



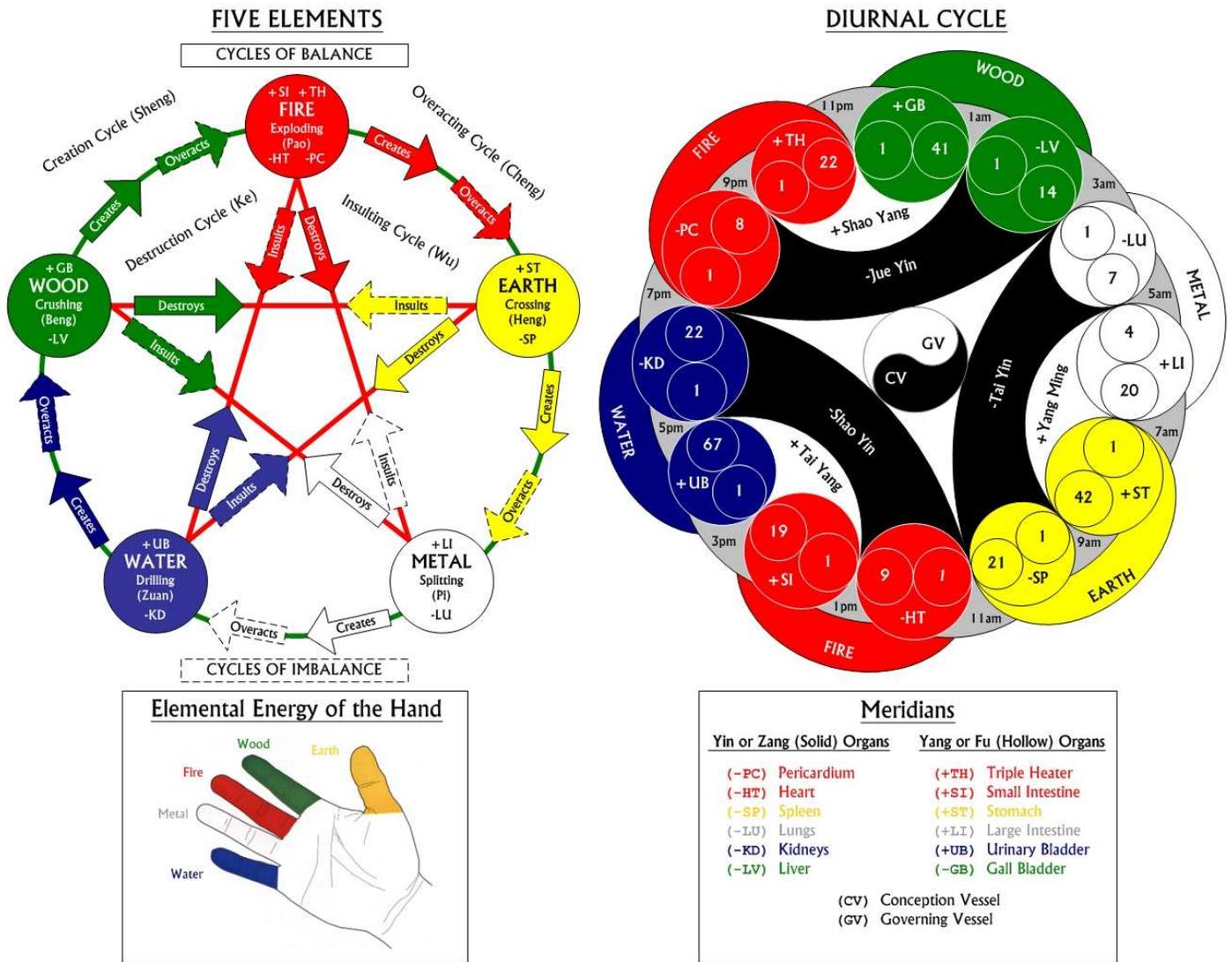
## Guelph Tai Chi for Health

### What are the five elements and five elements theory?

In the last paper we discussed taiji and wuji, yin and yang. According to yin-yang theory the human body - like the universe around us - is a blend of complementary and contradictory forces that are always seeking a balance point. The outcome of taiji movement is the production and balance of energy. Yin-yang polarity is the basic division of the universe according to Taoist philosophy.

After this division, Taoism sought to further classify and explain the human body and natural environment according to Five Elements theory. The five elements are: wood, fire, earth, metal, and water. These correspond to specific organs and meridians in the human body.

The diagram depicting the five elements should be thought of in two ways either nurturing or destructive (and again! yin or yang), always in a state of transformation, always seeking balance.



<b>Generating or Creating</b>	<b>Controlling or Destructive</b>
Wood feeds Fire; Fire creates Earth (ash); Earth bears Metal; Metal collects Water and Water nourishes Wood.	Wood parts earth; Earth absorbs water; Water quenches fire; Fire melts metal and Metal chops wood.
Liver supports the Heart. Heart supports the Spleen. Spleen supports the Lung. Lung supports the Kidney. Kidney supports the Liver	Liver controls Spleen. Spleen controls Kidney. Kidney controls Heart. Heart controls Lung. Lung controls Liver.

The Taoists took this basic table of relationships and expanded it to correspond to all natural phenomena and human characteristics<sup>1</sup>.

Disease can be described - for example - as "too much wood" (liver). The solution to illness would be to look at the controlling organ, the lung, and strengthen it in order to correct the balance or correspondence between the two.

The chart below is typical of the kinds of charts you will find of the Five Elements and Correspondences:

<b>Element</b>	<b>wood</b>	<b>fire</b>	<b>earth</b>	<b>metal</b>	<b>water</b>
<b>Season</b>	Spring	Summer	Late Summer	Autumn	Winter
<b>Yang organ</b>	Gall Bladder	Small intestine	Stomach	Colon	Bladder
<b>Yin organ</b>	Liver	Heart	Spleen	Lungs	Kidneys
<b>Emotion</b>	Anger	Joy	Sympathy	Grief	Fear
<b>Colour</b>	Green	Red	Yellow	White	Blue
<b>Sound</b>	Shouting	Laughing	Singing	Weeping	Groaning
<b>Taste</b>	Sour	Bitter	Sweet	Pungent	Salty
<b>Smell</b>	Rancid	Scorched	Fragrant	Rotten	Putrid
<b>Opening</b>	Eyes	Tongue	Mouth	Nose	Ears
<b>Tissue</b>	Tendons	Blood vessels	Muscles	Skin and Hair	Bones
<b>Climate</b>	Wind	Heat	Damp	Dry	Cold
<b>Process</b>	Birth	Growth	Transformation	Harvest	Storage
<b>Direction</b>	East	South	Centre	West	North

In taijiquan practice, the 5 elements correspond to the five directions we take in movement, forward, backward, left, right, and centred (still). Think about the directions we take when we move through the tai chi form, the constant changes in angle, forward, backward, and side-to-side. We begin and end in stillness, in the centre.

<sup>1</sup> There are many examples of Tables of Correspondences available in tai chi literature, and through a simple search of the Internet. Try "Five Elements" in a Google search and you will easily find many of these charts.