



There are normal  
cycles of the day,  
the year,  
and a lifetime. . . .  
no season,  
no time of life  
is better than another.  
Each has its gifts  
and challenges.



*Cabbage #2, Kathleen T. Carr, ©1981*

ergy of beginning, the power of the sapling becoming a tree. Summer (associated with adulthood) is known for the maturity of plants, for blossoming and flourishing. Late summer (mid-life) is known for the harvest, the bounty of the earth, for gathering all that we have planted over the lifetime. Autumn (later life) is known for insight, inspiration, and the clearing away of what is unnecessary, keeping only that which has value. That which is precious shows up in autumn. Winter (the stillness of death and the gestation before rebirth), is known for its capacity for stored power, essence, strength, courage and wisdom. And the cycle begins again.

This concept from Chinese medicine is therapeutic in itself, as illustrated in the case of Elaine. An attractive woman in her early forties, Elaine came for treatment of profuse sweating and sleeplessness. During the traditional diagnosis, I asked her what she hoped for the future. "I'm not sure," she said, "but I don't want a boring life. I can't see myself settling down in the suburbs and taking care of children." Elaine relished the excitement of her high-tension life. Although she held a demanding job, she partied late into the night several times a week. She had numerous sexual partners. She

seldom relaxed, seldom "came down." For Elaine, life out of the fast lane seemed hardly worth living.

More than once we discussed the phases of the life cycle described in Chinese medicine; and, eventually, Elaine made her own "diagnosis": "I think I'm stuck," she said. "I've been stuck in an earlier part of my life for a long time. I haven't wanted to move on till now." For the first time, she began to understand and value all the seasons of the cycle. This was a turning point in her treatment. Elaine entered a new phase, beginning to nurture her own energy by

changing her lifestyle, and nurturing others in more stable relationships. At the same time, her pulses showed more substance and a new, deeper quality of energy.

Each phase of life, like each season of the year, brings both "losses" and gifts. For women, growing older means the end of the childbearing years—and it also means sex without the worry of pregnancy. (Menopausal women are also old enough to know what good sex is.) And while growing older might bring a slowing of a career's upward climb, it also brings richness of experience; with that richness comes the satisfaction of having the skills and knowledge to mentor younger people. While it might mean that children are old enough to leave the nest, it also means more time and freedom to pursue one's own interests and to deepen relationships with spouse and friends.



*Cabbage #1, Kathleen T. Carr, ©1981*

In Chinese thought, then, mid-life is a time of harvest, a time to look back on all the hard work invested in nurturing family, career, and one's self, and to appreciate the bounty from that effort. While our culture reveres youth, cultures like the Chinese (among others) think that bountiful life, respect, and wisdom are correlates of age.

For many women, as for Elaine, acupuncture brings a deeper sense of rightness as their lives flow through the midlife season. It helps them through menopause with a minimum of physical and

emotional side effects. And it opens to them the opportunities of this time of life—opportunities to “come into their own” and claim the wisdom and authority of the Crone.

For instance, Margaret, whose story opened this article, has been in acupuncture treatment for several months now. Her profuse hot flashes have ceased altogether; her family has remarked about the decrease in her mood swings; and, perhaps most important of all, her attitude toward herself is growing more positive. She is beginning to appreciate the opportunity to learn about this phase of her life and to live it fully. Still undecided about

whether to take hormone replacement therapy, Margaret is now making a decision based on an evaluation of the pros and cons, rather than railing about how old she is.

Each patient mentioned here has changed her perception of the passage called menopause. Rather than seeing it as an end of what she has prized, she has chosen to see herself at the door of a new phase. In the late summer of life's cycle, these women look forward to harvesting the wisdom, compassion, and strength in their experience, using it to enrich their community and personal lives.

### Resources

- Traditional Acupuncture: The Law of the Five Elements.* Dianne M. Connelly. Columbia, MD: Centre for Traditional Acupuncture, 1974.
- Staying Healthy with the Seasons.* Elson Haas. Berkeley, CA: Celestial Arts, 1981.
- Acupuncture: Is It for You?* J. R. Worsley. Dorset, England: Element Books, 1988.
- The Silent Passage, Menopause.* Gail Sheehy. New York: Random House, 1991.

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