The controlling cycle

The controlling cycle exists to ensure that no element gets out of hand (in the diagram, this is shown by the crisscrossing arrows inside the circle). So Metal controls Wood, Wood controls Earth, Earth controls Water, Water controls Fire and Fire controls Metal. Again metaphors exist to explain this (a Metal axe chops trees or Wood, the roots of the trees or Wood bind the Earth, the Earth contains and controls lakes or Water, Water quenches Fire which is used to help shape Metal).

The Cycles

	Metal	Water	Wood	Fire	Earth
Season	Autumn	Winter	Spring	Summer	Late Summer
Environment	Dry	Cold	Wind	Heat	Damp
Yin Organ	Lung	Kidney	Liver	Heart	Spleen
Yang Organ	Large Intestine	Bladder	Gall Bladder	Small Intestine	Stomach
Direction	West	North	East	South	Centre
Taste	Pungent	Salty	Sour	Bitter	Sweet
Sense Organ	Nose	Ears	Eyes	Tongue	Eyes
Body Tissue	Skin, Body,	Bones, Nails	Tendons	Vessels	Muscles

	Hair				
Emotion	Grief	Fear	Anger	Joy	Anxiety

Five Element theory provides us with a broad conceptual model with which we can describe and interpret our world.

More specifically, the theory describes cyclical relationships between phenomena or objects according to the properties that each phenomenon or object displays. The Five Elements are symbolic representations of movements, phenomena or objects and can be applied macrocosmically to the universe, or microcosmically to an individual. The Elements describe everything in terms of the cycle between Metal, Water, Wood, Fire and Earth. Each of these elements has correspondences to seasons, sounds, emotions, body tissue, organs and so on (as shown in the correspondence table below).