

THE SPIRIT

(Collated by Michelle Wilkinson www.movingnaturally.co.uk)

There are many meanings for the word spirit. Here are some from the Collins English Dictionary (2011) that are not connected to distilled alcohol liquor.

The spirit refers to the nonphysical aspects of a person concerned with profound thoughts and emotions.

It is the nonphysical aspect of a person believed to live after death.

The spirit of something is a shared feeling, mood or attitude for instance there is the spirit of adventure or a fighting spirit.

The spirit can refer to a person's character or temperament.

It is the liveliness shown in the action a person takes or the animation, vital force moving through a living being.

A spirit can be broken in challenging life circumstances.

The spirit relates both to personal and religious beliefs.

Jung distinguishes between spirit as a psychological concept and its traditional use in religion. He viewed spiritual needs 'as real hunger and the fear of death' (1928, coll. works para 403).

In patriarchal-based religious beliefs, the spirit remains after death, elevated to the realms of pure spirit and is viewed as other worldly. It can take a person up and out of the body.

In feminine spirituality, spirit descends into the natural world lying in the flesh of the body, mortality and death. There is no desire to escape the world but embrace the rot and decay from which new life is created.

In the field of shiatsu Beresford-Cooke describes spirit as 'an experience, a sense of being a part of something greater than oneself, beyond the limitations of the material existence with which it is merged' (2017: 6).

In Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) there is a concept of the Five Shen or Five Spiritual Capacities which explore how consciousness can manifest in the actions of the world.

Each of the five spiritual capacities is reflective of a season and its element of focus.

In the autumn where the metal element shines forth The Po spirit resides. This concerns how the body is a vehicle for the spirit. It is housed in the lungs and enters

on the first breath and leaves on the last one. Through breath it is the interconnection between all people and the environmental world web.

In TCM the lungs hold the breath of Heaven and form the ultimate source of life on earth.

The word inspiration denotes both the intake of breath and to be in awe of something with the expression ‘to take one’s breath away’.

The winter expresses the water element and contains The Zhi spirit. This flows from the kidneys and fuels the human will. The ‘yang will’ is the determination to act upon something while the ‘yin will’ is the ability to accept life’s pathway.

In spring the time of the wood element is home to The Hun spirit. This is the spirit of the individual soul. It is considered to survive after death and to retain the distinguishingly qualities of the individual personality. The Hun benefits from free-flowing Liver Qi which can be supported by Qigong flowing movement.

The summertime of fire is home for the Shen, the spirit of pure presence. It is reflected in human awareness and consciousness and in a healthy state is tranquil. The Shen can become scattered or leave the body in conditions such as blackouts, coma and shock.

During the late months of summer, the earth element is home of The Yi spirit of understanding. It relates to a person’s life purpose, illuminating qualities of insight and forming the inner witness which holds the inner voice of wisdom.

In the field of somatic movement, a spiritual intelligence is thought to reside in the living cells of the body providing awareness, conscious reflection, inner witness, insight and wisdom.

In somatic movement ‘embodied spirituality’ like feminine spirituality views the body as subject and a source of spiritual insight. It is seen as a microcosm of the universe and a place for spiritual transformation.

Clarissa Pinkola Estes in her seminal work on the inner life of women entitled *Women Who Run with the Wolves* (1992) highlights the fact that some people use the word spirit and soul interchangeably. However, in the domain of fairy tales the soul is the direct ancestor of the spirit offspring. The spirit incarnates into matter to glean information from the outer world of society, the duties, ideas and values to convey it back to the soul. In this way the soul can find appropriate response.

A fairy tale may contain a spirit child that is at home both in the soul and outer world. Created from a human and curatorial form this dual heritage enables them to carry messages and gifts between the inner and outer worlds.