

Spring into Life



I'm thinking back to the 1st of March. In India it was Holi, the Hindu festival of colour and a celebration of spring, with everyone taking to the streets and throwing coloured powder in wild abandon. Here in the UK we were in the grip of sub-zero temperatures, ice and snow and, ironically, it was the first day of spring according to the meteorological calendar. If you use the 'does-it-feel-warm-enough-to-take-your-coat-off' calendar then spring may still be some way off. Somewhere between the two, and for most of us I imagine a more meaningful indicator of spring, is nature herself. Waiting to burst into life, false starts, a warmer day, yet another cold blast...the anticipation... and then finally eruption everywhere - birdsong, green shoots, warmth, sun and a freshening up of life. So, here are my personal ponderings on this favourite time of year and its influence on our wellbeing.

Spring feels, to me, like the true beginning of the year. Forget January with its resolutions and plans for the New Year, it's an uphill struggle against my natural inclination to semi hibernate and takes things gently. Spring's different, buoyed along by the eruption of life in nature with everything growing anew and the ideal time to tap into that surge of energy unfolding around us. It is a time to take a leaf out of nature's book and embrace life with renewed vigour and creativity.

It is a time of excitement and anticipation. I have snowdrops in the garden, a reminder in the very depths of winter of life and that spring will be on its way. Through the winter I put out feed and love seeing which birds frequent the garden, reminded of the struggle of their tiny bodies against the cold. There is a nest box on the wall, frequented for the past few years by a pair of blue tits. They survived the cold! It's a small but important connection to nature for me, amongst many other things. I take great pleasure in watching the pair take up residence, busy themselves with preparations and then watching them toing and froing with bugs and caterpillars for their young. Then, a highlight, watching eagerly for the fledglings to emerge and take their first tentative flights out, flapping frantically as they aim for a safe place to land. By observing the rhythms of the natural world we can remind ourselves that we too are a part of that natural world and feel a connection to it.

Daoism and the seasons

The earliest forms of acupuncture emerged from a Daoist tradition where people lived in close harmony with nature, and the seasons held particular significance. Their philosophy and language still enrich and influence the practice of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM). Although we now have scientific explanations for some of the mechanisms of acupuncture, which I find fascinating, they touch the surface and do not convey the holistic nature of traditional interpretations accumulated over several millennia of close observation. It is the interconnection between different parts that is emphasized and understood in traditional acupuncture – connection between different bodily systems and also between the mental, physical and emotional or mind, body, spirit. Treatment based on a holistic diagnosis taps in to the body's own complex systems of maintaining balance to bring the body back towards better health. Metaphors, such as those expressed in relation to the seasons, contribute towards that holistic interpretation according to the laws of nature, where the external are mirrored within the body.

The wood element

Chinese Medicine has a philosophical framework that encourages balance between activity and rest, doing and being. The five phase theory of which wood is one of the five phases offers a useful model for further refining these ideas into a cyclical rhythm of birth, growth, harvest, decline and rebirth. Spring is associated with the wood element. We all need balance of work, rest and play, community, family and time to ourselves, moments of excitement, celebration and joy and also quiet times of contemplation and renewal. Inevitably there will be times of sadness, frustration, worry, regret and grief, too. Being able to move with a degree of fluidity between these differing and contrasting aspects of life are important foundations of health and well-being. In terms of our outlook the wood element is associated with vision, fresh ideas, planning, determination and the movement of these ideas forward. It has tremendous energy, epitomised by the strength of a small shoot bursting through hard ground, even tarmac.

In a dysfunctional state the wood element tends towards stagnation, not having the vision or energy to move forward smoothly and can be characterised by a stop start approach or feeling totally stuck. That energy is trapped within and can build like a pressure cooker of pent up frustration that can then manifest in any number of ways within ourselves wreaking havoc on maybe our digestion, our mental wellbeing, possibly breaking out in the form of a headache or some other unwanted symptom. Of course, this can happen at any time of year but the energy of spring acts as a manifestation of the wood element in its healthy state and by reflecting on what happens in nature we can maybe feel a resonance within ourselves. Finding ways of moving, physically and mentally, through exercise and by giving freedom to our ideas are often key to unlocking the stagnation and feeling better.

Embrace Spring

Spring is the time of new beginnings, movement and birth and a time when we may feel that extra oomph.

- If you have been relatively inactive over the long winter months you can awaken the spring within by beginning each day with some stretches, like yoga, tai chi, qi gong or pilates. Get outside, a brisk walk in the park or a glorious garden and feel the warmth of the sun.
- It is a time to eat lightly, with less of the rich fattier foods of winter and more raw sprouted grains and seeds, young sweet root vegetables and spring greens. Balance the raw and the

cooked according to your constitution as raw foods can be too much for people with weaker digestion, consider lightly steaming instead.

- It can be a great time to move ideas along, especially if you have been procrastinating. Focus on the things you really want to do that will inspire you, enrich your life and be easier to sustain. Grab the moment and get things moving, put shape to some revitalising creative ideas – a spring clean of life with new possibilities.
- That may be easier said than done for many people and if you are not feeling too motivated, in a rut or just feeling a bit stuck then acupuncture may help. Having the space to talk, be heard and understood often helps us to see things in a new light. Acupuncture can give you a boost and help you to feel calm, relaxed, uplifted and revitalised. It can help to put that spring back in your step and get you going again.
- Every journey really does start with one step.

Inspiration

Here are some quotes that inspire a sense of spring – hope, creativity, new beginnings, plans, vision, motivation, movement and the anticipation and excitement that spring brings:

“Spring drew on...and a greenness grew over those brown beds, which, freshening daily, suggested the thought that Hope traversed them at night, and left each morning brighter traces of her steps.” **Charlotte Brontë**

“The beautiful spring came: and when Nature resumes her loveliness the human soul is apt to revive also.” **Hriet Ann Jacobs**

“I am a spring leaf trembling in anticipation.” **Maya Angelou**

“April hath put a spirit of youth in everything.” **William Shakespeare**

“Plan your year in spring, your day at dawn.” **A Chinese Proverb**

“Some stories don’t have a clear beginning, middle and end: Life is about not knowing, having to change and taking the moment, making the best of it, without knowing what is going to happen next. Delicious ambiguity.” **Gilda Radner**

“You don’t need endless time and perfect conditions. Do it now. Do it today. Do it for twenty minutes. And watch your heart start beating.” **Barbara Sher**

“Keep on beginning and failing. Each time you fail, start all over again and you will grow stronger until you have accomplished a purpose – not the one you began with, perhaps, but one you’ll be glad to remember.” **Anne Sullivan**

“It was such a spring day as breathes into a man an ineffable yearning, a painful sweetness, a longing that makes him stand motionless, looking at the leaves or grass, and fling out his arms to embrace he knows not what.” **John Galsworthy, The Forsyte Saga**

“Despite the forecast, live like it's spring.” **Lilly Pulitzer**

Here's to Springtime and the year ahead!