



# Inside out: Nourish your inner landscape all-year round

*Align and adjust your life, yoga and meditation practice with the seasonal changes by tuning in with the intrinsic powers of the five-element system used in Taoist practices.*

Words Jan Denecke Photography Gabriela Fearn

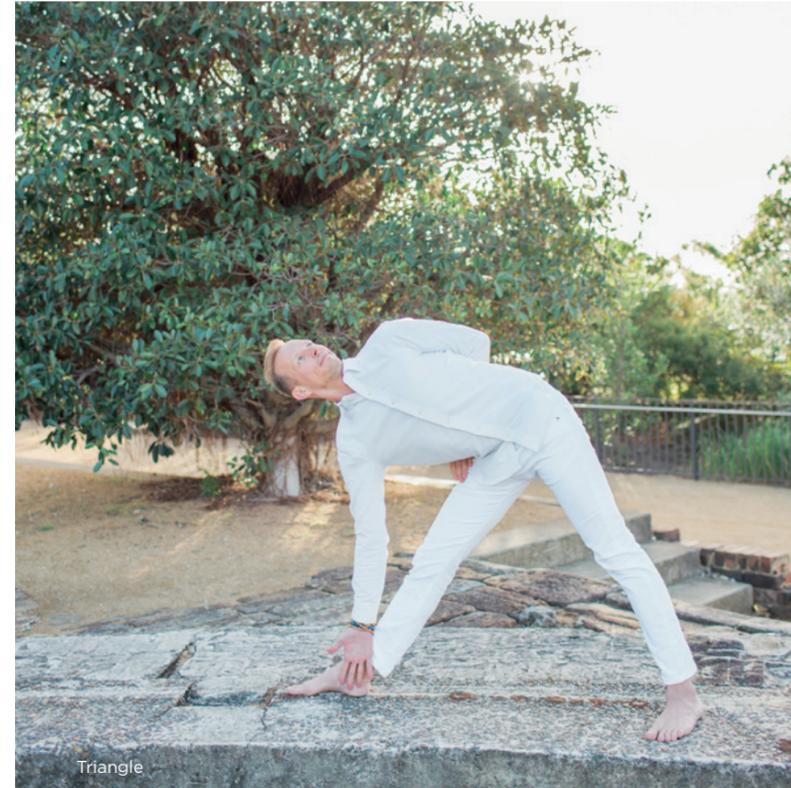
Human beings are a biochemical formation of atoms, molecules and cells. Within the deepest fibres of our body we share the same atomic footprint as our surrounding nature. Ancient Chinese philosophy expresses this with the five elements cycle, where each element mirrors our inner landscape with our surrounding nature. It forms a wonderful cycle for physical, mental and emotional support, growth and reflection as each element corresponds with a season of the year.

Like a garden, this cycle is organic, energetic and constantly changing with moments of sprouting, maturing, ripening, harvesting and composting. This landscape is designed and aimed to support a proper flow and maturation of energy, called *chi*. Each element correlates with a pair of organs and their related meridians: a network of rivers that nourish *chi*. When you adjust your practice to the season, by applying yoga and meditation practices that reflect the tendency of a season with specific *asanas* and intentions, you can better support these elements.

## Five-element system according to seasons Wood; spring; expansion

Spring is characterised by rebirth, sudden growth and rapid expansion. What has been dormant and patiently waiting throughout winter is bursting to come out. It is a time to shake the dark, cold stagnant winter off and clear away any leftover layers from winter. This season, the liver and gallbladder are in charge of storing, releasing and moving *chi* through the blood and into the body. Any delay, obstruction or resistance will inhibit a smooth flow and easy transition.

Spring is the ideal season for detox by avoiding alcohol, caffeine and fatty foods, and incorporating lots of green-coloured foods such as leafy greens and green tea into your diet. A spring yoga practice invites you to slowly increase movement and develop flexibility. Stiffer and tighter muscles from winter long to be warmed and stretched, especially the outer hips, glute muscles, legs, the sides of the body and inner legs, through which the related wood meridians of liver and gallbladder run. Asanas to incorporate into spring and



Triangle



Wild thing

A spring yoga practice invites you to slowly increase movement and develop flexibility. Stiffer and tighter muscles from winter long to be warmed and stretched.

hold for longer periods of time are eagle pose, pigeon, chair pose, funky/open chair, side stretches like reversed warrior, as well as side angle, triangle and tree pose.

## Fire; summer; expression

The radiant, outgoing warmth of summer is the season where nature reaches its full potential and fulfilment. Like the sun, the heart shines, permeates and reaches each and every cell of the body providing consciousness, sensations and feelings as it pushes *chi* through the body. This is reflected in our personality and our ability to express ourselves. When distributed well, it provides wakefulness and the development of wisdom and compassion.

Summer is a period of living day by day

and adjusting ourselves to the movement and heat of the sun. Practise yoga at dawn or sunset and avoid practising when the sun is too hot. The heart is the flower of our consciousness and blooms best with practices that give the chest and heart room for expression. Focus on asanas that stretch, release and open the chest, inner and outer arms. Asanas to incorporate and refine in summer are bridge pose, full wheel, humble warrior, eagle arms, cow face arms and wild thing.

Adapt a diet that is easy to digest, provides hydration and is not too hot or too cold. Heart-stimulating foods are red foods such as berries, cherries, watermelon, chilli, tomato, red beans and goji berries.



Humble warrior



When you adjust your practice to the season, by applying yoga and meditation practices that reflect the tendency of a season with specific asanas and intentions, you can better support these elements.

**Earth; late summer; pause**

Birth, growth and decline are absent as nature comes to a still point. It is a period of nourishment and stability through the resources given to us from the earth. All that has grown and matured in summer has ripened and is ready for harvest. Like Mother Earth, the spleen is our nourishing resource that gathers, transforms and transports energy and nutrients from our foods into our body as chi. Late summer is a period for self-care by eating regularly, reducing mental and physical stresses and deepening calming, grounded practices. It prepares us for a transforming period out of growth, prosperity and outer action into decline, stillness and inward attention.

Develop a strong, grounding yoga practice with standing poses such as warriors and focus on calm and deep abdominal breathing. Stretch and strengthen the quadriceps, hip flexors and abdomen areas, where the earth meridians — the spleen and stomach — run through.

Asanas to incorporate are upward dog, camel, bridge, hero pose as well as more passive poses such as supported bridge and viparita karani (legs-up-the-wall). Spend extra time in savasana and let the stillness of the pose help you connect with the earthing energies. Discover your natural nourishing ability to hold the space and pause.



**Metal; autumn; reduction**

Autumn is a season of shedding and decomposing. It is a time where once luscious foliage sheds and forms a protective barrier for the earth. Where once blooming flowers and ripe fruits leave nothing behind but the seeds that help to create new life. This process of surrender and gratitude is to distill all that is good and pure.

In autumn, the lungs govern the barrier between the outer environment and the inner environment. The lungs absorb oxygen and release carbon dioxide. A balanced distribution is essential for our physical, mental and emotional health. It is a period of setting limits and protecting barriers to let only the pure and good come in. In your yoga practice, concentrate on incorporating more *pranayama* (breath work) practices that calm the nervous system, provide clarity and support the release of mental and emotional attachments. Try pranayama techniques such as *kapalabhati* (skull shining breath), *nadi shodhana* (alternate nostril breathing), *sheetali* (cooling breath) and *bhramari* (humming bee breath).

**Water; winter; dormant**

The hibernation of winter inspires us to ignite our inner light, face our fears and build up courage. Winter preserves all that is essential, with chi provided by the kidney. With less sun and less movement, we warm ourselves from within with comforting foods that are nutrient-dense, provide long-standing energy and strengthen us.



In winter we celebrate our deeper soul by creating an environment that warms and delights us physically, mentally and emotionally. We take time to replenish and rest as well as make space for introspection and enquiring questions that help us form realistic plans so that when spring arrives, we can expand with great self-confidence and a deeper understanding of ourselves. In yoga, concentrate on deeper introspection and stillness with restorative and meditative yin poses that stretch out the whole back of the body and compress the kidneys in the lower back. Poses such as child's pose, seated forward pose, butterfly pose and sphinx pose are beneficial throughout this time. ♀

