



The silence of falling snow
The power of a tsunami
The stillness of a mountain tarn
The deep blue of the ocean

These are ways of describing the element of Water. Taoist traditions teach that we are all comprised of five elements: water, wood, fire, earth and metal. Each element has specific characteristics, functions and gifts. Each shows up in specific ways within us, and each corresponds to different organs in the body. And each element is associated with a season.

According to the Chinese calendar, we have entered the season of both Winter and Water. It is a time in nature when living creatures – animals and plants – enter a quiescent phase. The days are short, the nights seem darker, the temperature drops. It is a time to be still and to listen to our inner wisdom, to be still and listen to our hearts, to be still and husband our resources.

Water is the most Yin of the elements—dark, deep, cold. The physical organs that correspond to this element are the Kidneys and the Bladder. Both deal with water in the body from a Chinese and a Western medicine perspective—the Kidneys are our filters and the Bladder is our water container. In Chinese medicine, however, the organs have much broader functions; in the Water element these broader attributes include the ability to listen, will power, wisdom. Metaphorically Water represents the mystery of one thing containing two opposites: great hardness (as in ice) and great softness; courage and fear (one cannot have courage without fear); the cataclysmic movement of tidal wave and the absolute stillness of a pond; even cold and heat for it is within the Kidneys that the fire of life begins. Water is also associated with the gift of wisdom. The Chinese master Bai Hu Dong explains the relationship as follows: "The kidneys are the essence of the (element Water), and wisdom proceeds unceasingly without any doubt or uncertainty. Water likewise moves forward without uncertainty." It is our Water that gives us the power to move forward into the unknown, and it is through stillness that we come to know hidden aspects of ourselves.

So in a season that is often marked by frenzied activity, remember the advantages of being still, of being quiet, of being at ease with the unknown, of simply being.