

Lifestyle Prescriptions® and The Five Element Theory:
A Qualitative Study of A Combined Model

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Abstract

Effective on their own, both Lifestyle Prescriptions® and The Five Element Theory as practiced under the broad ambit of Traditional Chinese Medicine have produced unique and impactful results in addressing illness and symptoms. The current study creates and examines a unique hybrid model that combines Lifestyle Prescriptions® and the Five Element Theory from Traditional Chinese Medicine through a qualitative analysis. Through five case studies, the study evaluates the effectiveness of using these modalities in combination, in ways that complement and support the creation of wholesome outcomes for individuals pursuing well-being. The findings show that the Five Element Theory and Lifestyle Prescriptions work well in combination, and support trauma release, balance restoration, and release of symptoms in a range of situations. The study also explores the limitations of the hybrid model and adds to the literature through its insightful findings while also making a comprehensive case for future research in this direction.

Good health is not the absence of disease, but an active integration of the mind, body, and spirit, and a deep awareness and attention toward potential factors that may hamper the connection. This core philosophy underlies well-being in the most wholesome sense, and drives humankind to constantly strive to seek and find ways to build wellness. From ancient to modern praxis, collective wisdom has always been informed by a centered and grounded connection between the mind and the body.

Among ancient practices, The Five Element Theory has informed generations of practitioners and non-practitioners alike in ways to attain and sustain good health. The practice fundamentally acknowledges the roles of the five elements – wood, fire, earth, metal, and water – in balancing and maintaining our bodies in a state of equilibrium. The dynamic interactions among these elements imply an integrated engagement of enforcing and controlling one another: mutually building a homeostasis that controls elements from gaining an overtly upper hand over other elements, or losing grip while giving way to other elements.

Among contemporary and modern practices, Lifestyle Prescriptions® captures the essence of living life to one's fullest potential by going deep into the root cause of every symptom and manifestation of disease, and addressing it from bottom-up. It invites one to go deep within and identify lasting solutions that their own bodies, stories, and narratives hold within them, and paves the way for the mind and body to align with the release of trauma.

This thesis acknowledges the wisdom in combined praxis across time and space. By bringing the Five Element Theory to the world of Lifestyle Prescriptions®, this study presents and tests an experimental model combining the two streams to produce valuable results. The first part of this thesis will establish what the five element theory comprises and present some key components and action points under it. The second part of this thesis will explore the scope and focal points of Lifestyle Prescriptions®. The third part of this thesis

presents the model combining five elements theory and Lifestyle Prescriptions® and highlights the key findings drawn from case studies implementing the model. The final part of the thesis draws conclusions and identifies directions for future research.

Literature Review

The Five Element Theory

In Taoist theory, phenomena of reality are depicted using five elements – each of which represents a dynamic process that fundamentally comprises phases of change (Ahn et al., 2010). The five symbols are wood, fire, earth, metal, and water. The symbols are not to be construed literally: which means that mentions of water should not typically be centered on ocean water or tap water, but really on the characteristic features, the dynamic states, and the elemental force of water. In Taoist theory, wood is symbolic of rising, development of an action, impulse, expansion, and decampment. Fire represents embodiment, definition, action, dynamism, and design (Behmanesh et al., 2015). Earth reflects qualities of alteration, transformation, change, and conversion. Metal symbolizes sinking, contraction, and decline. Water represents contemplation, calmness, reconsideration, observation, and reflection.

Taoist theory contends that all material things in existence comprise one or more of the five elements in some combination – as these elements are fundamental components of existence (Ahn et al., 2010). In this combination, one element may predominate over another, wherein it is assigned an abstract generalization and can be classified appropriately. With time, the theory began to be associated with the human body and its organ system and sensory organs, as well as with colours, foods, biota, and a range of other things in the world we inhabit.

The five elements are equally important, and typically must be in balance while simultaneously being in states of constant motion and cyclical change in phases. Within the

phase, the elements reach a peak and decline. Every peak implies that there will also be a decline: the state of dynamism and constant motion implies that the energy is constantly gathered and forwarded from one element to the next. This energy is called “chi” (Chen et al., 2015). The element that generates or controls the chi at a given time and builds it up to its peak, and forwards it to the next element – at which point the decline begins for the generating/controlling element. This process is constantly repeated in a never-ending, but balanced, cycle. The Theory of the Five Elements is merely an observation and record of what we see as natural and creative changes in and around us. Through this dynamic cycle, nature is constantly in a state of smooth and harmonious balance and transition from one phase to another (Behmanesh et al., 2015).

The Energy Cycles in Taoist Theory

The Generating, Inter-Promoting or Enhancing Cycle (生; shēng). The generation cycle, or the creation cycle, has its genesis in the Big Bang Theory, which suggested that an infinitely hot singularity explored to create multiple units that cooled down and eventually became what we know (and don’t know) about the composition of the universe (Jayalakshmi et al., 2010). Drawing from this, the sun created the earth, whereas air and metal are available around and on the earth. The air freezes and becomes water, which in turn helps wood grow, which in turn helps fire burn. In this sense, we can say that the fire created earth, earth created metal, air created water, and water created wood.

In the generating and controlling cycles, the relationship between the elements is one of parent and child (Chunhua, 2013). In effect, in this cycle, one element acts as a parent, wherein it generates, enriches, nourishes, strengthens, and promotes growth and development of the element that follows it, effectively as though it were a child (Leung, 2010; Liu, 2011); Low et al., 2010). In the generating form, wood feeds fire. Fire, in turn, creates earth by

generating ash. Earth then proceeds to yield metal, which, in trace elements, collects and enriches water. Water, in turn, closes the cycle by nurturing and nourishing wood. In effect, then, the following formulaic representation holds true:

- Wood is the supporting element of Fire. Fire can release the power of Wood.
- Fire is the supporting element of Earth. Earth can release the power of Fire.
- Earth is the supporting element of Metal. Metal can release the power of Earth.
- Metal is the supporting element of Water. Water can release the power of Metal.
- Water is the supporting element of Wood. Wood can release the power of Water.

The Controlling, Destructing or Inter-restraining (剋,克; kè) and the Weakening (侮, wǔ) Cycle. In the controlling cycle, the relationship between the elements is one of grandparent and grandchild. In this cycle, the sense of control serves as a check and balance system to ensure that all elements are in order and in harmony. The controlling cycle can also be a destructing cycle, wherein one element either suppresses or controls, or dominates another element (Hee et al., 2013; Lozano, 2014; Maciocia, 2018). It effectively overcomes or weakens another element and prevents it from gaining or establishing power. However, the chi is never destroyed. In the controlling and destructing form, a metallic knife can cut wood into pieces, and therefore control the shape of wood without destroying the chi energy. In this form, wood can break the ground or earth, which can then soak up water and prevent it from flowing per its natural course. Water can control fire, which in turn, can melt metal. Metal, as we saw above, can cut wood.

The Overacting Cycle Cheng. The generating and controlling/destructing cycles operate to balance each other (Ahn et al., 2010; Leung, 2010). When one generates and develops something in overt measure, the other cuts down or limits it to prevent it from being overacting. However, the cycle also contains a component of overaction or overwhelm, where

there is an imbalance within the *ke* cycle, while still following the *ke* direction (Hicks et al., 2010). For instance, the grandparent element may overtly control the grandchild element and weaken it. In effect, in this phase, an element restrains another excessively, way beyond the normal extent. This always takes place when one element is in excess. Thus, an element can both promote and control another element. For instance, where wood promotes fire, fire promotes earth. Earth promotes metal, which, in turn, promotes water, which, in turn, promotes wood. On the other end of the spectrum, wood controls the earth, whereas earth controls water. Water controls fire, which in turn, controls metal, and finally, metal closes the cycle by controlling wood.

The Weakening (Insulting) Cycle (侮, wǔ). The weakening or insulting cycle is one where the control is refuted (Ho & Lisowski, 1997; Ling, 2020; Maciocia, 2015). In the weakening (insulting) cycle, the grandchild insults or returns the controlling force generated by the grandparent back to the grandparent. In effect, it also represents an imbalance where that which is destroyed, in turn, destroys the destroyer. Instead of following the direction of the *ke* cycle, this process goes in the opposite direction. Thus, each element can insult the one that normally restrains it (Juan, 2011; Leung, 2010; Marshall, 2020; Moss, 1999). The *ke* cycle is reversed when the balance is broken, especially when the quantity of one element is insufficient. In this cycle, for example, earth can bury wood. Water washes away the Earth, whereas fire “injures” water by causing it to evaporate. When there is too much wood, metal is insulted. When there is too much metal, fire is insulted. Too much fire results in an insult to water, whereas too much water insults earth. Too much earth insults wood.

Interrelation of the Cycles. The cycles never take place in isolation, but typically in conjunction with one another (Moss, 1999; Pachuta, 1991; Teppone & Avakyan, 2009). As it is a dynamic process, the cycles are also constantly in motion and a state of change, just as the elements themselves are. The *Sheng and Ke* or *Generating and Controlling cycles* come

together to form a feedback system that keeps the system, the body, and the universe at large in a state of balance (Yang & Jia, 2013; Xutian et al., 2009; Xutian et al., 2014). They are the basis on which each element is connected with the four other elements so that the larger state of harmony is carefully maintained. In this dynamic, wood restrains earth, while at the same time, earth promotes metal, which, in turn, restrains the Wood. In this cycle, we see clearly that metal makes sure that wood does not restrain earth in excess. Thus, the balance and state of harmony is maintained. In the *Ke and Wu* or the *Controlling and Weakening cycles,* there is a strong representation of the conflicting aspect. Here, whereas wood can break the ground (Earth), earth can bury wood. While earth can absorb water, water can cover the earth. Similarly, while water can extinguish fire, fire can cause water to evaporate altogether. Further, fire can melt metal, while metal may not melt before fire is extinguished. Finally, even as metal can cut wood, it may wind up becoming dull and even chip, while or before breaking wood. Next comes the *Wu and Cheng cycle*, in which the over-abundance of one element can lead to the complete disruption of the balance in the circle.

The Elements in Taoist Theory

The elements in Taoist theory are presented in Table 1. Detailed explanations follow in the sections below.

Table 1

The Elements in Taoist Theory

Element	**Body Part**	**Colour**	**Emotion**	**Flavour**	**Weather**	**Symbol**
Wood	Liver, gall bladder, tendons, and eyes	Green	Anger	Sour	Wind	Azure Dragon
Fire	Heart, tongue, pulse	Red	Joy	Bitter	Heat	Red Pheasant
Earth	Spleen, stomach, mouth, muscles	Yellow	Pensive	Sweet	Damp	Yellow Dragon
Metal	Lungs, nose, skin	White	Sadness	Pungent	Dry	White Tiger
Water	Kidneys, ears, bones	Black	Fear	Salty	Cold	Black Tortoise

Source: One World Nations Online (n.d.)

Element 1: WOOD (Chinese: 木, pinyin: mù). Among all the elements, wood is considered the most "human." It represents the element of spring, and the creative urge and energy to achieve and accomplish things. If frustrated, this energy can turn into anger. Wood is also associated with one's capacity for forward-thinking, planning for the future, making decisions, and striving for growth and expansion. In effect, wood represents a sense of

growth, expansion, and the ability to rise – thus also representing flexibility and evolution. Wood is often associated with green and rectangles. In terms of its equivalence in the human body, wood represents all self-regulating activities in the body that take place without any conscious thought or cognitive thinking. It relates to digestion, respiration, heartbeats, metabolism, the gall bladder, and the liver's function of converting food into fuel to supply to the muscles, tendons, and ligaments in the body. It also relates to the Eastern direction, the planet Jupiter, and governs the Chinese Zodiac signs of the Tiger, Rabbit, and Dragon. It is symbolized by an Azure Dragon.

Element 2: FIRE (Chinese: 火, pinyin: huǒ). Fire represents heat, summer, and enthusiasm, as well as nature at its peak and warmth in human relations. It is represented by the colour red and a triangle. As the motion represented by fire is upward, it is associated with dynamic and passionate energies of an enterprising kind. It symbolizes combustion, and therefore relates to body functions that reach fleeting points of maximum energy before beginning to decline. The fire element is associated with the heart, the circulation system, and the tongue. It represents the Southern direction, the planet Mars, and is symbolized by a Vermilion Bird or the Red Pheasant. It also governs the Chinese Zodiac signs of Snake, Horse, and Sheep.

Element 3: EARTH (Chinese: 土, pinyin: tǔ). Earth represents the element of harvest, abundance, fertility, nourishment, and bountifulness. It also symbolizes the mother-child relationship. It is considered central to balance and the area where energy begins to move downward. It also represents a change in seasons. It symbolizes stability and a sense of being well grounded and anchored. Earth is represented by the colour yellow and a square shape. It reflects the fact that the Earth's motion presents patience, reliability, logic, and a sense of duty and service to others. It also represents being militaristic and rigid, stubborn, and even very energetic. In terms of its relation to the human body, Earth is

associated with the digestive system, the stomach and gut, the spleen, and the sense of taste. It represents the direction Centre, and the planet Saturn. It is symbolized by the Yellow Dragon. The Earth governs the Chinese zodiac signs of the Dragon, Rat, and Ox. It is the central balance of all the elements, and can lend qualities to all the 12 zodiac animals as well.

Element 4: METAL (Chinese: 金, pinyin: jīn). Metal includes the element of air within it. It represents the force of gravity, the minerals on earth, the patterns and movements of planets and stars, as well as electrical conductivity and magnetism. Metal has structure, but can also easily accept new form whenever it is molten. It is represented by the colour white, and a circular or round shape. The motion of metal is determined and strong, forceful and unyielding. It represents a sense of self-reliance, reservedness, and sophistication. The metal is symbolic of the actions of cutting and reforming. However, it is simultaneously also seen as a process of solidification. Thus, it is associated with autumn. In the human body, Metal is associated with the skin, as well as the respiratory system, specifically the lungs and the nose. It represents the direction of West, and the planet Venus. Metal is represented by the White Tiger. It governs the Chinese Zodiac signs of the Monkey, Rooster, and Dog.

Element 5: WATER (Chinese: 水, pinyin: shuǐ). Water is the source of life. It flows, being both infinitely yielding and powerful all at once, while still remaining flexible and ever evolving. Water has the capacity to be silent and still, storing a potential energy. It can also flow, nourish, and cleanse, and flood, be destructive, and harm, all at once. In terms of the human body, water represents fluid and fluidity. Fluids constitute the main element of the human body – the circulation and state of flux nurtures, nourishes, and maintains health in each cell. Water represents the lung, kidneys, and the skeletal, excretory, and circulatory system, as well as all the vital fluids such as blood, lymph, mucus, semen, and fat. It is represented by the colours black and blue, and a wave-like shape. Water moves downward, in a fluid fashion that is not constrained to a single shape. It is secretive and intuitive, but

simultaneously also gentle, sensitive, creative, and compassionate. It is the ultimate yin. It can be quiet and cold, too, representing resting time, and the winter. Water also governs the balance with fear, and strikes a balance between the fear of being dominated and the desire to dominate. It represents the direction North and the planet Mercury. It is symbolized by the Black Tortoise. Water governs the Chinese Zodiac signs of Pig, Rat, and Ox.

Every individual is a blend of the five elements. For wholesome, good health, the elements should ideally be in balance. When there is an imbalance, health issues arise. One element becomes too strong or active, and disrupts the general flow of good health.

The Yin and the Yang

All the universe's many phenomena are capable of being described in terms of the Yin and Yang. While the human body is seen as a whole, its individual components are analyzed through the lens of Yin and Yang. There are five Yin Organs, namely the liver, heart, spleen, lungs, and kidneys. There are six Yang Organs, namely the gall bladder, stomach, small and large intestine, the bladder, and the triple burner - which is a functional organ that does not have a physical structure.

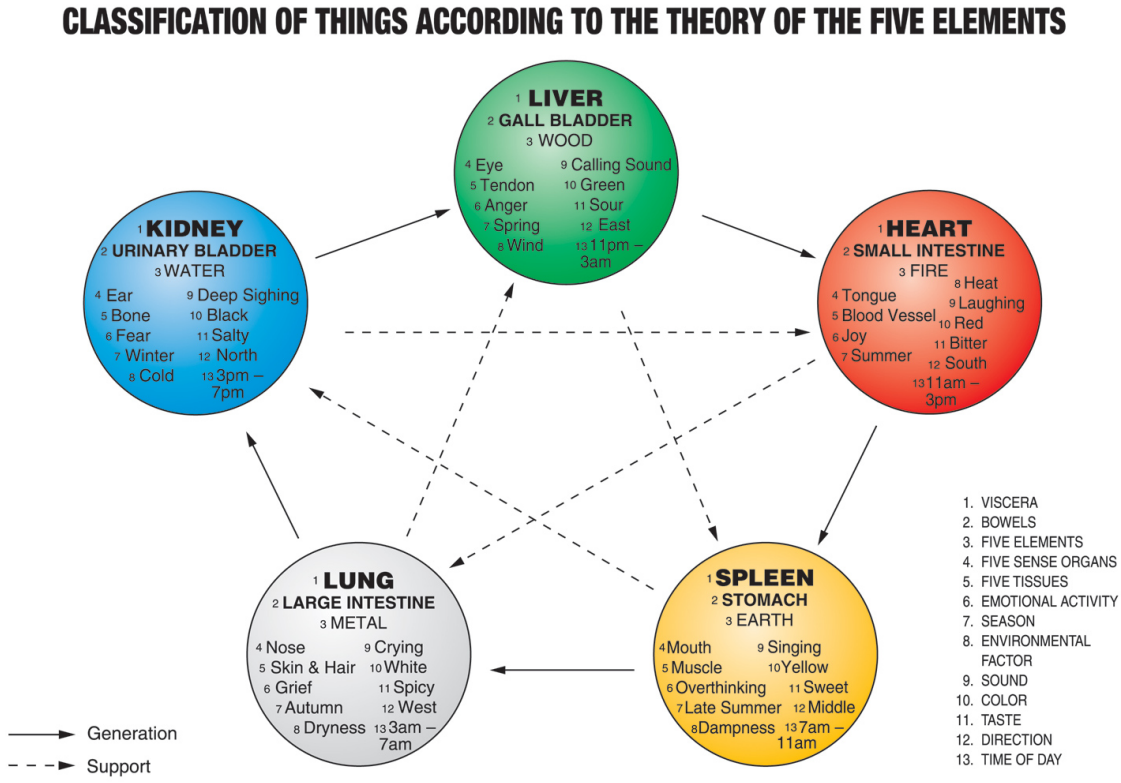
The organs named here individually have both Yin and Yang aspects. The human body comprises two primary substances, namely Qi and blood. Blood is Yin, because it is a fluid, it nourishes and substantiates. Qi is Yang, as it is vital, active, and energetic. Any imbalance between the two can pave the way for disease and illness. The disease that manifests can also be analyzed through the lens of Yin and Yang, and can be treated accordingly, as well.

The Yin and the Yang define the universe as interactions among polar opposite forces. The five elements differentiates these interactions into five stages of transformation, as seen above. The human body also comprises the Yin and Yang where each Yin organ is paired

with a Yang organ. These pairs share specific meridian pathways, tissues, muscles, and energy functions. These pairs are each associated with one of the five elements. For instance, wood represents the pairing of the liver and gall bladder, whereas fire represents the pairing of the heart and small intestine. Earth represents the pairing of the spleen and stomach, while metal represents the pairing between the lungs and the large intestine, and water represents the pairing of the kidney and bladder. The triple burner is absorbed into the fire element. The individual organ systems operate both independently and in relation to each other. Yin organs are inside our ribs, like the heart, lungs, liver, and kidney. Yang organs are the ones outside the rib cage, like the stomach, small intestine, large intestine, gallbladder, and urinary bladder. One yin and yang organ makes a pair: the liver and gall bladder, the small intestine and heart, and so on. The liver and gall bladder control the muscular system. Figure 1 presents the interconnection.

Figure 1.

The Yin, Yang, and Five Elements



Put together, the elements work at the global and universal level, as well as at the individual level. A mapping of the element and its significance at each level is presented in

Table 2.

A Map of the Elements and Their Significance at the Universal and Individual Levels

Element	Universal	Individual
Wood	Growing, flourishing, rooted yet pushing upward	Striving, controlling, flexible strength, self-assured
Earth	Productive, fertile	Solid, stable, reliable, tenacious, grounded
Metal	Hard, structured, symmetric	Organized, substantial, strong, durable
Fire	Dry, hot, ascending	Dynamic, sparkling, enthusiastic
Water	Wet, cool, descending	Flowing, adaptable, pliant

The characteristic feature of each individual phase that starts from the new Yang and continues until the full Yin depends on what happens in the natural word in each of the associated seasons. As the seasons flow into one another, they play their roles through the year, doing whatever it does before moving into the next. Harmonious transition and balance from one season to another are important.

The Zang Fu Theory

On the lines of the Yin and Yang theory, Zang refers to all Yin organs, while Fu denotes all Yang organs (Jayalakshmi et al., 2010). The Zang are solid organs, while the Fu are hollow ones. Accordingly, the Zang Fu theory explains that Zang organs produce and

store vital energy, while Fu ones help this energy flow from one part to another within the body. Thus, the Zang organs are complementary to each other and work together. However, the Fu organs are not complementary – but rather control each other (Jayalakshmi et al., 2010). The two sets of organs are unique, but interdependent. The Zang Fu theory suggests that there are five Zang organs, wherein the heart and the pericardium are considered one organ. The Zang and Fu organs are shown in Table 3.

Table 3.

Organ categories, Organs, and their Functions

Organ category	**Organ**	**Function**
Zang	Lung	Breathing. It also relates to the skin and hair, which protect the body.
	Heart	Blood circulation and supporting mental activities such as thinking and remembering.
	Spleen	Digestion, blood circulation, development of immunity, digestion of water, and protection of soft tissues.
	Liver	Secretion of bile, blood, storage and sending fluids to other parts of the body, and controlling endocrine secretions.
	Kidney	Keeping blood pressure under control, relates to the bones, cartilage, teeth, nails, and hair growth, and controls the reproductive organs.
Fu	Large Intestine	Excretion of waste.
	Small Intestine	Absorption of food and sending food to the cells, and waste to the large intestine.
	Triple Warmer	Helping the body function in harmony.
	Stomach	Digestion of food and water and sending them to different parts of the body.

	Gall Bladder	Storing bile and supporting mental activities such as thinking and remembering.
	Bladder	Controlling the water in the body and supporting the activities of the reproductive organs.

Source: Adapted from Jayalakshmi et al. (2010)

Interactions and Connections

The Five Element theory explains how every element is connected and related. They show how the structures, systems, and mechanisms in our bodies are connected to each other, how we are connected to our environment and the world around us, and how our world is connected to the universe at large. This deep connection thrives and exists even if we, in our everyday lives, are not conscious of it. . Let's take an example. The element water relates to winters, the northern direction, the colour black, the kidneys, and the emotion of fear. At first glance, one may not be able to tell how these components are connected: but if you go deeper, you see how the cold essence impacts the kidneys and the emotional connection of fear.

The five elements are energies: and therefore, they are always dynamic and in motion. They comprise two key relations, namely generation and support. These two relations are vital to maintaining a balance and a state of harmony. Generation implies a sense of nurture, growth, and evolution. For example, when a woman gives birth to a child, the child receives energy from the mother for its growth. Within the human body, the kidney generates the liver representing a similar relationship of balance and generation. Support helps restrain the energy in ways that prevent it from generating or growing too quickly or too weakly. Each of these organ combinations under the five element theory are explained below.

Liver/Gallbladder under the Five Element Theory

In Chinese medicine, the liver is responsible for the smooth flow of both emotions and the Qi and blood. It controls the volume and flow of the blood in the body, and also stores blood. It is most affected by excessive stress and emotions. The liver is paired with the gall bladder, and is associated with the eyes. Eye issues – be that blurry vision, red or dry eyes, or itchy eyes – effectively signify that the liver is not functioning smoothly. Similarly, the liver is also associated with tendons. Under Chinese medicine, strength is drawn not from the muscles, but from one's tendons. The liver is also associated with sourness as a taste – which means that if one were craving sour foods, it may be that their liver is communicating with them with a request for an extra boost. Increasing vinegar and sweet and sour recipes in the diet can help the liver with this boost. The liver is also associated with anger – meaning that if one were constantly irritable or likely to get angry easily, is high-strung and finds it difficult to unwind from daily activities, or even finds it tough to reason and let go of things, the root cause lies in the liver. Experiencing these emotions chronically or in excess can leave the liver in a state of imbalance.

Heart/Small Intestine under the Five Element Theory

Chinese medicine considers the heart the king of all organs, implying that other organs will make sacrifices for the heart – in the form of energy. This means that they will give energy to keep the heart in balance. The heart partners with the small intestine. The stomach is considered the child of the heart, indicating that if the stomach is functioning well, then the heart will be in good shape. Thus, the stomach energy must balance the heart energy. The liver, on the other hand, is the mother of the heart. When one is under constant stress, the liver energy becomes compromised as it is fundamentally expected to smooth and regulate emotions. Thus, it cannot offer support to the heart. The heart also controls body fluids, and

the tongue is the sense organ related to the heart. The condition of the heart can be gauged by observing the tongue. If the organ is in balance, the tongue will be a healthy red. If there is insufficient blood in the heart, the tongue may seem pale. If there is stagnation, the tongue will be dark purple. The heart is associated with a bitter taste.

Stomach/Spleen under the Five Element theory

Chinese Medicine considers the Stomach and its partner, the Spleen, as most affected by chronic worry, anxiety, and overthinking. The stomach serves to digest emotions and thoughts, and keeps all that nurtures the spirit while letting go of all that does not. The stomach's element is the earth – so it effectively, like the earth, feeds the organs to nurture their growth and functioning. The mouth is the sensory organ related to the Stomach, whereas muscles are the tissues associated with the Stomach. The stomach corresponds to sweetness as a taste. The stomach loves warmth, but hates coldness. When one craves sweets, it means that the stomach needs support and is relying on sweetness for that support.

Lung/Large Intestine under the Five Element Theory

The Lung's major functions include maintaining a healthy immune defence against pathogens and circulating Qi and fluids throughout the body. The Lung and its organ partner, the Large Intestine, help one "let go" of all that they do not need, ranging from life experiences to emotions to actual metabolic by-products. The lung is associated with the nose, and spiciness as a taste. Thus, when one craves spicy food or experiences a runny nose, sneezing, congested sinuses, or loss of smell, the lungs needs support. The skin is the tissue associated with the Lung.

Kidney/Bladder under the Five Element Theory

Chinese Medicine treats the Kidney as the powerhouse of the body as it supplies reserve energy to any organ that is running low on Qi. Its partner organ is the Bladder. The

kidneys are associated with winters, which effectively points to the value of conserving energy through rest. The Kidney stores all reserve energy called "pre-natal Qi," which is inherited by every individual from their parents. When any other organ in the body is low on energy, the Kidney sends it an extra Qi boost from this inheritance. The kidney is related to the ears and the bones. It also corresponds to saltiness as a taste – which means craving salt implies that the kidney needs support.

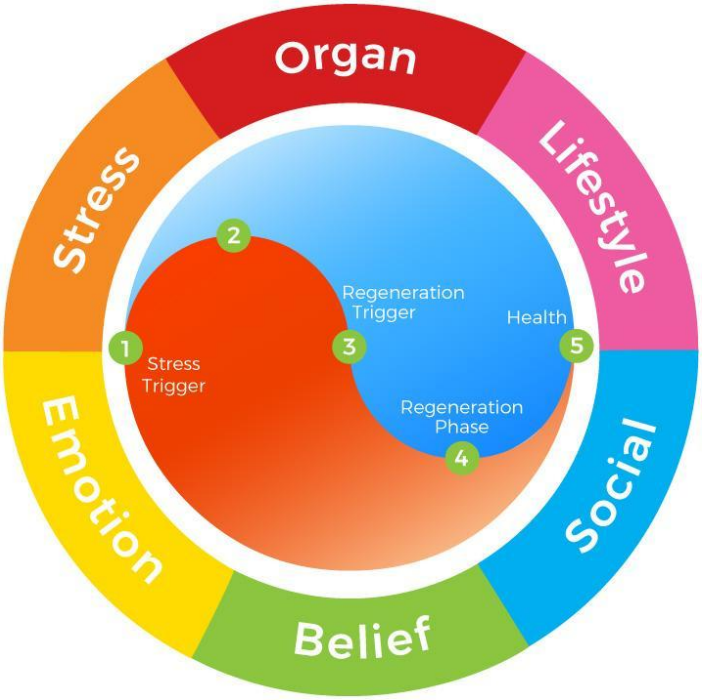
Lifestyle Prescriptions®

Our lifestyle habits can affect our symptoms. Originating from the work of Dean Ornish, lifestyle medicine recognizes the direct relationship between lifestyle modifications such as improved nutrition, stress management, focusing on fitness, and social support, and our body's ability to stop and reverse as much as 80% of chronic health issues (Ornish Spectrum, n.d.). Further, Emotions are known to have major impacts on the health of an individual (Feinstein, 2019, 2021; Gilbert, 2015).

Lifestyle Prescriptions® acknowledges the mind-body connection and identifies the need to provide options to clients to add lifestyle-based prescriptions in order to enhance compliance and health outcomes. The focus is on all six root causes, namely stress management, emotions, beliefs, social stressors, and lifestyle habits like nutrition, food, exercise, and sleep (Fisslinger, 2019). Figure 2 presents the substratum of Lifestyle Prescriptions®.

Figure 2.

Lifestyle Prescriptions®: An Overview



Lifestyle Prescriptions® has demonstrated the connection among the mind, organ, and brain, and has identified that the core efficacy of root-cause health coaching is deeply rooted in the Organ-Mind-Brain Anatomy (Fisslinger, 2019). Through a detailed 10-step Root-Cause Analysis process, Lifestyle Prescriptions® Health Coaching helps draw out all the key stressors, emotions, beliefs, and lifestyle patterns and habits that underlie and affect symptoms. This is supplemented by a root-cause based health coaching technique and protocols that support clients in autoregulating themselves, to attain and live lives to their fullest potential.

Traumatic experiences can produce difficult consequences, including dissociation and "blanking out." The stress associated with experiencing or witnessing trauma can cause abrupt and marked alterations in mental state, including dissociative symptoms that involve blanking out the intense emotions and memories (Classen et al., 1993; Van der Hart et al., 2004). Memory blackouts ensue as a result of facing traumatic experiences (Heron Ridge Associates, n.d.). According to Bessel van der Kolk (1994), people who face trauma may exhibit bodily expressions of traumatic memory not necessarily accompanied by narrative

memory of the trauma. Regardless of the objective intensity of the trauma in itself, the subjective perception of the trauma by each individual determines whether they remember, and if so, how much, in what detail, and in what vividness. Further, the impact of psychological trauma differs depending upon the social and cultural context and the social and cultural resources available to individuals, families and communities (Ford, 2009). In several cultural contexts, the value attached to family culture and social honour imposes the burden of stigma on people who speak up and articulate their trauma – especially in cases where these stories involve painful incidents involving sociocultural connotations such as sexual assault, family disputes, property issues, relationship and monetary issues, career and achievement issues, and certain categories of mental and physical illness. While working with individuals who present such trauma, it is vital to acknowledge that the "silence" or "blankness" they may encounter is a function of multiple factors that are specific to them and the communities they come from (Liem, 2007).

Every individual, family, community, and society has a heritage that includes a distinctive blend of racial, ethnic, cultural and national characteristics (Ford, 2009). Such heritage also involves a legacy of personal or familial exposure to psychological trauma – and the ascription of social stigma for any "conduct" that is assumed "deviant" – to the point that individual experiences of trauma can also be met with shame. Culture, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation and disability are potential sources of resilience, but they also may lead to chronic stressors such as social stigma, discrimination and oppression which increase psychological trauma and PTSD (Ford, 2009). Owing to culture-specific individual and collective meanings linked to trauma and trauma-related disorders survivors may be exposed to (self-)stigma in the aftermath of trauma (Schnyder et al., 2016). As a result, those who are reluctant to talk about their traumatic experiences may, on occasion, be willing to use other modes to articulate their trauma – and for still others, there may be a "blank."

While the substantial focus of Lifestyle Prescriptions® Health Coaching lies in understanding the root cause of the trauma, articulating the story behind the symptom, spelling out the root cause, and presenting the narrative that culminated in the trauma in itself can be challenging. Acknowledging the inherent challenges associated with seeking redress for trauma and presenting one's story while doing so, this study deliberately drew upon a healing modality that does not require an individual to articulate their stories in full to receive a comprehensive healing – namely, the Five Element Theory. By combining Lifestyle Prescriptions® Health Coaching and The Five Element Theory, the hybrid model enables clients to receive the full benefit of the diagnostic tool and a healing modality without having to articulate, present, or perform their traumatic narratives.

Research Methodology

Research Approach

Within the scope of my research, I deployed qualitative methods to derive my key findings, specifically a case study method by relying on tested cases with clients I have worked with. My data gathering centered on understanding the impact of the modelon the health and symptoms presented by my clients. Within the scope of secondary research, I reviewed the literature specific to the Five Element Theory and Lifestyle Prescriptions® with a focus on drawing out key elements in order to build my model. I then examined particular commonalities and relationships between both streams of practice and identify areas of divergence as applicable.

Research Philosophy

The philosophies of my research approach include ontology, epistemiology, rhetorical, with parts relating to methodological philosophy. Ontology helped me examine the impact of emotional traumas on the human body and the use of the model in addressing such traumas

by relating to it through case studies. Epistemiology (considers views about the most appropriate ways of inquiring into the nature of the world, what is knowledge, and what are the sources and limits of knowledge) supported me in my study of the limits that are imposed on the extant knowledge systems and practices relating to the interpretation of "health and wellness." Finally, I used inductive logic to expand from the specific concerns of the lived experiences of individuals with specific symptoms to more wholesome strategies that can address health issues for wider cross-sections of society.

The traditions of inquiry that I relied on are phenomenal study, which helped me describe the lived experiences of individuals with symptoms, and the case study method which assisted in the exploration of a bounded system (applying the model created in this study) and cases over time through detailed and in-depth data collection and analyses. Coming to the ideological perspectives, I looked at positivism to help test my contentions through the measurement of observable social realities. I operated from the presumption that people have health issues that are a direct manifestation of their unresolved traumas and have experiences that are related to their health and trauma-related challenges, objectively and externally and that knowledge is valid only if it is based on observations of this external reality, and, finally, that universal or general laws exist or that theoretical models can be developed that are generalisable, can explain cause and effect relationships, and which lend themselves to predicting outcomes.

Data Collection

Data were gathered using the case study method. Every case was meticulously documented through handwritten notes. Upon completion, the client-participant was given the notes to validate and approve of the content.

Ethical Considerations

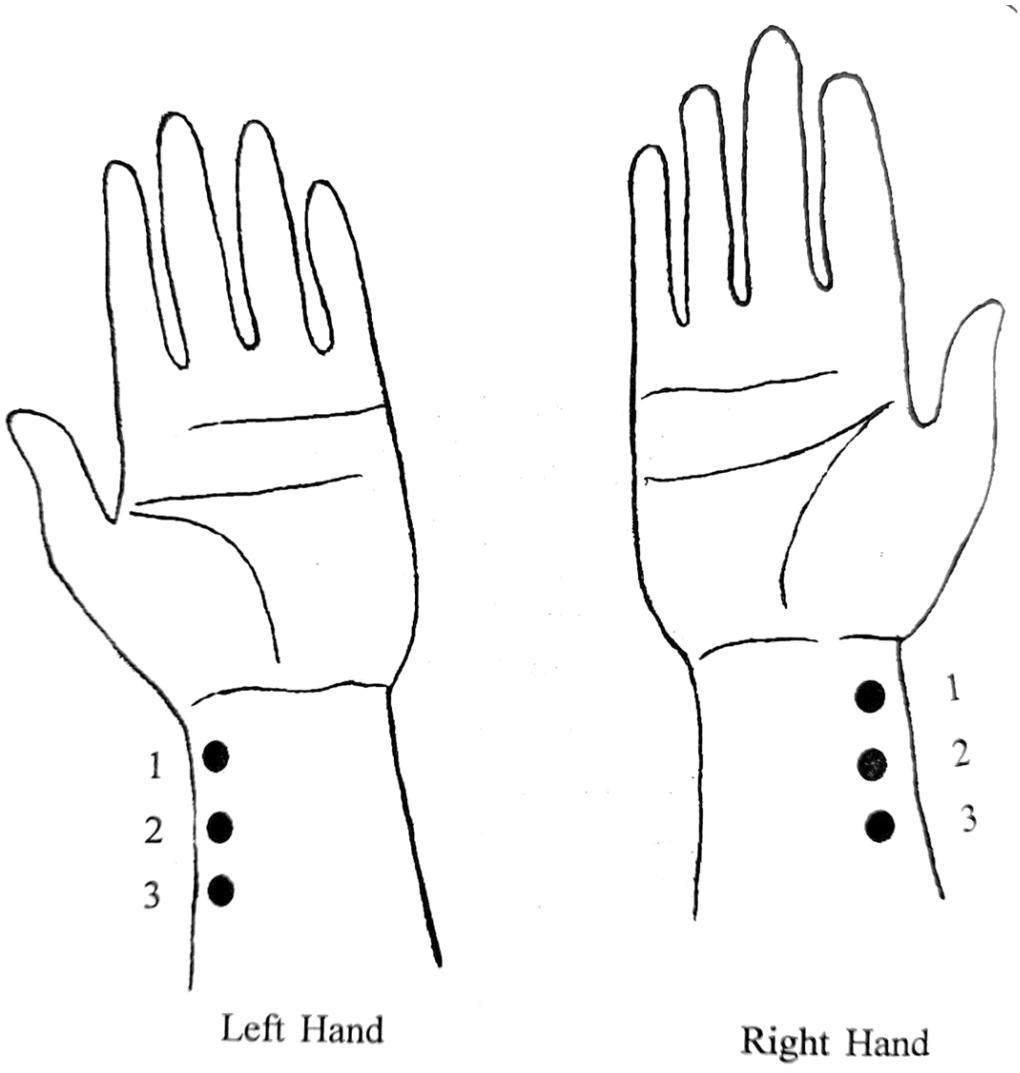
All participants were informed of the purpose of the study and were free to participate. Written consent was received and confidentiality of participation was assured. The participants were given the freedom to withdraw from the study at any time. All data were anonymized, and no client-participant was identified by any identifying information such as name, gender, location, or age.

The Model

Everything in the world is classified into Yin and Yang. One cannot exist without the other. Only if both are equal will we have harmony. If there is an increase or decrease in one, it will cause an imbalance and affect one's health. According to Lifestyle Prescriptions®, a symptom occurs because of a trauma. A trauma is an incident that is unexpected, dramatic, and isolating, and that leaves us without any strategy to deal with it. This is referred to as a UDIN (Frank & Weiner, 2019). Some examples of trauma one may experience include abuse in any form–physical, sexual, emotional–or accidents, wars, and natural disasters, among others. What could be a trauma for one need not be so for another. For example, being scolded by a teacher may be a trauma for one child, but mean nothing to another. Trauma produces psychosomatic impacts. In the words of Peter Levine, "What happens in trauma is, our body doesn't go back to where it was before, it stays in this stuck place. A key in working with trauma in somatic experiencing is in finding out how the trauma has become lodged in the person's body, then helping them move through that stuck place" (Beyond Theory Podcast, 2020). The model proposed here combines Lifestyle Prescriptions® and the Five Elements Theory to create a hybrid approach that combines the wisdom of the five elements and root-cause therapy. One way to understand the root cause of where the energy is trapped, is to use the pulse points. Figure 3 presents the key pulse points on the hands within the TCM model.

Figure 3.

Pulse points on the Left and Right Hands



Source: Jayalakshmi, Seshadri, & Srilakshmi (2010)

The pulse can be examined by placing the index, middle, and ring finger side by side. Each finger occupies approximately one centimetre. The index finger is placed as close to the wrist crease as possible. If this is not possible, one can feel the pulse in each and every point by the index finger or the thumb. The first point on the left hand denotes the small intestine at the superficial level and the heart at the deeper level. The second point denotes the gall bladder at the surface level and the liver at the deep level. The third point denotes the urinary bladder on the surface and the kidney at the deep level. The first point on the right hand

denotes the large intestine at the surface level, and the lungs at the deep level. The second point on the right hand denotes the stomach on the superficial level and the spleen at the deep level. The third point denotes the triple warmer on the surface and the pericardium at the deep level. The pulse readings are presented in Table 4.

Table 4.

Pulse Readings

Superficial pulse	Distinct when touched Weak on heavy pressure Indicates prolonged illness
Deep pulse	Felt only by giving deep pressure Disorder has advanced to the interior of the body
Slow pulse	Rate is less than 4 beats per breath Denotes cold syndromes
Rapid pulse	Rate is more than 5 beats per breath Denotes heat syndromes

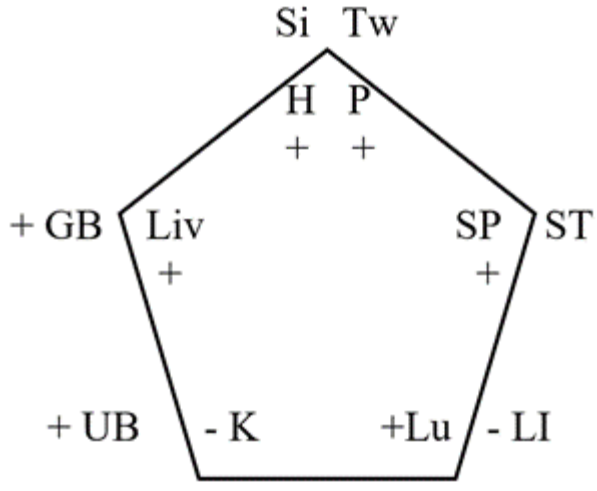
Pulse of the XU type	Pulse is weak and forceless Disappears on heavy pressure
Pulse of the shi type	Pulse is forceful Felt even on deep pressure
Wiry pulse	Pulse is felt as though pressing a string Denotes insufficiency of the Yin and hyperactivity of the Yang of the Liver
Rolling pulse	Smooth, flowing, and forceful pulse Healthy people and pregnant women have this pulse
Thready pulse	Pulse is fine like a thread Denotes deficiency of both qi and blood
Short pulse	Short in duration with irregular missed beats Denotes excess phlegm and retention of food Sign of collapsing
Knotted pulse	Slow and gradual with irregular missed beats

	Denotes retention of cold phlegm
Intermittent pulse	Pulse is slow and gradual with missed beats at regular intervals

In its use to address traumas and symptoms, the model proceeds as follows. First, using pulse diagnosis, the organ(s) that are too low in energy or too high in energy and thus in need of balance are identified. Figure 3 presents a simple diagrammatic representation that can be relied on to identify the pulse for all organs within the TCM model through pulse diagnosis.

Figure 4.

The Pulse Diagram



After marking, the next step involves choosing the three consecutive plus or three consecutive minus signs. Next, each organ must be worked on separately to identify the

trauma stored within. Sometimes, investigating one organ can open up the trauma and enable the client to get a resolution. At this point, it is important to investigate the other two organs as well. Sometimes, only emotions may come up following the investigation of one or few of the organs and the trauma may come up in the third. Following this, any healing modality should be used to clear out the energies or emotions and restore the body to normal balance.

Results

Case Study 1: Client A

Client A came to see me with cervical spondylosis. The diagnosis was their own as they had not seen a doctor before attending the session. Client A complained of pain on the right side of the neck. After checking the wiring, it became apparent that they were right-wired. This implies that the presenting situation may have related to an issue concerning their partner (in business or in life) or father, their siblings (or anyone they considered a sibling), outer world, and/or work. Following the assessment, pulse diagnosis was used. Client A's hands were warm. Under the Five Elements Approach, cervical spondylosis, neck pain, pain in the arm, and elbow and so on, emerges from excess coldness in the lung meridian. Client A was asked all the UDIN questions based on Lifestyle Prescriptions® Health Coaching, namely, to establish what was so unexpected, dramatic, and isolating, where they had no strategy to deal with the situation, and where they felt morally and intellectually devalued. Client A reported an incident. They worked in a company. All the board members and Client A were in a boardroom meeting one day. Four members were against Client A and were sniggering and laughing pointedly at them. The four members had offered rude comments amongst themselves, all targeting Client A. This was the UDIN moment. Client A then reported the incident scene by scene. Client A had done a presentation. Four board members were dead-set against them for being selected to make the presentation. The four other board members were on Client A's side. However, Client A was very upset that the four members

who did not support them had refused to see Client A's viewpoint. Client A did not want to bend backwards to accommodate them or to make the changes they expected them to make. Client A knew that their point of view was accurate. There was a visible change in the pallor of their face, their tonality changed. When touched, Client A's hands seemed cold. Emotional Freedom Technique (also known as EFT), is a combination of psychology and acupressure points which involves making statements in line with a particular set up and tapping specifically identified acupressure points on the hands, face, and upper body in order to release trapped emotions) was used to release the emotions. The emotion was fear and the intensity was 9, on a scale of 0 to 10 where 0 indicated no intensity and 10 indicated maximum intensity. Client A's belief was that they could never do anything right and that they were fit for nothing. Their values were oriented towards the family as they were the sole breadwinner. We worked through all of these, and their fear came down to 0. Their belief at the end of the therapy session was that they had all the resources and capabilities and that they knew that they were good at all that they did. There was a whole new confidence. Client A decided to make a lifestyle shift by taking a baby step to start conversing with their colleagues, which they said was very difficult in the beginning. They began by speaking to the few colleagues they were comfortable with. Slowly, they began expanding the circle. Two months later, they called to say that they had been promoted and was transferred to another place. They were very happy with this.

Case Study 2: Client B

Client B came in with complaints of severe flatulence. They had consulted a doctor, a homeopath, an Ayurvedic specialist, and a naturopath, and reported that nothing worked. They felt alright when they were on medication, but the problem returned whenever the medication stopped. Pulse diagnosis was used. There were three consecutive "+" marks,

namely the heart, liver, and kidney. When the superficial pulse is light, it is denoted with a "-" sign, and when it is strong, it is denoted it with a "+" sign. The three consecutive "+" marks or "-" marks are considered next, which in this case, were the heart, liver, and kidney. First, the liver point was addressed. The conflict theme using Lifestyle Prescriptions® Health Coaching was starvation. Client B was asked the UDIN question, that is, if there was a time when something happened that was very unexpected, dramatic, where they felt very isolated and had no strategy to deal with it. The client immediately said that they felt intense anger in their stomach region, but could not get in touch with any incident. The anger was made note of, with the aim being that it would be addressed later. A pulse diagnosis was conducted on the heart point. At the same time, Client B was asked the Lifestyle Prescriptions® Health Coaching question (UDIN), specifically, on what the UDIN was for them where they felt that they were not in flow, where they felt that they were not able to support themselves or someone else (this refers to the arteries – the brain layer is the mid brain). At this stage, Client B began weeping. However, nothing else came up. The kidney point was addressed, where Lifestyle Prescriptions® Health Coaching was used. The UDIN question was asked again. Later, the kidney parenchyma was tested, where the theme is a fluidity conflict. However, there was no trauma at this point. This had to do with the kidney collecting tubule. The trauma that emerged was as follows. Client B said that they had a huge fight with their mother as they had supported their sister and not their spouse, although the mother knew well that her daughter was the one that was wrong. Client B said that their mother had beat their spouse, which was a big shock for them. This was the UDIN moment. This brought up a lot of anger and Client B felt isolated, as Client B's father and sister (who knew they were in the wrong) did not support him. Once Client B worked on this issue, the flatulence disappeared entirely. EFT was used and the anger was reduced. It was at an intensity of 10 and came down to 0 (on a scale of 0 to 10 where 0 indicated no intensity and 10 indicted maximum

intensity). The belief was that no matter what Client B did to express their love for their mother, they always favoured Client B's sister. Client B felt that they were good enough in their mother's eyes. After EFT, Client B's belief shifted, and they began to see their mother's love and appreciation. Client B also affirmed that they did not need to be validated at every point. The value system before the session was relationship: Client B spent quality time with their spouse and none with their mother. After the session, Client B had realized what they were doing and took a baby step to start spending 10 minutes in the mornings with their mother. With time, Client B endeavored to increase the time spent. One month later, during a follow-up, Client B reported that their flatulence had gone and that they were enjoying the time they spent with their mother, with their spouse joining Client B on occasion. Client B did not measure the time spent with their mother. Client B realized that society's belief of a mother changing after their ward's marriage had made them very uptight. Once realization dawned, Client B began enjoying the time they spent with their mother. Their mother also enjoyed the time spent and was "love personified" in Client B's words. This made Client B realize how false their belief was.

Case Study 3: Client C

Client C approached with a complaint of pain near the ankle. Using the Lifestyle Prescriptions® Health Coaching UDIN questions alone to get to the UDIN did not work, as Client C drew a blank consistently. They were right-wired, which meant that the trauma had to do either with their partner (work or life), father, siblings, friends, outer world, or their work. The kidney meridian was addressed as points K3, K4, and K5 crossed the point that was on the inner median ankle. The Lifestyle Prescriptions® Health Coaching UDIN question was posed (what was so unexpected, dramatic, and isolating, where they had no strategy to deal with the situation that was a UDIN where they felt could not stand or deal

with a situation, as it was their right ankle). Client C shared that they had gone on a holiday and had gone boating, when the boat capsized, and they did not know how to swim. People in boats near them who knew how to swim dived in and helped them out. When they reached the shore, they realized that their bag and purse with cards and money were all gone. This was the UDIN moment: the boat had capsized and water had entered their nose and mouth and they felt like they were drowning, and thought it was all over. The emotion they felt was fear at an intensity of 10 (on a scale of 0 to 10 where 0 indicated no intensity and 10 indicated maximum intensity). The belief was "It is all over, I am dying!" The value was their family, particularly their children, to the point that their care for their children preceded everything else, and they did nothing for themselves. They went boating because the kids begged Client C for it. After using EFT, by the end of the session, the fear had come down to 0. It was 10 at the start of the session (on a scale of 0 to 10 where 0 indicated no intensity and 10 indicated maximum intensity). The belief now was "I can equip myself well, I am good enough." Client C decided to devote time for themselves by doing one thing they really wanted to. They said that when their children were away at school, they could start by learning tailoring, something they always wanted to do. The pain in the ankle was gone by the end of the session. After six weeks, during a follow-up session, there was no pain in the ankle. Client C said they were enjoying their tailoring class. Shortly after, they enrolled in swimming classes, too.

Case Study 4: Client D

Client D came in with corns in both their feet. It had reached a stage where they could not walk. They were in pain. The kidney meridian passed exactly where the corn were. Though skin was involved, both conflict themes – skin (dermis) and the KCT conflict themes – were used. Client D felt isolated. Client D was also asked the Lifestyle Prescriptions® Health

Coaching UDIN question, which was unexpected, dramatic, where they felt very isolated and had no strategy to deal with it where they felt isolated, felt a need to protect themselves or grow thicker skin. Client D said that they had to leave home to go work in another city. This was a first for them. They were very scared as they had read in the newspapers that it was not a safe city because of sexual violence. The UDIN moment was as follows: a horrible incident of rape had been reported in the paper, which they read on the morning of their departure to the new city. The emotion they reported was fear. Client D had formed the belief that this city was not safe for them. The value was family, where the focus was on their mother and brother and not themselves. This fear came down to 0 from 10, which shifted to "I am safe if I follow the ground rules – no late night shows, no flouting curfew etc." The values shifted to a little more focus on the self, where they equipped themselves with Krav Maga lessons that were provided in their neighbourhood. Two months later, they said that the corn had improved there was a wee bit remaining. During a follow-up session, they said that there were times when news reports of sexual violence and robbery tended to trigger them. We worked on this with Family Constellations where this energy came from their great-grandmother. There was a huge shift after this session. One month later, Client D reported that they felt confident and had travelled overnight by bus to their hometown, something they would never have done before in their own words. The one remaining corn was also barely visible by the end of the session.

Case Study 5: Client E

Client E had come with infertility issues. The UDIN moment was that Client E and their spouse were forced to go into IVF by their mother-in-law under the threat that they would have to undergo a divorce if the couple did not have a child of their own. The emotion was anger, and it was at 10 on a scale from 0 to 10, with 0 being the lowest and 10 being the

highest. The belief was that "In-laws are always cruel." The value was family. After EFT, the anger had come down to 0. The belief had shifted, and Client E began to realize that communication is the key to happiness. Client E also realized that they had never expressed their fears. However, the couple did not conceive. When Client E came in 3 months later, Spleen 6 was worked on, as it is a very good point for fertility issues. Client E was asked the UDIN question, which is what was so unexpected, dramatic, isolating where they had no strategy to deal with the situation that had to do with blood where either one or someone else they saw was bleeding to death – essentially, a conflict regarding blood. Client E reported that on the eve of their wedding, their pregnant aunt had fallen very ill. Client E was by her side, and saw the aunt bleed profusely. The aunt had to be rushed to the hospital, where it was declared that their aunt had lost their baby. The client was very scared, and formed the belief that it was not safe to have babies. The UDIN moment was the visual imagery of a dead fetus and blood on the carpet. The emotion was fear, and it was more than 10. The belief was that it was not safe to have a baby. The value was health. After EFT, the fear had come down to 0. After understanding Lifestyle Prescriptions® Health Coaching, and the palpable shift they felt in their energy, the new belief was that, "After this therapy work, we will conceive!" They seemed to have been focusing only on not having been able to conceive. Client E took one step towards a shift, where they decided to start teaching. They used to teach at a college before marriage. Two months later, Client E reported that the couple had successfully conceived. As of date of submitting this study, Client E and their spouse are the proud parents of a nine-month-old baby.

Discussions, Conclusions, and Recommendations

This study examined the efficacy of combining the Five Elements Theory and Lifestyle Prescriptions® to create a hybrid model for wholesome mind and body healing. The model was tested through case studies and proved effective and sustainable in terms of its

outcomes. Combining the best of conventional and traditional praxis with modern systems can pave the way for robust and wholesome health models that can go a long way in shifting the needle on understanding and healing from diseases. The two modalities have a functional advantage in combination, wherein they support the client's process of discovery of the root cause as well as a comprehensive route to addressing the imbalance within the organ system. The case studies represent powerful ways in which the two modalities work in conjunction, often in complementary ways. Further, where clients come in with "blankness" or an inability to recall events or the trauma, the Five Element Theory offers a comfortable layer of effort that helps address the symptom. By simply relying on a pulse diagnosis, the approach is simplified even further, as a client does not have to relive, or struggle to find blurry memories. To this end, the model has the potential to guide intervention with cases involving heavy trauma, particularly, in cases of sexual assault or painful memories like accidents, as most such cases involve some degree of blankness or inability to recall incidents entirely or partially.

Furthermore, Lifestyle Prescriptions® Health Coaching offers an equally valuable supplement to the Five Element Theory by entrenching the organ balance in sustained lifestyle changes. While one part of the process does involve working with the pulse diagnosis and actioning a balance in the energies, it is important for this balance to be restored not only in the organs, but also in the lives of clients: as the symptom may persist if the underlying beliefs, values, emotions, and thoughts remain unchanged. Lifestyle Prescriptions® Health Coaching supports clients in seeing how they can remain active stakeholders in their own healing journeys by embarking on simple changes in their lifestyles. In doing so, it helps them not only take ownership over their health, but also rightfully situates their agency in their healing process in their hands. The changes in beliefs, values, thoughts, and emotions can be possible only when the underlying trauma is cleared. To this

end, the Five Element Theory complements, supplements, and works in conjunction with Lifestyle Prescriptions® Health Coaching rather successfully.

Even as the case studies depict a successful cross-pollination of both Lifestyle Prescriptions® and the Five Element Theory, there are inherent challenges in the generalizability of these findings. First, the core philosophy in the Five Element Theory is that the organs associated with the individual elements alone form the frame of reference for any intervention. In reality, however, the dynamic nature of the mind-body connection inherently presupposes that the reaction to traumas are not linear and confined to singular formulae. For instance, when the issue presented is a case of a thyroid issue, the Five Element Theory might lead to an assumption that the focus should specifically remain confined to addressing the thyroid issue. However, in reality, a heavy overload on the adrenals that are unable to cope may force the thyroid to take over. At this point, a heavy reliance on the Five Element Theory may be limiting.

A second limitation lies in the exploration of the UDIN or Trauma that Lifestyle Prescriptions® seeks to determine as the root cause of the issue at hand. The human psyche is as dynamic as the species in itself, and different minds react differently to traumas. In cases where an individual is unable to recall a root cause, or even explore the fundamental factor causing the symptom, it is typically challenging for the individual to move forward. Applying the Five Element Theory without these insights in place could also produce limiting outcomes. Furthermore, Lifestyle Prescriptions® calls for lifestyle changes. In particularly vulnerable circumstances where an individual may be challenged economically, socially, culturally, and possibly even within their own families, implementing changes in one's lifestyle may be typically challenging and difficult. In such situations, half-hearted or partial implementations may kick in, limiting the outcome significantly.

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