Getting in Tune with Nature
review by Irene Alleger

Staying Healthy with the Seasons
by Elson M. Haas, MD
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Whoever wishes to investigate medicine should proceed thus: In the first place, consider the seasons of the year and what effect each of them produces.

– Hippocrates

The cover of Staying Healthy With the Seasons seems bursting with life – every element is vibrant, full of energy. And that reflects exactly what is found within – vibrant life, health, well-being. This book is not about illness and disease, it's about health – how to preserve it, enhance it, sustain it – in the most natural way possible.

Dr. Haas, in his introduction, recalls the events that led to his writing Staying Healthy With the Seasons in 1981: an interest in acupuncture and nutrition which he found “changed his life,” ridding him of “an accumulation of physical and psychological sludge....” Juice cleansing, especially, started “the healthful flow of chi through all levels of my being.” In 1981, Staying Healthy With the Seasons became one of the first books to integrate ancient Eastern healing traditions with modern Western medical practice, and so became a classic in the field. This 21st century edition will find an even larger audience, for its time has come!

Dr. Haas begins with his basic philosophy, especially the role of the mind and emotions in illness. He briefly outlines allopathic medicine, prevention, nutrition and herbology, before introducing Chinese Medicine and the Five Element Theory.

The Five Elements are Wood, Fire, Earth, Metal, and Water. A chart showing the attributes of the particular element is included at the end of each seasonal section. (The relationships and associations of the complete Five Element Cycle are summarized in a chart at the end of the book, which can be referenced whenever needed.) The process of the Five Elements runs through birth, growth, maturation, harvest, and storage, finding a congruence in the seasons of the year.

In the Chinese system of the Five Elements, the Spring season is correlated with the element Wood, which governs the gallbladder and liver. The Wood element refers to the growing structures, the spine, limbs, and joints in the human body. The associated color of this element is the predominant one of Spring – the green of young plants. Other associations to Wood are discussed, such as the sense organ – in this case, the eyes. The liver and gallbladder, the organs of Spring, become congested and toxic from overeating (a peculiarly American habit), alcohol, chemicals, drugs, fried oils and meats.

Springtime is the season for major cleansing, for a new beginning. In the Spring, everything comes to life again, and in our reptilian brain, even we humans feel the pull of Nature. Dr. Haas has his own favorite cleansing program called the “Master Cleanser”: 2 tablespoons fresh squeezed lemon juice; 1-2 tablespoons pure, 100% maple syrup; and 1/10th teaspoon cayenne pepper, mixed in 8 ounces pure spring water. “Lemon is a perfect liver food and a great body cleanser...Lemons are an especially good aid to arthritis sufferers, cleansing the joint spaces.” Cayenne eliminates toxins and mucus, as well as keeping the body warm. The maple syrup is for energy. He recommends 6 glasses a day.

Dr. Haas offers many different kinds of cleansing – fruit and vegetable juices primarily, with many helpful little tips for the best outcome. The Spring diet consists mostly of Greens of all kinds, sprouted seeds and beans, Wheatgrass juice, and herbal teas. All of these are aimed at keeping the Wood element – the liver and gallbladder – in good condition...“with new attention to nutrition, exercise, self-awareness and self-expression...this is a special time to be open to the new, and the season to clear out the past which is ready to leave.”

Each season is correlated with the corresponding element. Summer corresponds to the element Fire, and is seen as providing the energy governing the heart and small intestine. The Fire element gives enthusiasm, vitality, and energy; Fire...“is the action that carries out the ‘idea’ from the Wood
element." All the relevant associations to Fire are given for Summer, as for each season.

Late Summer, or “Indian Summer” is a special time at the end of Summer, and before Autumn, and is correlated with the element Earth. Even though it’s a short “season,” it is correlated with an important element in the Five Element Theory. The spleen and stomach are the body organs in the spotlight during this short, but intense period, and the digestive system is emphasized. Food-Combining is explained and recommended, as well as Acid and Alkaline diets.

Autumn is associated with the element Metal, and represents the mineral ores and salts of the Earth. The Metal element is associated with the lungs and large intestine. Dr. Haas advises: “If you are one of those with a history of digestive or bowel weakness, or of long winters of colds and lung problems, this is the time to prepare yourself for staying well this Fall or Winter.” Autumn cleansing is recommended, using grape juice. A wonderfully intelligent and useful section discusses Meditation, then goes on to examine the increasing role of psychoactive drugs and their “unintended” side effects. The Autumn diet stresses whole grains, root vegetables, as well as medicinal herbs, useful for cleansing lungs and skin.

According to the Chinese Five Element Theory, Winter is related to the element Water and correlates to the Bladder and Kidneys. “Winter’s power is deep and yin. It is a time to conserve energy and resources. You need special care in the form of nutrition, warmth, and rest.” This section contains a detailed description of the “rhythm method” as natural birth control. The Kidneys and the Water element are associated with sexual and reproductive functions, hence birth control.

There is also an intelligent discussion of abortion in a totally non-judgemental way.

There is a great deal of information tucked in here and there, in this book—perhaps because it’s basic naturopathy, everything is connected; every thing leads to something else—and ultimately, to the whole. Among the elegant presentations of the Five Element Theory and their associations with the seasons, is a bonanza of health-related advice and wisdom, such as discussion of diet and therapy, the Chakras (with charts), Food-Combining (chart), Centering, Yoga, and modern sexuality.

What makes Staying Healthy With the Seasons an outstanding and genuinely satisfying book is the special insight of Elson Haas. There are no mysterious panaceas, no exotic herbs or single medicinal that will make us healthy. Basic Naturopathy integrated with the ancient art and science of Chinese Medicine produces a formidable philosophy of prevention. Allopathy says “Take this, take that”; Naturopathy says “Avoid this, avoid that,” because most modern illness can be avoided/prevented. Unfortunately, we live in a culture of excess and are constantly exhorted to consume, consume, be it food, or the latest product in the marketplace.

Technology can never replace the wisdom distilled from experience and combined with an open mind (said to represent the “scientific” method). How to maintain health seems far more important than trying to cure illness, and Dr. Haas has written a book that can never be out of date, for the Laws of Nature remain the bedrock of healing and health.

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