



Autumn: The Metal Element

The season of drawing in, discernment and letting go

As I write this there is still a little warmth in the day, but I can sense things beginning to change. The mornings have a cooler edge, the evenings are arriving a little sooner and the quality of the light is different. After months of everything growing, flowering and reaching outwards, there is a feeling that the energy around us is beginning to draw back in and it is wonderful to see the parched ground somewhat restored after the summer droughts. I notice this shift in myself too. I love the expansiveness of summer and find it very easy to fill those long days with swimming, walking, travelling, gatherings, evenings outside and generally saying yes to things. As we move towards autumn, I can feel myself becoming a little more thoughtful about where I want my energy to go. It isn't that I suddenly want to stop doing things, but I do feel less inclined to keep filling every available space and more interested in noticing what I actually want to carry forward with me.

There is a gradual stripping back in the natural world, but it isn't rushed. Leaves begin to change and eventually fall, plants stop putting their energy into new growth and the abundance of summer slowly gives way to something quieter. As the leaves disappear, we begin to see the structure of the trees again, the shapes of branches that have been there all along but were hidden beneath all that summer growth. Silhouettes of trees are still hiding, waiting to show their full glory after especially windy storms. Autumn is so often described as the season of letting go and, while that is certainly part of the Metal element, I wonder whether there is something that comes before letting go. We need to know what matters to us, what we value and what we want to keep before we can really know what we are ready to release. Perhaps autumn is as much about discernment as it is about letting go, allowing some things to fall away so that we can see more clearly what remains.

Metal: What Do We Value?

In Five Element theory, autumn belongs to the Metal element. It follows the nourishing, gathering quality of Earth and begins the gradual movement towards the quieter, more conserving energy of Water and winter. Metal is associated with clarity, value, boundaries and our ability both to receive and to release. I like the idea of metal itself being something precious that is found within the earth and then refined, gradually separating what is valuable from everything surrounding it.

There is something in that image that feels particularly relevant at this point in the year, when nature itself seems to be simplifying. Metal seems to ask 'From everything we have gathered, what do we actually want to take with us?' Not everything has to come. And letting something go doesn't mean that it wasn't important, worthwhile or right for us at the time. Sometimes things have simply had their season.



Metal Energy Within Us

The Lung and Large Intestine meridians are associated with the Metal element within Shiatsu and Traditional East Asian Medicine. Together they offer a lovely image of receiving and releasing, something we are doing continually and without much thought through the simple act of breathing. We breathe in and receive what we need and then breathe out and release. We cannot continually breathe in, nor can we continually breathe out. Each creates the possibility of the other and perhaps there is something useful here when we think about the balance between what we take into our lives and what we are able to relinquish.

The Lungs

Within Five Element thinking, the Lungs are associated with breath, inspiration and our relationship with the world around us. Our breathing happens without conscious thought most of the time, yet it can also give us a sense of how we are in a particular moment. Sometimes we become aware that our breathing feels spacious and easy, while at other times we might notice ourselves sighing, holding the breath or carrying tension around the chest and shoulders.

I don't think we always need to immediately change these things. There can be something useful in simply noticing them. Perhaps the body needs the sigh. Perhaps taking a moment to notice the movement of our breathing, without trying to make it deeper or better, gives us a little information about how we are feeling.

The Lungs are also associated with grief and sadness within Five Element theory, which feels particularly present in a season when change and loss become so visible around us. I am wary of making grief fit too neatly into a seasonal metaphor because our experiences of loss are individual and can be enormous, complicated and long-lasting. Yet, I do find something reassuring in a tradition that gives grief a place within the natural cycles of life rather than treating it as something we should quickly move through. We grieve because something mattered. Perhaps there is something very Metal in recognising the value of what has been lost while allowing grief to have the space and time it needs. It seems to be all about value and vitality.

The Large Intestine

The Large Intestine brings us to the other part of this cycle and, within Five Element thinking, is associated with release and letting go of what is no longer needed.

I also don't think this needs to mean a dramatic clearing out of our lives every autumn. It might be much smaller than that. Finishing something that has been hanging around for too long, creating a little more space in an overfull week, clearing a drawer that irritates us every time we open it, or perhaps noticing an expectation we have placed upon ourselves that doesn't feel quite so necessary any more.

Sometimes what we release will be something we have loved. A stage of life ends, circumstances change, relationships alter and versions of us that were once completely necessary may no longer fit in quite the same way. There can be sadness in that as well as relief, and perhaps we don't need to choose between the two.



Wisdom of the Metal Element

Metal feels much more connected with recognising what has value and creating enough space in our lives to actually experience it. Guided by the ever-present natural world around us, we can see that this seasonal contraction isn't a problem, it is just part of the process. Trees withdraw their energy and release their leaves because the conditions have changed and a different way of being is needed. They don't attempt to remain permanently in summer. Perhaps we can allow ourselves to respond to the changing season too, becoming a little more selective about where our attention goes and noticing whether there are places where we would welcome more room. We can begin to notice what feels important and what feels less so. Through touch, pressure, movement and stillness in Shiatsu there can be an opportunity to experience a little more space, to notice the breath and perhaps to become aware of places where we are holding more than we realised.

Perhaps rather than seeing autumn only as the ending of summer, we can allow it to show us what remains, what matters and what we would like to make room for as we move towards the quieter part of the year.

Three gentle Metal practices

1. **Notice your breath:** Spend a few moments noticing your breathing without deliberately trying to change it. Where do you feel the movement of your breath? Is there anywhere that feels spacious or anywhere that feels held? Simply notice what is there.
2. **Make a little space:** Choose one small area that has become cluttered and rather than clearing for the sake of clearing, notice what you value and want to keep and what you are genuinely happy to release.
3. **Notice autumn arriving:** Take a familiar walk and look for the small changes that tell you the season is turning. What do you notice around you, and also within you?

Three reflective Metal questions

1. What feels most valuable to me as I move into autumn?
2. Where would I welcome a little more space in my life?
3. What might I be ready to carry differently into the season ahead?

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Offered in the spirit of seasonal care.

