

18 AUGUST 2016

*How to approach treating a
patient with breast cancer*

From a five element perspective, the onset of any illness or imbalance of any kind should be interpreted as being the result of some blockage in the balanced flow of life-giving energy round the cycle of the elements. There are many ways in which energy can become blocked, the simplest block being that between mother and child, where for some reason the mother is prevented from passing on enough of her good energy to her child, treated by needling the tonification points. Another form of energy transfer is that between the grandmother and grandchild elements, bypassing the mother element because the grandmother has more energy than the mother to pass on. And then there are all the other forms of blocks, such as Entry/Exit blocks, and the three major blocks, Aggressive Energy, Husband/Wife and Possession.

The important thing when treating somebody who comes to us with a serious condition, as in the case of breast cancer, is not to think that we have to approach treating the patient in any way differently from the way we approach every new patient. We need to go through the same steady first steps of treatment: first trying to diagnose the guardian element, checking for any blocks, beginning with an AE drain, and then concentrating our attention upon strengthening the element we have chosen as much as we can. With a specific diagnosis, such as in the case of breast cancer, we should also think carefully about which particular meridians flow around and through the area of the body where problems are occurring, here the breast, and consider which potential blockages might be occurring there, which have led, may potentially have led

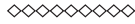
or may in the future lead to symptoms appearing. In the case of breast problems, I always needle the points used to clear blocks between Spleen and Heart (a XII/I, Sp/Ht block), and between Kidney and Heart Protector (a IV/V, Ki/HP block). I do this even though my pulse readings may not necessarily indicate these blockages are there, but because needling these points can be regarded as a preventative measure. This will encourage the good flow of energy around the affected breast, and will thus help prevent future blocks occurring. In addition, since pulse interpretation is such a highly skilled art, I never like to rely entirely on my own pulse-reading skills.

If there is already any surgical scarring around this area, the points should only be needled on the healthy, unaffected side, since patients are warned against needling near the scar tissue. Correcting the good flow of energy through a meridian on one side of the body will also help correct its sister flow on the other side.

For further information about how to diagnose and treat blocks, I would refer you to my *Handbook of Five Element Practice* which discusses each block in greater detail.

I have also written two other blogs about Entry/Exit points, one on 14 December 2010 and the other on 22 May 2012, and a blog about treating a patient with terminal cancer on 27 February 2013.

In addition to my blogs, the last chapter of my book *The Pattern of Things* (now published by Singing Dragon under the title of *Patterns of Practice*), entitled *Afterword: Healing in Death*, is my tribute to the courage of a terminally ill cancer patient of mine, and offers a good description of how I approached treating her in the last year of her life.



18 AUGUST 2016

Needle retention

One of the questions I was recently asked on my Facebook Question and Answer sessions was about needle retention. The questioner asked whether there was any difference between manipulating the needle and then leaving it in place, which I interpreted as referring to our five element sedation technique, or removing the needles immediately after needling, our tonification technique. This made me consider carefully what the effect a needle left in the skin has. It is fairly simple to me to understand that when we stimulate a point and remove the needle, we are then handing back to the patient's own energy the task of continuing the effect the tonification needle is intended to produce, without any further interference from the acupuncturist (and I use the word interference advisedly).

But what is actually happening when the needles are left in place, and, as sometimes happens, are stimulated again at intervals? In effect, any needle left in a point continues to activate this point in some way. Sedating a point will therefore draw energy away from the sedated meridian for as long as the needle is inserted. In this case, the acupuncturist continues to treat (to interfere, as I call all treatment) for as long as he/she decides to leave the needle, or more usually the needles, in.

It is interesting that in all the years that I worked under JR's supervision or watched him work with others I cannot remember a single occasion when he said that we should sedate rather than tonify an element, except, of course, for an AE drain and for possession treatment. But for these two treatments the needles are never manipulated whilst in the skin, just repositioned if we feel they are not in the right place

or threaten to fall out. I have always interpreted the minimal use of sedation in five element acupuncture as a sign that the initial AE drain on all patients at the first treatment draws away any excess energy from the relevant elements in the patient, leaving us to do what is then needed, which is to stimulate deficient energy, i.e. to tonify and boost the flow of good energy between the elements.

In other forms of acupuncture, it seems that sedation of points by leaving needles in place forms a major role in treatment. I wonder, though, with sedation of this kind which may well calm and pacify energy, what is then done to boost it?



24 AUGUST 2016

*Thoughts on the Fire element and other
elements prompted by watching Usain
Bolt and others at the Rio Olympics*

Usain Bolt is, of course, pure Fire, at the moment the most visible example dominating our headlines. Watching him interact with the crowd has added to my knowledge of Fire, and made me think more of what it tries to offer those around it. So here are some more of my insights.

Fire wants to share its smile, its laughter, its thoughts. If you watch Fire's eyes, they are always looking directly in the eyes of another person when they are talking or smiling or laughing to make sure that their speech, their smiles or their laughter are being received by somebody. You could say that Fire regards them as gifts they want to offer others.

All elements can talk, smile and laugh, but their interactions will be directed outwards in different ways because they come from a different space within them, created, as everything we do is, by a particular guardian element. Wood wants to command attention, point something out. Earth wants to ensure that all within hearing respond to it, for it likes being at the centre of a circle, not demanding one-to-one attention. Metal, true to its natural desire to observe and judge life from a distance, will tend to keep many things to itself, saying the minimum that it thinks needs to be said, often choosing to keep its thoughts to itself, unless actively asked to share them. Its smiles and its laughter are more like brief flashes breaking out, as though disturbing its preference for silence. Compare, for example, the quiet celebration of joy that Jessica Ennis (Metal, I think) shows at winning with Usain Bolt's tumultuous one, where he draws the whole world around him, spectators and TV audiences alike, to help him share his joy.

Finally, there is Water, always last in my list, because it is such a mysterious element and so difficult for me to pin down, with its often rather hysterical outpourings of speech and emotion, which are more likely to make us step away rather than draw us towards it, because it makes us feel unsure of what we are experiencing and how we should be reacting.

I use a study of myself, as Fire, more than of anybody else in trying to fathom the secrets of what Fire wants of life. Thinking of Usain Bolt, as I was this morning, I realized that my need to share my thoughts appears in the urge behind my teaching and my writing, particularly of my blogs. And I want to share my thoughts immediately, almost unable to wait until I have somebody with me, either in person or through social media of some kind, with whom to share them. I can't not share, just as Usain Bolt can't not smile.

A comment from India from a very perceptive Water patient of mine after she read this blog:

I just wanted say how nice it was to read your blog about the elements today. Of course the one on Water is very apt, based on my own experience. I think Water surges out towards people it feels comfortable with (or communicative towards) but maybe tends to overdo it, leaving a confused or uncomfortable gap.



26 AUGUST 2016

The challenge of treating very young children

In the early days of my practice I was very reluctant to treat young children. I knew that they could not themselves tell me what was wrong, and without talking to them I was not sure how I was going to diagnose their element. Everything I learnt about them would therefore have to be filtered through what their parent told me. (For simplicity's sake, I will call the mother the parent, although the same holds true for the father.) Before seeing the child, therefore, we need to arrange to talk to the mother quietly on her own, and not in the child's hearing. Ideally, this should be done face to face, rather than on the phone, and certainly not by email. A private talk will also yield crucial information about the mother's relationship to the child, and here we have to use our diagnostic skills to discover what exactly is going on between mother and child.

Most, if not all, problems in young children (and in later life!) originate in family life. The difficulty for us here is that most parents are often unaware of the part they play in this, for, like most of us when faced with unpleasant facts, we are reluctant to admit to our own responsibility. A parent of a distressed child often has unresolved issues around being a

parent, which may well be, and usually is, the prime reason for disturbance in the child. I have some very good examples of this from my own practice which have reinforced my conviction that if only I could treat the mother, the young child would probably not need treatment. This conviction, and often my experiences of failing to help the child, have reinforced my increasing reluctance over the years to treat young children.

I was fortunate that I was able to take the first two children I was asked to treat to see JR Worsley. This was at a very early stage in my practice, when I did not know how I should approach treating them. The first child was a young boy of about three, who was said by his mother to be completely out of control. He would only let his mother touch him, refused to relate to anybody else and had been given a provisional diagnosis of autism. His mother and I had to drag him kicking and screaming from the car to the practice room, where JR, after looking at him quickly, told me to carry out the AE drain, despite his loud protests, with his mother and me holding him firmly on my lap. As I recall, there was no AE, although I have since often found a surprising amount of AE in even the youngest child.

JR diagnosed the element as Wood, and told me to follow the AE drain with the source points on Wood on the left side only. To my surprise, shortly after the treatment, the young boy suddenly fell quiet, turned his head to look at me and kept eye contact as I walked away, something he had not done with any of us before. I interpreted this as the Wood element diffusing his terrible sense of anger. From then on, for the few treatments he continued to come to me once a fortnight for the simple five element command point treatment JR had recommended, he would run happily to greet me as though he enjoyed his treatments. Nobody would then have diagnosed him as other than a normal little boy.

Sadly, however, I was only allowed to treat him a few more times. JR had pointed out that I should do possession treatment on the mother, luckily a patient of mine, something I had not yet noted, but very shortly afterwards, the mother abruptly stopped treatment for both herself and her child. The child's father, who was very happy with my continuing to treat his son, explained his wife's decision to stop treatment by the fact that she was very disturbed to think that I might think that she was the cause of the child's problems, something she denied totally. He himself could see that she was much too possessive of the child, but could do little to persuade her to allow me to continue treating their child.

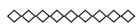
I had similar experiences with two other mothers, both of whom, though ostensibly wanting help for their young children, refused to acknowledge that there was anything in their own attitudes to their children which might be contributing to the problem, and both quickly discontinued the child's treatment very early on despite quite clear evidence that it was helping.

Of course, other practitioners may have had happier experiences of treating children than I have had, and their experiences may well be with less complex mother-child relationships than mine have been. I'm sure, too, that much can be done to help young children deal with whatever problems, psychological or physical, they come to you with simply by trying hard to diagnose the element by means of any information you can glean, then doing an AE drain and basic five element treatment.

I am happy, though, that I can finish this blog with a rather lovely story of the successful treatment of a young child, though I never saw the child or inserted a single needle. A patient of mine had an 18-month-old daughter who had suddenly started to suffer from asthma. Could I do something to help, she asked me. With some of the unhappy experiences I had had in mind, I was at first reluctant to do so, but then I

put on my five element hat, and asked myself, ‘Why would a little baby develop asthma? Why would its Metal element be in such distress?’ Metal, being the element of our relationship to our father, I asked whether anything had recently changed at home, particularly in relation to the child’s father. She told me that he had joined a golf club, and was now away from home for much of the weekend. Before this, the whole family had had happy weekends doing things together. I talked through the needs of the Metal element with both father and mother, and suggested that the father should make every effort to be with the child as much as he could, perhaps sacrificing some golf for his child’s sake. This was rather a long shot on my behalf, and I wasn’t very optimistic that this would help.

To the father’s credit, he did this, and even I was surprised when the mother told me that, after a few weeks of increased attention from the father, the child’s asthma started to improve, and eventually disappeared altogether. And this without the need for any medication, or any needles. Here, both parents had enough insight into family relationships and were open to listening to advice, something which is unfortunately rather rare, as we know.



12 SEPTEMBER 2016

*We comfort eat when we don't get
enough comfort from eating*

A few days ago I was sitting in my favourite café enjoying my favourite meal of the day, which is breakfast – a small espresso with a drop of very hot milk and a fresh croissant to dunk into it. I was contemplating the world around me, thinking

how good it was peacefully to savour the taste of what I was eating, when a thought popped into my mind, which was how important it is to give ourselves the time to enjoy food.

That led me to think how little attention we often now pay to the simple pleasure of eating when we can dash into a coffee house and grab a quick drink and a bite to eat on our way to hurrying to wherever we are going. This made me consider what this is doing to our Earth element, our mother element which is there to nourish and support the other elements, and which needs to be nourished and supported itself if it is to do its work properly. It has to learn how to do this, as all elements do, as they gradually take over the role their mother has taken on in the womb. I now watch with dismay as mothers stuff bottles into small babies' mouths in their prams in the street or even in buses amidst all the tumult and traffic noise. Here there is none of the peaceful enjoyment of feeding time which we should be allowing our babies, and which help its tender little Earth element to assume its role.

I wonder how far our lack of attention to the actual process of enjoying the food we put in our mouths, particularly in the early days of a child's life, is one of the reasons for the sharp rise in obesity we see all around us. The Earth element can only develop as it should in a loving, caring environment, where it is able to welcome food as something which warms and nourishes it. It needs this to sustain a healthy relationship to food throughout later life. If it is denied this comfort because its Stomach official is asked to snatch at the food that reaches it, it will try to hold on to as much of this food as it can, being unwilling to discard what is unwanted because it is not given enough time to process it. Rather than satisfying it, then, the food that reaches it is tantalizingly snatched away as it is gobbled down in the hurly-burly of modern life.

This may perhaps be one of the reasons behind the success of so many TV cookery programmes. Do we, through them at one remove as it were, learn to enjoy again, or even for

the first time, the delights of food cooked as it should be, as though we are kidding ourselves that this is how we are feeding ourselves? Is this, too, the reason for the runaway success of *The Great British Bake Off*, with a mother or a grandmother substitute for the whole country so clearly there in Mary Berry, as the TV immerses us in succulent images of home-baked cakes, so Earth-like a delight?

Somewhere hidden in this, too, may well lie the reason why I hardly pass a person in the street who is not holding a cup of coffee or tea in their hands, often making no attempt to drink it, a substitute for a mother's nipple if there ever was one, as though their Earth element is sending out a constant reminder to them of its need for attention.

And is this, too, why I so enjoy sitting in a coffee house with my coffee and croissant, a reminder, perhaps, of home and hearth (and mother) all those years ago?



4 OCTOBER 2016

For simplicity's sake – another heartfelt plea

Anybody who knows anything about me will know how often I plead for one basic principle of five element acupuncture, which is to keep it simple. I always hear JR Worsley's voice in my ear telling us that we really only need three minutes with our patients: one to look at them, one to decide on the point(s) to needle and one to say goodbye. It was said jokingly (or at least I assumed it was), but, like everything he said, it hides profound wisdom. The longer I practise, the more I have come to understand this.