



**Professor J.R. Worsley**  
1923 - 2003

### **Classical Five-Element Acupuncture: The Teachings of Professor J.R. Worsley**

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#### **Introduction:**

For thousand of years, the Chinese have recognized that the Five Elements: Wood, Fire, Earth, Metal, and Water exist in everything, everyone, and are essential for life. Classical Five-Element Acupuncture asserts that every human being is born with, or develops early in life, an imbalance in the natural functioning of these Five Elements. This imbalance becomes the underlying cause of illness.

Classical Five-Element Acupuncture is set apart from other systems of acupuncture by its core premise of diagnosing and treating a patient's fundamental Causative Factor: the element among the five that is the source of imbalance. The Causative Factor is assessed by way of sensory information provided by the body, mind, and spirit of the patient. Each of the elements has a corresponding odor, color, sound, and emotion, which can be perceived when a particular element is out of balance. Accurate diagnosis and treatment of the Causative Factor is the key to Classical Five-Element Acupuncture. In addition, this elegant system recognizes that the health of each unique individual's body, mind, and spirit must be taken into account to fully understand and treat the cause of illness. Thus, no two patients are ever treated the same.

Professor J.R. Worsley, universally acknowledged as the Father and Master Teacher of Five- Element Acupuncture in the modern world, brought this system of medicine to the West. A titled "Master", a designation bestowed upon him by his Masters, J.R. died on June 2nd, 2003. Consistent with this heritage of master training and strict adherence to traditional teachings, J.R.'s teaching methods were highly personalized, and he created programs to ensure that this lineage would be continued after his death.

This article seeks to clarify terms and simply present what Professor J.R. Worsley taught. This is important to do as others now attempt to carry forward the essence of his great work. As is always the case in historical moments of transition, there is the temptation to alter and embellish. However, there is no need to re-interpret or add modern spins to the ancient system that J.R. taught, as it is based on the timeless teachings of Nature itself. J.R. warned that human beings, unfortunately, will always want to create new "improvements" and clever interpretations and that doing so would only clutter the simple beauty of this elegant system of natural medicine.

In the mid 1980s, visiting Professors from China advised Professor Worsley to call the type of five-element acupuncture he taught "Classical Five-Element Acupuncture." This "classical" category adheres to the exact tradition as it was taught thousands of years ago and remains virtually unaltered today. However, as is often the case with students who train with a Master, there are many who trained with J.R. over the years who have chosen to develop and practice their own variations of his teachings. While innovation and variation are to be expected in the life of any discipline, it is important to clearly articulate the original teachings so that students and the public can make informed decisions about Five-Element

Acupuncture. Two recent variations of what J.R. taught are worth noting, and are explained in more detail later in this article.

"Constitutional" five-element acupuncture is a recently introduced notion that uses as its premise the "constitutional factor", abbreviated in the same fashion as J.R.'s terminology as "CF". Obviously, the language similarity to "Causative Factor" as taught by J.R. is very likely to cause confusion. Causative Factor and constitutional factor are not the same thing.

Another variation of J.R.'s work refers to the Causative Factor (CF) as the "guardian element" and interprets the elements in this new style. It is very important that anyone wanting to learn Classical Five-Element Acupuncture know that this new interpretation was not what J.R. taught.

J.R. diligently prepared, as any Master would do, for the day he would die. J.R. did not leave the destiny of this precious tradition to assumers. He spoke in public, on videotape, and committed to writing about his intentions. He named his successor and trusted custodians of his work. He taught for decades, and in the last twenty years always with a media team recording his teachings. In 1997, he selected a group of formal apprentices to train and develop further as practitioners, teachers, and leaders under his guidance, and that of the Master-Designate, to carry the tradition of Classical Five-Element Acupuncture forward. With the deepest gratitude to J.R. for his teachings and his unwavering love for us, his students, we humbly dedicate this article to his memory, in the knowledge that we write with his expressed authority to speak for him and his teachings, under J.B. Worsley's direction.

### **"Be yourself."**

J.R. taught how to recognize the authentic Self. He taught that everything a practitioner would ever need to diagnose and treat patients dwells within. He taught that this medicine could not be learned from books. He often said, "If you want a teacher, go and find yourself a child below the age of one, before his/her mind has been conditioned and polluted." J.R. taught how to access beyond thinking to that childlike spontaneity beyond categorizations, characterizations, and labels.

### **Our Uniqueness and Causative Factor:**

He taught that every human being is a unique individual, a unique balance of the five elements: Wood, Fire, Earth, Metal, and Water. No two people are the same, regardless of the similarities of their symptoms or of their underlying elemental imbalance, which he termed the Causative Factor (CF).

We all have a Causative Factor, but this does not define who we are, fundamentally or constitutionally. Causative Factor defines the cause and the source of imbalance. Experiences, personality, constitution, values, beliefs, preferences, psycho-spiritual dynamics count amongst the many factors that determine individual uniqueness; however, these are irrelevant to the Causative Factor determination.

J.R. never used the term "constitutional imbalance" or "constitutional factor". Causative Factor was J.R.'s signature mark in the acupuncture world and the phrases are not interchangeable. J.R. stated that there is nothing constitutional about one's CF; CF does not define one's essential nature. If, for example, one were to see a rose withering from lack of water, it would be absurd to describe the nature or constitution of the rose by the qualities of water. CF is a unique diagnostic aspect of Classical Five-Element Acupuncture.

J.R. taught that there is absolutely no value judgment ascribed to any element, whether it is the Causative Factor (CF) or not. The Causative Factor is neither negative nor positive, and reveals no special insights or guardianship any more than the water needed by the withered rose in the previous example. It is simply what the rose needs to flourish. The elements are, of themselves, neutral and equal in value. Nature is our guardian and requires no additional "positive spin" or embellishment. It is simply what it is. When we are at one within ourselves, with our senses awake, we perceive Nature's essential reality without mental commentary and recognize that any sort of "thinking" about the elements is merely just that: thinking. J.R.'s teaching was to "Be".

### **The Internal State:**

J.R. taught to observe one's own internal state, thus enabling one to cultivate a state of awareness, empty of mental chatter. When in this state of peace and stillness, one is able to clearly perceive the Causative Factor (CF), the imbalanced Elements Within the CF, the primarily affected Official, the level at which the primary imbalance exists (physical, mental, or spiritual), and the exact points needed to treat. J.R. showed, with countless patients, that symptoms are merely distress signals of the body, mind, and spirit saying, in essence: "Help!" To access the deeper levels of cause, he taught how to be

"present". Before launching into questions about patients' problems, it is vital to achieve rapport - oneness within oneself and with the patient. Only when in rapport, a state of internal quietude, does a practitioner have the presence to access the true diagnostic information to assist Nature to correct imbalance.

The experience of being in rapport is very different than the experience of coming from the head: "Well, now I'll offer this person sympathy, anger, fear etc and "test"/see what happens." It is a contrived approach, based upon assumptions and categorizations, and is inauthentic. J.R. taught to "test" - meaning to stretch/test oneself by going beyond one's own emotional comfort zones.

We have, in the West, been intensely conditioned to rely on the mind. We "think" our way through life and have been rewarded since childhood for so doing - for our intellectual accomplishments. J.R. taught, however, that once the basic framework of this system was learned, the "head" days were over. He warned, "Practicing this system of medicine from your senses is very easy. Coming from your head, it is impossible." He taught to beware of seemingly "easy methods" and shortcuts - attempting to replace authentic, direct experience with "characterizations" which are precisely coming from the head.

### **The Myth of "Types":**

J.R. emphasized that there are no such things as "elemental types." To think of people in such terms is simply that: thinking. He taught that one can draw no conclusions based on any categorization: not body type or shape, facial expression or characteristics, behavior, gestures, personality traits, spoken words, symptoms, attitudes, or personal history. For every Earth imbalanced patient that is built like the "Pillsbury Doughboy" - thick, soft, and fleshy we can show you another that is the exact opposite: thin, hard, and angular (or any other combination of physical traits imaginable). For every Wood imbalanced person that manifests anger, we can show you a Fire, Earth, Metal, or Water imbalanced person who gets even angrier. Every person must and will express every emotion and each element contains all five. The relevant issues are the quality and the appropriateness of the emotion.

No two fragrant odors are the same, nor are two shades of yellow, singing voices, nor expressions of sympathy, yet these indicators, unique to each individual, will clearly express Earth as the underlying Causative Factor. As in Nature, Earth can be dry and sandy, loamy, rocky, clay-like, volcanic, unstable and quaking, etc., yet it is still Earth. Such endless variations can be found in any element and, therefore, in individuals as well.

What is Water? Is it the roaring ocean, a peaceful lake, a meandering stream, a thunderous rainstorm, a gentle drizzle? Are they not all expressions of Water? Metal can be diamond, gold, air, molten lava, rotting leaves, and excrement. Wood can be a seed, a blade of grass, and a massive oak - everything that grows from the Earth. Fire can be a raging forest fire, a cozy fireplace, a smoldering ember, a single spark, burning rubbish, the heat of the summer sun, the light of a distant star - all expressions of Fire, no two ever the same. Once one knows the Causative Factor, the Elements Within, and level of the disease, then one can understand the how and why of an individual patient's symptoms, physical presentation, attitudes, behaviors, etc. It is never the reverse.

### **The Elements Within:**

J.R. taught that to better understand the uniqueness of a person, one must look at the state of the elements within the Causative Factor (CF). Every element contains within itself all five elements, and each brings its own unique qualities to every person, regardless of the primary imbalance. These qualities will and must influence the way in which a person manifests him/herself. The Element Within is the secondary element that has, in effect, caused the imbalance in the CF.

Even more subtly, there is a third element within the secondary. This Element, having caused the imbalance in the secondary, will manifest as a third dimension of odor, color, sound, and emotion.

### **The Three Levels:**

Regardless of the Causative Factor (CF), a patient will be primarily imbalanced at the level of body, mind, or spirit. Just as no two bodies are the same in any two people, neither are two minds nor two spirits.

As with the elements, one cannot analyze a particular behavior and conclude a patient's level. Ultimately it is the spirit that fuels the body and the mind. Therefore, if a patient makes an obvious mental miscalculation such as purchasing a lottery ticket as the means of resolving financial difficulties, we cannot simply assume that he/she is primarily imbalanced at the mental level. Such an absurdly unlikely financial resolution could well be the last ditch, desperate attempt by a person whose spirit is nearly resigned.

One can only perceive the patient's level, and the specific needs within it, from that same level within oneself. One cannot perceive a patient's spiritual needs from one's mind - by thinking. Only spirit understands spirit. One's job is to determine, from the whole of oneself, the level that is in most trouble, exactly what the trouble is, and to select the exact points to reach the root of the problem.

### **The Use of Moxabustion:**

*Artemesia Vulgaris Latiflora*, the herb placed on the skin and ignited to smoldering prior to needling, contains regenerative properties far deeper than mere physical warming. Classical Five-Element Acupuncture states that moxabustion has little to do with heat and much to do with rejuvenation.

A patient may be physically hot, but may be cold and inert at the level of the mind or spirit. By understanding the needs of the patient, when moxa is properly used, the heat will reach the needed level and therefore balance out all three. Only in cases of hypertension or upon certain specific points is moxa contra-indicated. A patient manifesting overheating symptoms on a physical level actually cools down as a result of using moxa appropriately on the needed level!

### **The Concepts of Tonification and Sedation:**

J.R. taught that it is impossible to have too much energy. A person is born with a given amount and, although one can rebuild and replenish it, one cannot get "extra." It is, however, quite possible that the available energy within a person is improperly balanced and there may be a relative excess in one area and, thus, a relative deficiency elsewhere. In such cases, the practitioner may need to transfer from the relative excess to the relative deficiency in order to assist Nature to restore balance and harmony.

Even in cases in which a syndrome that may seem to be, by its presence, an excess condition, the underlying nature of the person's energy (physical, mental, spiritual) will be deficient. J.R. taught that, in this day and age, the vast majority of patients are imbalanced at the spirit level, regardless of the presence of physical symptoms, and one truly cannot have too much spirit. Thus, in the vast majority of cases, the choice of treatment action will be tonification. By properly treating the CF, the elements within, and the level, any concern with so-called "pathogenic factors" dissolves as the power of treating at the cause and level produces seemingly magical results.

In rare cases, all of a patient's pulses may feel excessive. J.R. taught that this means there is internal chaos going on, not that all the organs have too much energy. Once we have given the appropriate treatment to restore calm (in such cases using sedation), we will find that underlying the chaos and panic was, in fact, deficiency.

### **Awakening our Senses:**

J.R. taught that one cannot awaken one's senses by merely wishing and hoping. It takes "presence", achieved through focus and choice. Regarding smell, there is no substitute for consciously smelling a dozen or two-dozen things a day in order to reawaken the olfactory sense that one experienced as a young child. The sense of smell "switches on" the entire sensory apparatus. He taught his students to smell everything - papers, plastic, pens, pencils, tea, coffee, etc. Wool smells different than cotton. Oranges smell different than apples. How can one know without this vital sense? He said emphatically, "The patient is there, emitting odor constantly, but what good is it if you can't smell it?"

Regarding seeing, J.R. reminded his students early in their training that most people don't see. They look. They take a cursory glance, form an opinion, and off they go. We can only see our patients with our whole being, through the eyes of our own spirit. Only from this state, can we perceive the state of our patients' spirits, their level of struggle and suffering, as well as who they are in the fullness of their potential, with their unique divine spark realized. Anything less is just "thinking" that we have the answer, (i.e. the CF, level, etc.) and empty of real perception.

It is the same with touch. In the course of a treatment, there are many opportunities to make physical contact with a patient. Is the contact merely physical, or does it touch the mind and spirit as well? Is the practitioner's physical communication appropriate, arising from a genuine impulse within? Is it consistent with the words, the tone of voice, the emotion, and facial expression? If mixed messages are given, mixed and confusing answers will result.

These sensory skills are natural, effortless, and available to all. However, they are beyond the reach of the intellect and irreplaceable by thinking. From the senses, one can actually know the patient and what he/she really needs to take the next steps on the journey. From the head, one can only imagine, speculate, and guess. Having a head filled with correspondences, categorizations, and expectations is not being present to anything but one's own mind. However, when

responding to each moment innocently - without preconceptions, expectations, or an agenda, without "trying" to do anything (including trying to "get it right," and to "look good") then one is present to the patient - wholly and completely.

### **Crafting a Successful Treatment:**

J.R. taught in the tradition of Master Teacher. He personally demonstrated and showed each student how to translate the sensory information into a precise treatment plan to meet the needs of the patient. He taught the physical, mental, and spiritual dimensions of every element and Official (organ/function). He brought the spiritual connotations of each point to life. He gave students individual feedback on pulse taking and point location, and shared his own findings as a standard against which his students could measure their own sensitivity. With ongoing practice, students found their pulse diagnoses and point location congruent with his. He gave students the benefit of his own sensory experience and choice of points, in a way that they deeply understood not only what, but how he arrived at his conclusions.

### **Removing our Internal Obstacles:**

Finally, J.R. invited his students to drop all of their excuses. Bringing the ancient teachings of the Chinese sages to life, he taught that the results we get depend on the core beliefs we hold. If we as practitioners believe, for example, that we cannot smell, then we create that result as reality for ourselves. He taught that we have the responsibility for our own learning. Nothing is stopping us but ourselves.

Our perceptions and interpretations are ours, as well as any self-imposed limitations. It is untrue that anyone or anything "out there" is challenging and needs to change. We challenge ourselves by resisting, interpreting, labeling, distorting, and blaming. With responsibility, we see that we, not the outside world, need to change. With this realization, we put ourselves "at cause." To imagine otherwise is to embrace excuses, to act as impotent victims, simply at the effect of events and circumstances over which we feel we have no control. Thus, we come face to face with our own issues and beliefs - how our minds create an illusion of separateness between us and our patients, the world around us, and our God given senses. Recognizing how we create disconnectedness is itself the way out of the mind trap of enslavement to the past, fear of the future, and into the purity and authenticity of the present.

Ultimately, he taught his students to love one another, to see beyond the false self and the notions of separateness to the essence beneath. We might not like everyone, but we are still connected by a single life energy. When we feel the connection, we are "in" the energy. We are "in love," for love is the connection and the oneness. Ultimately, any notion of separation between "others" and us is illusory. He taught, "In God's eyes, we are all equal, so for God's sake, don't look down on anyone or up to anyone, because anything you think they've 'got,' you've got in spades, as well."

The fact that we exist in a level of physical appearances and separate forms simply means we have more work to do on ourselves. The good news is we have so many opportunities to do the work - so many people and situations to thank for revealing our false selves, for "pushing our buttons" so that we can know these buttons are there and resolve them. This stripping away of ego, admittedly, can be painful, but what an incredible liberation it is. This becomes the profound focus for our development as better and better instruments of Nature.

### **The History, The Future:**

J.R. received this lineage from his Master Teachers, Master Ono and Master Hsui, with whom he studied in the Far East in the 1950s and 1960s. He always asserted, "Classical Five-Element Acupuncture is nothing I have invented. I am simply passing along this system as it has been practiced for thousands of years. It is based on natural laws that do not change and will not change." He passed the responsibility of teaching this lineage to Judy Becker Worsley, his wife, his student, Trustee of his intellectual property and his designated successor. In the last 31 years Judy was at his side, learning with him. He announced two years before his death that we were no longer to consider him the sole Master and Judy in a lesser role. She was to be the new Master, was absolutely his equal, and had fully embodied the teachings.

In 1997, J.R. and Judy invited a group of senior practitioners to become "apprentices" thus creating the Master Apprentice Program (MAP™), which is dedicated to developing leaders, teachers and protectors of the Classical Five-Element Acupuncture lineage as taught by J.R. The MAP™ participants, dedicated to preserving the integrity of this system of medicine following J.R.'s death, established the not-for-profit Worsley Institute to protect the accuracy and integrity of his teaching and make it widely available. There are currently five designated Master Apprentices and ten Apprentices. A second MAP™ was initiated in 2002 with thirty-seven practitioners currently enrolled.

There is no need for speculation about who will carry forward the Classical Five-Element Acupuncture lineage. J.R. honored his oath to his teachers - to practice and teach Classical Five-Element Acupuncture as it has been taught for thousands of years - until his last breath. Judy and all Master Apprentices and Apprentices have pledged the same oath: to preserve, teach and express the ideals of this Classical Five-Element Acupuncture lineage.

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Please visit the Worsley Institute website (listed below) for information on Professor' Worsley's charts, tapes, books and other upcoming events that teach his work.

[The Worsley Institute of Classical Five-Element Acupuncture](#), a not for profit foundation established to advance Classical Five-Element Acupuncture as taught by Professor J.R. Worsley, offers a range of training programs, continuing education opportunities, practitioner support, informational resources, and public information, including a list of Classical Five-Element Practitioners.

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