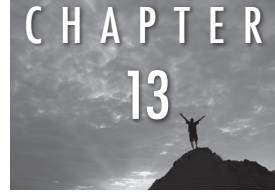




DONNA EDEN

CHAPTER

13



## Dancing With the Five Rhythms of Nature

**W**e are, Dianne Connelly observes, “a replica of the universe passing from season to season in a natural unending season of life.” By carefully observing the Earth’s seasons, the Chinese sages gained penetrating insights into the way nature conducts her business. In the seasons of nature they found analogies for understanding the growth and cycles of all things under heaven. In addition to the four seasons of winter, spring, summer, and autumn, the transition times between seasons were collectively treated as a separate season. These periods of transition were originally thought of as occurring for about two weeks four times each year, with one of the solstices or equinoxes at their midpoints. In recent centuries, however, the four transition periods have been abbreviated into a single season, placed between summer and autumn, and compared with Indian summer. Indian summer prolongs the summer, as if trying to hold off the death that inevitably accompanies autumn.

The name of the Chinese system is often translated in the West as “the five elements” because the early pictograms depicted the familiar, concrete, and observable—the five elements of water, wood, fire, earth, and metal. But the system has always concentrated on processes within nature, not her static forms (the literal translation is “the five walks” or “the five moves”)—and this dynamic emphasis will be ours as well. Thus, the element of water corresponds with the season of winter, wood with spring, fire with summer, earth with the time of the solstice or equinox, and metal with autumn.

**Donna Eden is widely recognized for her inborn ability to literally see the body’s energies, to accurately determine the causes of physical and psychological problems based on the state of those energies, and to devise highly effective treatments. She has treated over 10,000 clients individually and has taught hundreds of classes, speaking to packed houses throughout the United States, Europe, Australia, New Zealand, and South America. She offers a certification course in Eden Energy Medicine, and is the author of *Energy Medicine* (Tarcher, 1999) and the forthcoming *Energy Medicine for Women* (Tarcher, 2008).**

Each person is characterized by one of these elements or seasons, or a specific combination of them. In the human life cycle, we also travel through periods or phases that are analogous to the seasons of nature in tempo, intensity, and function, each potentially lasting for years. I find the language of the seasons to be wonderfully descriptive of the distinct rhythm that vibrates throughout the entire energy body at any moment in time. Each season has its own rhythm. I think of people in terms of the energy of the seasons, and I speak in terms of the rhythm of summer or the rhythm of autumn when describing a person's "element."

While each of us contains all five seasons, one season or a particular combination of two or three will blend themselves into your personal rhythm. You will vibrate more naturally to people, environments, and activities whose rhythm corresponds with your own. Those that do not will be more challenging for you, but potentially more enriching as their influence expands you.

## Understanding the Rhythms that Affect You

Of the many systems that sort people into one category or another, the five-rhythms approach has the advantage of being grounded in the person's core bioenergies. At the same time, it tells you a great deal about that individual's health challenges, personality, and spiritual journey. When I look at a person's energy field, it is characterized by a distinct vibration that corresponds precisely with at least one of the elements described by the ancient Chinese physicians. I believe I am seeing what they saw. For instance, when I look at someone whom the Chinese would call a winter or water element person (the derivation of the word "winter" is "to make wet,") the energy literally has a watery, languid, rolling quality, and this manifests in the way the person walks and talks. If the person is well balanced, the rhythm is smooth and flowing, and it runs deep.

You will see that each rhythm has certain strengths and certain vulnerabilities. Many factors determine whether you will manifest the best or the worst qualities of your basic rhythm. For instance, your way of living is related to the way your family and early social environment supported or failed to support that rhythm. Children whose primary rhythm is appropriately recognized and supported grow into adults who express that rhythm in its more positive form. The qualities of a child's primary rhythm may, however, be so prized and reinforced that the child not only learns that rhythm but overdevelops it to the point that little is learned of the other rhythms and there is no balance. If, on the other hand, the qualities inherent in the primary rhythm are punished or bring disapproval, the child may grow up alienated from his or her core rhythm.

While most people embody a combination of two or three rhythms, I will describe each of the types in its unmixed form in order to get you thinking about your own personal rhythm.

**The Rhythm of Winter: Embryonic Possibility.** Winter's rhythm embodies the seed, the embryo, potential. The time of long nights and little light, winter embodies the promise of the future. While life appears to have ceased, it is growing decisively under the ground, waiting to burst forth.

Winter people, when in their strength, embody a fresh spirit that is infused with childlike enthusiasm because their season is about beginnings. They know how to envision a project and joyfully get it under way. When they feel safe, they utterly trust their surroundings, and they laugh and play with the spontaneity of a baby. Their energies may be limited, since their season has little sun, but like a hibernating polar bear, they are able to retreat into themselves and regenerate. They are deeply reflective about the meaning of life and the direction it should take.

As with each of the rhythms, the winter person's potential weaknesses are the polarity of these strengths. The playful energy of good beginnings is not so well suited for going the full distance of completion. They may have little sense of direction or motivation for the long haul. Just as special care and protection are required to survive in winter, people moved by winter's rhythm often need and demand special attention, so they are particularly vulnerable to narcissism. Rooted in nature's embryonic time, there is a babylike quality to this rhythm. Winter people may be unable to recognize how they are affecting others, focusing only on what others are doing to them. They can have difficulty feeling loved unless love is showered upon them. Needing the mother's succor like the seed needs the unfailing sustenance of the earth, winters who feel unloved tend to retreat within, becoming cold, isolated, and paranoid. Your first cycle of winter's rhythm extends from conception through about eighteen months. But if stress or trauma prevented you from sufficiently garnering its lessons, its issues can become fixated into a lifelong pattern where you behave as if you are the center of the world, for it is possible to become arrested while moving through any of the rhythms.

The talk of a winter person is a slow, flowing kind of groan from deep within. The walk is unhurried and elegant, like a rolling wave, almost a swagger, knees slightly bent so the body seems more aligned with the ground. The sustaining mental state is courage. Under stress, courage may become fear, which is the stress emotion of a winter person. Because the future is hard to see from winter's embryonic shadows, winter people are afraid to move forth, afraid to make a

commitment. They reflect deeply, motivated by their fear of what is to come. In the wild, a newborn animal is utterly vulnerable and must quickly learn to distinguish between what is dangerous and what is safe. During your first eighteen months, your first cycle of winter's rhythm, fear alerted you to that which was dangerous. Through fear you learned to establish boundaries. You defined a zone of safety. Dangers, both real and imagined, can tend to paralyze a winter's rhythm, making it even more immobile, more hidden, more pulled toward hibernation. With maturity, however, a winter's fear becomes a wise and discerning caution.

**The Rhythm of Spring: New Growth.** The energy of a spring or wood element person is reminiscent of the seedling you might see bursting forth through a rock in the springtime. It is solid within its space. The rhythm is staccato yet insistent, like a marching soldier.

Spring's rhythm embodies the power and insistence of new life. Earth becomes warm, and the hours of light begin to outnumber the hours of darkness. Life bursts forth as the landscape explodes with color and exuberance. Spring is assertive—life pushes onward.

Spring people take a strong stand. They unabashedly claim their space, as if proudly announcing, like a budding rose, "I am a force to be reckoned with." Their strength is that their vision is potent, seeing inequities and assembling forces for justice and truth. Their vision of truth and wholeness inspires others. They see the truth. They see the way. They can marshal their intellect and their energies into a plan. They are sure of themselves and shine in a crisis. Their sense of timing cuts to the quick. Their ability to assert themselves and organize efforts is characterized by sound goals, good judgment, and wise decisions.

The spring person's self-confidence is at risk of becoming arrogance; assertiveness can become inflexible, self-indulgent, and opinionated. They may hold a narrow and rigid vision that causes them to harshly judge those who do not subscribe to their truth or follow their direction. They may righteously hold to this position and become easily and vocally frustrated about the beliefs and actions of others. Or they may lose their vision and be left disorganized, hopeless, and despairing.

The talk of a spring person is choppy and syncopated, almost a shout. The walk is also choppy, hitting the ground decisively, with clear concise movements, like percussion. The sustaining mental state is assertiveness. The stress emotion is anger. In nature, the energy that has been accumulating beneath the ground in winter explodes forth above the earth in spring. Ideas or opinions may take root within a person, growing and expanding until they ferociously burst forth. During the "terrible twos," your first cycle of spring's rhythm,



you are exploring, expanding, moving outward, and whoever or whatever blocks this energy will know your fury. If spring is your primary rhythm, your disposition is to push forth. Your roots are firm, your territory is well marked, your purpose is strong. You meet obstacles decisively. If they do not give way, your anger is quick and forceful. With maturity, however, a spring's anger becomes a wise and healthy determination.

**The Rhythm of Summer: Fulfillment.** The energy of a summer or fire element person blazes up and out, creating the impression that the person is everywhere at once. Like wildfire, which jumps ravines and spreads in every direction, its rhythm is rapid, random, and rising.

Summer's rhythm embodies fruition. Earth becomes warm and the days long. New light bursts forth in the early morning. The fruit on the tree has matured, ripe and luscious. Summer holds the radiance and joy of youth in all its glory. It gives delight in the richness of the moment.

Summer people move from their heart, open and vulnerable. Their strength is that they are warm, empathic, joyful, and exuberant. With passion and radiance, they are able to draw out the positive and the hopeful in others, communicate with them in their uniqueness, and elicit cooperation. With charisma and a grasp of the whole picture, they ignite the actions of others with insight, compassion, and clarity. In recognizing what is possible, they are the magicians and catalysts who help others believe in themselves, free themselves of self-imposed limitations, and move with confidence to a better future.

Summer people may become junkies for love, for the "high" — whether through parties, drugs, sex, or spirituality. They may go into a panic of frenzied activity, trying to make everyone happy. They often have difficulty with discernment and setting priorities. They may give from their hearts until they have no more to give. Summer people often burn themselves out, overcommitted and exhausted. They are so drawn to the bright side of life that they may not register the dark, the negative, or the dangerous. To those who look to them for leadership, their optimism and enthusiasm may set up expectations that were never meant and are rarely met.

You can hear laughter in the talk of a summer person. The walk is like a skip, with an up and down movement, arms rising and falling like flames. The sustaining mental state is infused with joy and passion, which under stress can escalate into panic or deteriorate into hysteria. In summer, the light is dazzling, the fruit abundant, and the fish are hopping. Excess is all around. During adolescence, your first cycle of summer's rhythm, you lived for thrill and exhilaration.

Joys and sorrows were laced with passion, taken to excess. If you are a summer person, you want to enjoy, not strive. The present is all that matters, and as you bask in its warmth, you radiate your excitement. Others may find your Pollyanna optimism either contagious or irritating. With maturity, a summer's nondiscerning enthusiasm, passion, or infatuation become discerning love and involvement.

**The Rhythm of Solstice/Equinox or Indian Summer: Transition.**

The energy of a solstice/equinox or earth element person, who is oriented toward the transitions from one season to the next, has a centering, side-to-side roll. The rhythm sways, as if the person is moving to the rhythm of Earth herself.

The solstices and equinoxes embody the rhythm of transition. As the midpoint between two seasons, the time of transition is governed by a balance between opposing forces, holding both the past and the future in the present moment. Most familiar as Indian summer, its colors are bright and glorious, a last burst of the waning season. This rhythm creates stability amid transition, assimilates change, and coordinates between the season that is ending and the season that is arriving.

Solstice/equinox people know about holding steady. Like the balance scales that are the symbol for justice, they embody fairness. At the center of the cyclone, their strength is to stay stable while nurturing the changes happening around them. Like a midwife or Earth Mother, they bring support, compassion, and confidence to times of transition. They hold the center, staying in the present moment as they add their tranquil touch to life's changes. Keeping a fresh perspective as the old order passes, they pave the way for stable change, rarely seeming rushed or stressed. Because they exude compassion, people feel safe with them. They bring equilibrium to chaos, peace to the threatened, and shelter to the displaced.

With a compulsion to help others stay in a comfort zone, solstice/equinox people may hinder another's transitions. This aversion to rocking the boat, combined with their characteristic desire to support the other, may also lead to obsessive worry. Or they may involve themselves in a manner that stunts the other's growth, babying and overprotecting. "The helping hand strikes again" is the epitaph of a solstice/equinox person whose life has lost its balance. In their joy at helping others flourish, they may neglect to give enough attention to their own growth. Skilled at helping others integrate lessons and experiences, they may have a harder time integrating their own. Knowing bone-deep that loss is an inevitable part of transition, they may anticipate it and try to prevent it, staying with a bad marriage or an unfulfilling job. And so they may turn their strongest suit into

a losing hand by interfering with the cycle of necessary change. Also, because they do not have a designated season of their own, solstice/equinox people may live with heartrending questions always in the background, such as: "Where is time for me? When will my season come?"

The talk of a solstice/equinox person has a singing quality, as when you are talking to a baby. The walk has a relaxed, lyrical manner, a slow, rhythmic side-to-side sway, lightfooted as a deer. The sustaining mental state is compassion. The stress emotion is a codependent sympathy. In moving from one season to the next, the two seasons come into a resonance, a sympathy, as one transforms into the other. In times of transition, the ability to provide nurturing is no less than a survival tool, and no one does this better than the solstice/equinox person, whose archetype is the Earth Mother. In your own transitions, you must activate that archetype within yourself, supporting yourself through endings and new beginnings. The harvest of the season that is passing must be incorporated into the season that is coming. Solstice/equinox people instinctually help others in transition to transform past mistakes into lessons for the future. A transition person's generosity may be martyrish; with maturity, however, exaggerated sympathy ripens into a wise and balanced compassion.

**The Rhythm of Autumn: Ending.** The energy of an autumn or metal element person seems to be stretched between the heavens and Earth. Like a tall tree that has lost its leaves, the energies seem restrained yet serene, barren yet dignified. The rhythm glides like a ballet dancer—elongated, still, and graceful.

Autumn's rhythm embodies completion. Each day turns to night earlier than the last. The warmth fades. Yet autumn embodies the peace of completion, the meaning found in attainment, and faith that dying to the old makes way for the new. The leaves fall to earth, fertilizing the next cycle. This rhythm garners the meaning of the cycle that is coming to an end, evaluates what has been useful and what has not, and eliminates all that is not valuable so as to bring about a worthy completion.

Autumn people have the ability to mine truths out of their experiences and apply those truths. Living in the last cycle, there is an urge toward perfection, high achievements, and model results. Autumn people can see what needs to happen and are highly motivated to make it happen. Out of this vision of perfection grow standards of excellence that are true and pure, concerned with a higher good, and inspiring to others. That which is impure—whether ideas, behavior, or systems—is eliminated. As the last season of the cycle, autumn carries a sadness, and those whose rhythm vibrates



with autumn carry a simpatico with the world's grief. From this affinity with sadness grows kindness, honesty, and integrity. They have a capacity to express themselves clearly, and they receive well the ideas and inspiration of others, for they have a gift for discerning the pure from the impure. They have an urgency to find meaning and serenity in what has been, for theirs is the final cycle. Forgive them their persistence. It is their rhythm.

Autumn people are vulnerable to becoming overly serious or sinking into depression. Shunning fun and lacking pleasure, they may find their energies becoming restrained and dry, like a tree without leaves. They may appear dreary and aloof. Living always in the energy of the final cycle, they may have difficulty with time, trying to cram more into each day than it can contain. Oriented toward the future, they see life through the lens of death, and they may become trapped in depression or in the pressure to reach perfection before the last grains of sand have emptied from the hourglass. Their ability to make pure judgments may be clouded by this despair or perfectionism, and their standards may be tarnished by hopelessness or inflated through unrealistic assessments. Either may paralyze them so that they become unable to let go into change, obsessively evaluating and reevaluating to the point of exhaustion, lacking the capacity to complete a cycle of their lives, again failing to reap the benefits of their strongest suit.

Elisabeth Kübler-Ross observed that the best way to prepare for your eventual dying is to meet with consciousness the "little deaths" life continually provides. When you are actually in the process of dying, you will be in autumn's rhythm. Each cycle of completion, each "little death," each autumn in your own life's flow is an opportunity to glean the lessons of the cycle that is ending, to create a meaningful completion, and to open the way for whatever is next to come. Each cycle trains you for all the autumns yet to be. So it was when you had to die to adolescence to be reborn into adulthood. So it is when your own children leave the nest. So it will be when your body comes to its final season.

The talk of an autumn person has a weeping sound. The walk is tall, straight, and subdued, gliding with head high and gaze forward. The sustaining mental state is reflectiveness. The stress emotion is grief. As the leaves fall and the wildflowers die, loss is in the air. The cycle draws to its close. When you come to the close of a cycle in your own life, there may be sadness for opportunities missed and for what must be left behind. If autumn is your primary rhythm, you are oriented toward completions, toward discerning what has been worthy and meaningful. There is a heaviness in these tasks, and you know the grief of what might have been but was not to be. With

maturity, however, an autumn's grief transforms into an identification with the whole cycle, at peace with life, at peace with death.

From these descriptions, you may recognize within yourself one, two, or three of these clusters of traits. Fully understanding your rhythm and all its implications is a lifelong process. The system is that basic and that profound. If you understand your own primary rhythm and its dynamics, you will know a great deal about your needs and your blind spots in all areas of your life, from your choice of a mate to your vulnerabilities for illness. Your primary rhythm manifests itself in the way you look, walk, sound, feel, act, and react. If you know the primary rhythms of a colleague, client, friend, or family member, you will be able to understand that person's behavior with greater insight and empathy.

If you do just ONE energy practice every day it would be the 5-Minute Energy Routine.

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