

HARMONIZING WITH THE SEASONS

Part 1: The Structure of the Five Phases of Transition

By Amy Snow and Nancy Zidonis

All that horse guardians really want is for their horses to be strong, healthy and happy. The domesticated horse is highly dependent on us to provide for all of his needs to sustain and enhance his life. And there is much to be learned about horses, and how best to support them while living among us.

Over the past year, we have presented each of the “seasons” of the horse’s life and health issues as they relate to the Five Phases of Transition, often called the Five-Element Theory. This ancient Chinese model gives us insights into how to pattern life in accordance with the natural flow so that the horse can live fully and healthfully.

After looking at each of the Five Phases of Transition as separate entities, it is time to understand a little of how this model for a healthy life works as a whole. The first step is to delve into the “inner workings” of this conceptual construct, yet we are only able to *begin* to explore this extraordinary tool, because the Five Phases have so many ramifications and can be used in so many ways.

Part 1 of this 2-part article addresses the structure of the Five Phases of Transition and how to perceive the horse’s health in relation to this model. Part 2 will delve into what you can do to support your horse following the teachings of the Five Phases of Transition.

THE FIVE PHASES OF TRANSITION: A GUIDE TO BALANCE

The Five Phases describe different types of life-promoting energy (*Chi*) and define relationships that balance each other. Each of the Phases are named after a constituent existing in nature: Wood, Fire, Earth, Metal, and Water. These phases, often called “elements” in western translations, promote or create each other and control each other resulting in balance. (See SIDE BAR.)

The theory underlying Five Phases of Transition is basic to Traditional Chinese Medicine and reflects the natural flow of life that leads to health and longevity. The Five Phases is simply a guide to following the patterns of transitioning from one climatic season (in Chinese medicine, there are five seasons) to the next, and one phase of life to the next, so that the body can thrive in its environment. If this is not followed, the equine body becomes imbalanced and vulnerable to the invasion of external ‘pathogens’ such as the harsh wind in autumn or extreme heat in summer.

THE FIVE PHASES AND THE HORSE

The Five Phases of Transition can appear complex, especially when further defined by Yin-Yang Theory, the core of this ancient medicine. Chinese medicine is made up of theories and it takes the western mind time to grasp both its intricacy and its simplicity. But, most of us can intuitively understand the guidance Chinese medicine theories offer following the laws of nature.

For instance, if a two-year-old gelding is acting lethargic, his limbs feel cold to the touch, his eye seems dull, and gaze unfocused, we would all know that this animal is not well. If a 38-year-old gelding were to exhibit the very same indicators, we would attribute it to his advanced age. The flow of energy in a young animal should be vibrant, while the aging animal is just that - aging. The two-year-old is in the beginning of the Fire Phase or the summer of his life, while the 38-year-old is in the Water Phase or the winter of his life. We all know this through observation and at an intuitive level.

PROFILES OF THE FIVE PHASES

Each of the Five Phases is associated with a season, a phase in the life cycle, specific internal organs, an emotion, a sense organ, an activity level, and many other attributes.

1. **Wood** is associated with the following: season of spring, lifecycle phase of birth, exuberant energy, sense organ of the eye, emotion of anger since it is an effective protective mechanism, and the internal organs of the Liver and Gallbladder since they control the replenishment of Blood and the health of the tendons and ligaments of the body. Wood prepares the way for Fire.

2. The warmth of summer promotes high energy and growth in the **Fire** Phase. The filly dances with joy in the pasture building her strength and expanding her knowledge of the ways of horses. When the filly is not prancing and dancing in her first summer of life, she is not balanced and thus not healthy. Nor will this filly have the physical, emotional and energetic resources to be strong and healthy in the coming Phase. As this animal moves into maturity and the season of late-summer, she is entering the Earth Phase. The

← Wild horses know how to prepare for the seasonal transitions in climate and resources to maintain their own energetic balance and health. We can help our domestic horses prepare as well by following the guidance of the 5 Phases of Transition.

CYCLES CREATE AND KEEP NATURAL BALANCE



Creation Cycle

There is a Creation Cycle, or *Sheng* cycle, where each of the phases promotes or creates the next. For instance, it is the resources created in the Wood phase that makes it possible for Fire to exist since Wood fuels Fire. During the activity of burning Wood, Fire creates ash, a nutrient-rich resource for the creation of Earth. Each “element” or phase of transition transforms to create the next. It is a constant cyclic process that we can see in the annual passage of the seasons or the passing from birth to maturity to old age. Each Phase has its own unique energetic characteristics and each Phase needs the support of the one before it. Fire needs Wood to exist, just the way a child needs its mother to provide the resources to exist.

Control Cycle

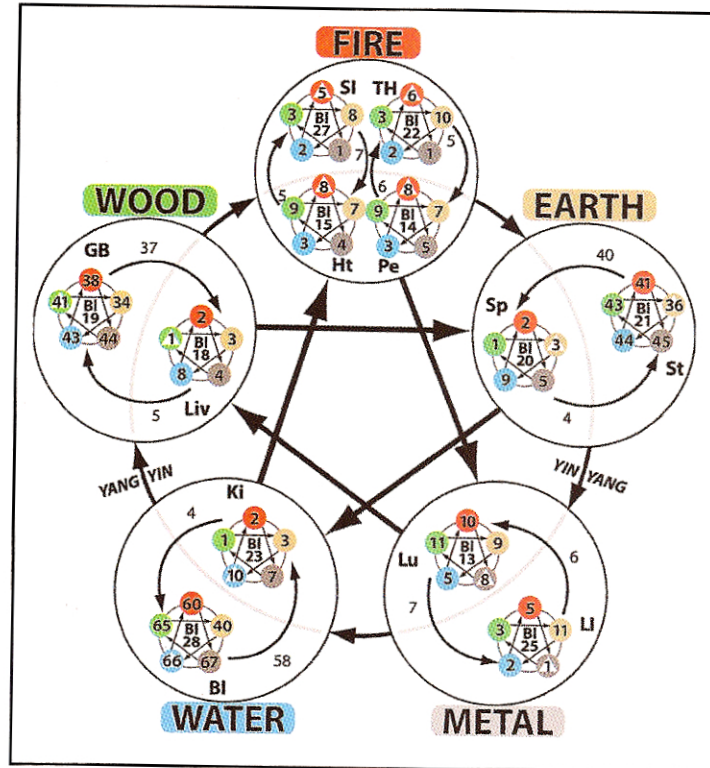
If all life were creation and promotion, we would have exponential growth of all living things. This would exhaust the natural world as we know it. The ancient Chinese saw that nature had built-in checks and balances so that excessive abundance cannot occur. This is called the Control Cycle, or *Ko* Cycle. The same constituents of nature inter-relate in such a way as to control each other so that there is a natural, predictable balance.

Water can tame the flames of Fire, thus balancing the energy of Fire. The Metal ax can chop an excessive growth of trees, thus Metal Controls Wood. The heat of Fire can melt Metal, thus Fire Controls Metal. Each Phase within the Five Phases of Transition requires a force or energy that can manage and balance it.

The natural world has its patterns, rhythms, and cycles to ensure that balance is maintained. The horse and human are part of nature; neither of us can survive healthfully if we ignore this fact of life. ♪

associated internal organ systems are Heart, Small Intestine, Triple Heater, and Pericardium; the tongue is the associated sense organ.

3. **Earth** energy is maturity, greater stability, and the time when the horse has the ability to nourish himself physically and emotionally. The sense organ is the mouth, and the internal organ systems are Stomach and Spleen. In late summer, horses are ready to “ingather” since the full blades of grass are diminishing and the cooler winds of autumn are not far away. Horses know to add bulk to their bodies’ before grazing becomes scarce. The animal that does not prepare himself for fall will be vulnerable to chill and invasion of wind as the days pass.



Five Phases of Transition Chart

The ancient Chinese recognized that the entire universe is subject to constant change and transformation. Each of the Five Phases of Transition, also called the "Five Elements", represents and corresponds to distinct energetic qualities, characteristics and properties. The Creation Cycle, or Sheng Cycle, flows in a clockwise manner and the Control, Ko Cycle, looks like a five-pointed star in the center of the diagram.

Creation Cycle: Wood creates Fire; Fire creates Earth; Earth creates Metal; Metal creates Water; and, Water creates Wood.

Control Cycle: Wood controls Earth; Earth controls Water; Water controls Fire; Fire controls Metal; and, Metal controls Wood.

4. **Metal** is autumn, the time of life beyond maturity and before old age. Picture the settled horse: a stable mount that lives by routine and only requires moderate exercise. If this animal were to race around the pasture at a feverish pitch expending his energy rapidly, it would be clear that he is experiencing an imbalance that could have dangerous consequences since he is not in harmony with the natural Metal season and stage of life. The Lung and Large Intes-

tine internal organ systems, and the nose as sense organ, are associated with this phase,

5. **Water** is the cold of winter, old age, nearing death. The emotion is fear, the sense organ is ears, and internal organ systems are Kidney and Bladder. It is when nature is dormant, resting and replenishing before the next cycle of life begins anew in spring time. Horses need to follow the same pattern of resting and replenishing their resources.

This is the beginning of the story of the traditional wisdom of the Five Phases of Transition. A horse cycles through the seasonal cycle every year, and needs to be balanced throughout the year and his entire life... even throughout each day. The Five Phases is a realistic model from which we can learn to balance our horse's energy in relation to the environment, and in Part 2 we will discuss how to harmonize the horse's life with the flow of the seasons, thus maintaining balance. ♪

About the authors:

Amy Snow and Nancy Zidonis are the authors of *Equine Acupressure: A Working Manual*, *The Well-Connected Dog: A Guide To Canine Acupressure*, and *Acu-Cat: A Guide to Feline Acupressure*. They own Tallgrass Publishers, which offers Meridian Charts for horses, dogs, and



Nancy Zidonis and Amy Snow

cats, plus videos on animal acupressure. They founded Tallgrass Animal Acupressure Institute which provides hands-on and online training courses worldwide including a Practitioner Certification Program. 888-841-7211; www.animalacupressure.com; info@animalacupressure.com