

## AOM and the Changing Seasons

Marilyn Allen, Editor at Large

Our planet enjoys the beauty and benefits of four distinct seasons. The changes Mother Nature brings us profoundly influence our daily routines and lives, and even our way of thinking. Just as nature has cycles, so do humans, and there is a clear connection between the two. Oriental medicine can demonstrate nature within human beings and define the medical relationship between nature and people. With the fall season upon us, it's a good time to discuss this connection and how this particular year may make your services even more important than usual.

In some geographical regions, the change from summer to fall is very noticeable. The leaves change color from green to vibrant reds, oranges and yellows in the autumn. The trees then drop all those lovely leaves in preparation for the dormant months of winter. Autumn also brings the inevitable transition from the long, lazy days of summer to cooler and more temperamental weather, the regimented routine of school and homework, and earlier nightfall. There even seems to be a different smell in the air during the autumn months. And of course, fall is also the season of the harvest. Each item in the bounty is a concentration of sun, earth, wind, rain and time, and each human heart rejoices.

Autumn signals that now is the time to begin to slow down in preparation for the coming winter. However, it just seems that as the daylight grows shorter, we seem to get busier. One reason for this is because autumn signals the beginning of the holiday season.

Each season brings many new challenges. These include everyday events that demand our attention and usually require action to keep us, as individuals and as a collective community, moving ahead and making progress. This year, in particular, is a perfect example. By the time you receive this issue of *Acupuncture Today*, we will be poised to elect or will have just elected a new president of the United States. If that is not a cause for stress, I don't know what is! Fortunately, every day we wake anew and have an opportunity to begin with a fresh start.

This particular autumn season seems to bring a great deal more stress than usual, and people definitely seem to have higher anxiety levels than in the past. This year, there are the pressures of rising food and gas prices, the mortgage crisis, and now the federal banking bailouts. Add all of that to the usual holiday stress of making the kids' costumes for Halloween, feeding an army for Thanksgiving (with those increased food prices) and fighting for a parking space at the mall. All of these factors affect people's general health conditions. This is what people mean when they talk about the "holiday blues."

How can we as AOM practitioners and/or students help people during this most stressful time of year? Of course we have many tools at our disposal, but a recent study provides some insight into one way we might be able to help. The study, published in the September 2008 issue of *Anesthesia and Analgesia*, suggests acupressure helps calm anxious children right before they get anesthesia for surgery, without the nausea and other potential side effects caused by sedatives.

In an article published by the news agency Reuters, the lead researcher (an MD) stated, "As

anesthesiologists, we need to look at all therapeutic opportunities to make the surgical process less stressful for all patients. We can't assume that Western medical approaches are the only viable ones, and we have an obligation to look at integrative treatments like acupuncture as a way to improve the surgery experience." Pretty powerful stuff coming from a Western medical doctor.

There's a great lesson here: We have the means to de-stress our patients, even during this most anxiety-inducing time of year. Let us use those means to reach out to everyone - young, old and everywhere in between. It might just be the best holiday gift you can give, and your patients will be very glad to receive it.

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