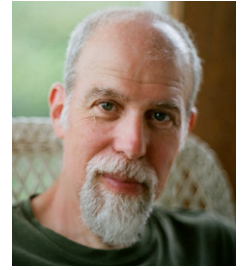


# HOW WE WORK



## Meet Stephen Cowan, MD *Cultivating the hero in the child by choreographing the Five Phases*

Interviewed by JIUAN HENG, CCH



This is the sixth in a series of interviews with homeopathic practitioners who are expanding the reach of homeopathy by providing integrative care for clients. Get a peek inside the practices of these remarkable individuals who are using homeopathy to improve lives, one at a time. Find out how they work, what motivates them, and how they stay inspired.

"There are no accidents," Stephen Cowan, MD, mused as we began our conversation one morning in the depths of winter. "We've chosen the coldest day of the year in winter (the Water season), me speaking with you (a Water personality) about homeopathy (the Water modality)." The serendipity of the context that brings together these three similars is known as 感應 ganying: resonance.<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Cowan traces his unusual path to becoming a pediatric developmental specialist to his earliest childhood. His mother, a poet and writer, would read Chinese poetry to put him to sleep. His father, the art director of *The New York Times* (NYT) for 45 years, nurtured Stephen as his apprentice from the age of three, mixing paints, before allowing him to paint clouds "and nothing else" till he could do it with his eyes closed. After that, he was allowed to paint trees. "He knew that if I could paint clouds and trees, I could paint anything. And poetry is metaphor, and metaphor is healing," Dr. Cowan reflected.

After a brief stint in art school, he switched to engineering and then returned to the humanities, especially Chinese philosophy, because "I am a humanist, not an engineer." In Italy, while studying Italian and art, he had an epiphany to become a doctor. He also realized he has a photographic memory for pictures. "Once I realized that I learnt through pictures and could load a lot of information into a picture [and recall it later], I became the top of my class. I could see the whole picture. ... and all of a sudden, *relationships* emerge!"

After taking a homeopathy course in medical school in Europe, he came across homeopathic physician Edward Whitmont's book, *The Alchemy of Healing: Psyche and Soma*. A bout of pneumonia had previously landed Stephen in the hospital, where Italian doctors treated him with just homeopathy and Vitamin C! Whitmont brought together Jungian symbolism and homeopathy. It struck a chord.

Dr. Cowan recalls another chord from childhood. His father's best friend, *NYT* columnist James "Scotty" Reston, had acute appendicitis while visiting China with Henry Kissinger in 1971 ahead of Nixon's historic visit. Instead of evacuating Reston to the U.S., Chinese doctors performed surgery, using acupuncture for anesthesia and recovery. It triggered an international crisis, and Reston wrote about it on the front page of the *NYT*,<sup>2</sup> a landmark moment that opened the door to acupuncture and alternative medicine in America.<sup>3</sup> Uncle Scotty convinced Stephen's father to visit a famous acupuncturist, John Shen, in Chinatown for treatment. Young Stephen, who went along, was struck by the experience.

When Dr. Cowan returned to the U.S. in the 1980s, he was thrust into a rigid way of practicing medicine—a jarring transition from his humanist medical training in Europe. As a pediatric resident, he met an anesthesiologist-acupuncturist who suggested they do a study on getting kids with sickle cell disease off Demerol with acupuncture. Though never published, their success planted a seed—to integrate Chinese medicine with conventional medicine.

Walking away from a prestigious pediatric neurology fellowship offer, Dr. Cowan found his calling in Child Development, a specialty that calls on a doctor to collaborate with a team, rather than be the specialist at the top of the hierarchy. "The heroics of medicine are all about acute care—walking into ERs and saving lives. ... but it wasn't enough for me. I wanted to know how chronic illnesses affect child-

hood development."

He became the medical director of a pediatric rehab facility in the woods of Westchester, NY, that brought the sickest kids out of NYC for healing. He moved his young family nearby and could walk to the hospital. As the doctor-on-call 365 days, he had total freedom to develop programs for the children.

"We brought in healthy food and took the kids on hikes in the woods. Every morning I did *qigong* exercises with the children with chronic asthma. Within a month, some kids were off all medications that they had been on for years. ... I went running back to the pulmonology department in Columbia, saying: 'You're not going to believe this! Your patients who have been on bronchodilators and steroids for years, in and out of ER and ICUs, are off their meds hiking in the woods!' And they didn't believe it. This made me realize that this information had been kept from me in my western training—the possibilities of healing chronic illness!"

There was no turning back. "In that moment, I knew my path had opened up. I started reading about Chinese medicine. ... These kids would have a taste of freedom, a taste of what health feels like, but then I would have to send them back to the city. And two months later, I'd get a call that they were back in the ICU again. It was breaking my heart. I became physically sick with shingles. This was a wakeup call. I left my position and started a pediatric practice. I had experienced a transformative moment. I watched kids heal before my eyes with a minimum of what you could call a homeopathic treatment of breathing in the morning.

"That's when I found the book *Between Heaven and Earth* by Efrem Korngold and Harriet Beinfeld. I called them in San Francisco and said, 'I must study with you!' They had integrated Jungian psychology/symbolism with Chinese medicine. That brought back Whitmont, that brought back my childhood. That began my understand-

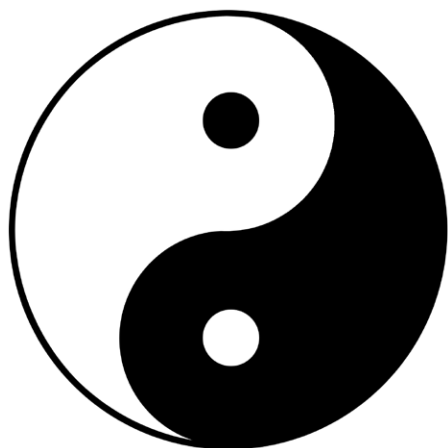
ing of the power of metaphor, how these energies exist in each of us simultaneously at different levels.”

Studying with Efrem and Harriet brought Dr. Cowan an *aha* moment: “My father and mentor, who I loved dearly, was a big Fire type whose larger than life energy filled the room. I thought I was supposed to be like him. I remember saying ‘I’m an artist, like my father.’ Efrem said, ‘Yes, there may be a generational gift, but you are not Fire!’ I was shocked, and then liberated from the burden of living up to something that is not my deepest note. That freedom changed my life.”

Dr. Cowan made it his life’s work to discern and liberate the deepest note in each young patient through Chinese medicine’s Five Phase (or Five Element) model of transformation. Because it is a very big-picture model, it allows him to understand the interrelationships between many alternative treatment modalities and strategically integrate them, including homeopathy, to guide a child to express his true potential.

### Dynamic model of change: a Chinese perspective

To appreciate the elegance of the Five Phase model, let’s travel back 3000 years, when a worldview fundamentally different from our modern Western one (which sets human beings apart from nature) was taking shape in China. The Chinese were studying nature to understand the *processes of unfolding*—known as the *dao* or the Way. “They recognized that nature is *everything*. It goes back to the *Yijing*



Credit: Yin Yang or Taiji Symbol by DonkeyHotey, Flickr.com, CC-by-2.0

# THE FIVE PHASE MODEL: a season and power for each phase

Anyone who watches the seasons change grasps the Five Phase model intuitively. Each season has its felt quality, an energy that iterates in nature—in the macrocosm of the heavens, on earth, as well as in the microcosm of the human being.

For instance, in the Spring Phase, lightning in the heavens starts up life and creates wind in the trees on earth. In human beings, this expansive energy is associated with the liver and gallbladder network, and the strength of the tendons and muscles. The sense is vision, the emotion is anger, and the sound is a shout. These correspondences represent the energy of Wood whose impulse is to give birth to Fire, the Phase of Summer.

In a brilliant stroke of imagination, Dr. Cowan developed the Jungian ideas Beinfeld and Korngold first taught him, synthesizing the Five Phase energy patterns into five archetypes that every child dreams about: to be a hero with a secret power. The accompanying charts show how each season’s qualities provide powerful metaphors for children’s *secret powers*, as well as where the challenges and gifts of each power lie. Also, view this video: <https://tournesolkids.org/kids-families/#five-powers>

WOOD POWER (spring)	FIRE POWER (summer)	EARTH POWER (harvest)	GOLD POWER (autumn)	WATER POWER (winter)
Moving	Playing	Gathering	Refining	Retreating
Exploring	Relaxing	Sharing	Sorting	Imagining
Needs change	Needs contact	Needs harmony	Needs order	Needs solitude
Seeks challenge	Seeks excitement	Seeks connection	Seeks perfection	Seeks fantasy

The Wood Hero: (Growth-mind)	The Fire Hero: (Growth-mind)	The Earth Hero: (Growth-mind)	The Gold Hero: (Growth-mind)	The Water Hero: (Growth-mind)
Motivating Trailblazer Bold leader	Inspiring Entertainer Charismatic leader	Caring Peacemaker Humanitarian leader	Revering Designer Moral leader	Enlightening Sage Wise leader
Grows through struggle	Grows through intuition	Grows through collaboration	Grows through practice	Grows through reflection
Shares courage Creates freedom	Shares laughter Creates joy	Shares harmony Creates community	Shares grace Creates beauty	Shares insight Creates peace

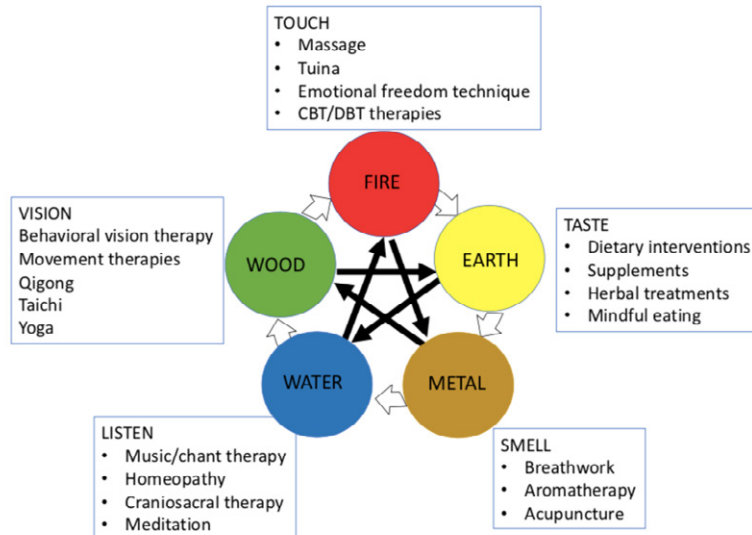
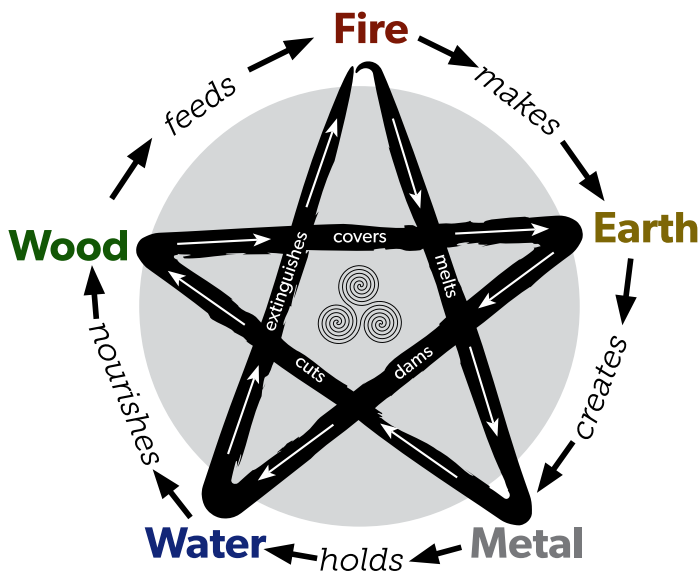
Insecure Wood (Fixed-mind):	Insecure Fire (Fixed-mind)	Insecure Earth (Fixed-mind)	Insecure Gold (Fixed-mind)	Insecure Water (Fixed-mind)
"Losing is bad"	"Unhappy is bad"	"Disharmony is bad"	"Being wrong is bad"	"I am bad"
Pushy Argumentative Aggressive Impatient Hyperactive	Dramatic Bored Overwhelmed Panicked Impulsive	Worried Confused Over-thinking Disorganized Indecisive	Disappointed Rigid Overcritical Self-righteous Compulsive	Withdrawn Absent-minded Apathetic Stubborn Depressive
SIGNS OF STRESS	SIGNS OF STRESS	SIGNS OF STRESS	SIGNS OF STRESS	SIGNS OF STRESS
Headaches Hypertension Muscles twitch	Hypoglycemia Reflux Diarrhea	Insomnia Stomachache Bloating	Constipation Eczema Tics	Malaise Back pain Hypochondria

[*I Ching*] or *Book of Changes*, the most ancient Chinese text and the basis of Chinese medicine,” explained Dr. Cowan.

In the *Yijing*, there’s “an understanding of change from *yin* to *yang* to *yin* to *yang*. And

the most important things are the two dots in the *taiji* symbol, the dots of transformation.

“In the *taiji* symbol, as the white (*yang*) grows bigger and bigger, it culminates in the black dot (*yin*). That’s a distinctly



With this Five Phase Model of interrelationship, Dr. Cowan has a compass that helps him to orientate a child's journey of healing and a map where he can assign therapeutic modalities their strategic place, take a perspective on diagnoses and scientific research, as well as figure out a time and place for intervention.<sup>5</sup>

homeopathic concept. There is an expression in taiji practice that says it takes only four ounces to move 1000 lbs. This is the power of weakness. 'Less is more,' as Laozi said. If you're watching the way things are progressing towards their completion, the final note—the straw that breaks the camel's back—flips it. The dots define our innate capacity to transform, to heal."

Clinically this means that "in resolution of any crisis of any kind, chronic or acute, it's about looking to develop things towards that *moment of transformation*."

"This resonated within me, moving from a reductionist model of medicine where you control variables [with a view that all symptoms are bad], to a *relational* view. Chinese medicine is essentially relational."

### April showers bring May flowers: Relationships between Phases

The Five Phase model views change in terms of relationships between the Phases<sup>4</sup> in nature. This is the basis of Chinese medicine, the art and science of harmonizing relationships within oneself, with others, and with nature.

These relationships enable the individual to grow into her full power. Just as April showers bring May flowers, each Phase in the outer circle of the Five Phase diagram is like the womb that incubates and nourishes the energy for the next Phase to emerge. Thus, just as winter gives birth to spring, water nourishes plant growth (wood) and,

likewise, spring is said to be the mother of summer, wood feeding fire creating a *supportive cycle of the five phases*.

Moreover, there are *dominating relationships* that *challenge* us to grow. These relationships are a matter of degree; water can cool down or extinguish fire, wood can plow through or cover up the earth, fire can melt metal to shape it or destroy its shape, earth can channel or dam water, and metal can prune or cut down wood. "Seeing the subtle interrelationships between forces in nature, between us, even between remedies, becomes essential to healing. This is where Chinese medicine really enhances our understanding [of the whole]." Understanding these dynamic relationships between and within us enables us to draw on the powers of the Phases to restore balance, induce transformation, to meet self and other in compassion, and to become whole.

"For example, we can organize these correspondences according to the five senses. [See diagram, upper right.] Water is deep listening, a resonance. This is exactly what every good homeopath does. Wood is vision, looking ahead, visualizing healing, and it corresponds to all the movement therapies. Fire is the embodiment of feeling, of emotional intelligence, tracking the shift and shadings of feeling from moment to moment, in the body. Earth is tasting and everything related to the art of eating, the dietary interventions, herbal medicine.

Metal corresponds to breathing, aromatherapy. It is also the precision of acupuncture. When we recognize these similars and inter-relations, there's no reason why we [practitioners of different modalities] can't work together." Dr. Cowan explains.

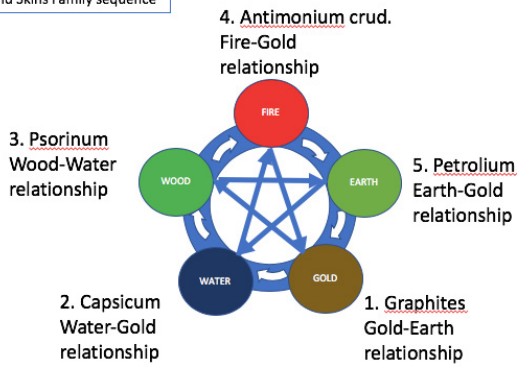
While contexts are ever shifting, the *relational patterns* endure, lending bearings to the process of healing.

### Child development and the seasons of life

Dr. Cowan showed me how he tracks a child's development using the Five Phase model, his *tour de force* synthesizing developmental pediatrics and Chinese medicine.

"From the one-ness within the mother's womb through the blur of the so-called fourth trimester is a Water Phase. A baby moves into the world at around 3 to 4 months when he discovers his hands and exercises his agency by rolling, sitting, standing, and walking (Wood phase) over the next 18 months. Then as he learns to use the power of naming things, he confronts the drama of 'No' that characterizes the Terrible Twos (Fire). Between three and four years old, he starts to play *with others* (Earth), and he learns to play by the rules and the logic that relates to *why* at four or five years old (Metal).

"By 7 years old, he then relives what happened at his birth (Water); there is another opportunity to heal it, if it was traumatic. The spiral of development moves us through the



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five phases again through the next seven years [and beyond], expanding your consciousness as life develops you outward into the universe. Each phase of your life colors who you are in that particular moment, sometimes nourishing, sometimes challenging you to grow. This gives you an opportunity to practice developing all five of these energies during your lifetime.”

### Daniel’s story: the Five Phase model in practice

“To understand healing as a developmental pathway, you want to look for where someone got stuck in the cycle of their life. Always ask, ‘What is the symptom trying to accomplish, and how can we help move this destiny forward?’

“Let’s look at the story of a boy we’ll call Daniel. Born at home, he was found to have bilateral clubfoot deformities, which was a shock to his Earthy mother. She was in such a vulnerable place; birth is a deeply mysterious Water time. In Chinese medicine, the Water Phase is associated with the emotion of fear. The baby required immediate surgery, and both legs were casted. Shortly after this he developed deep eczema-like, leathery, inflamed skin all over his body, particularly on the yang surfaces (back of arms, legs, and head).

“And that’s when they came to see me. His legs were in casts. The first thing I did was to get to know them, to make a safe place for them. And this deep Water question was at the back of my mind—‘Who is this baby?’ I was observing him the whole time and thinking, ‘Wow, this is a holy man! He’s got these eyes that are penetrating, and he’s watching and listening, he’s not

making any noise. He’s like Yoda, with a deep penetrating gaze, almost still, not scratching intensely, but almost unconsciously scratching.’

“We had a conversation about the Five Heroes [see sidebar on page 37], and I started talking about the Water constitution. This was such a revelation to the mom because she had two other kids who were very different from Daniel. She was melting because she

suddenly saw someone ‘get’ him on a level that she didn’t have the language for. I was setting up a framework for saying how he was unique from her other two kids.

“The Five Phase pattern was alive in my head: ‘Where did he get stuck in the developmental cycle? What is the symptom of the rash trying to do, and what’s it saying to me?’ In Chinese medicine, skin corresponds to Metal, the boundary between you and me, the outer aspect of our containment. Bone corresponds to Water, the deepest level or our form, where the club-foot deformity exists. Congenital deformities can be generally classified within the Metal to Water transition into life. Metal is the mother of Water. And Earth is the grandmother of Water. Earth corresponds to diet, nourishment.

“I explained how the ankles represent the Water source in Chinese medicine. I had no access to Daniel’s ankles to examine them because they were casted. Because he was exhibiting such a Water constitution, both homeopathy (water) and acupuncture (metal) were in my mind. I decided to try one acupuncture point (a point associated with Metal on the elbow). And he looked intensely at me when I did it. He didn’t say a peep. Mom had him on her lap, and she said, ‘Oh my God, I feel him shifting.’

“I understood this shift as moving from womb to life—he needed to walk through life, and his congenital deformity and casts kept him literally frozen.

“In my early years of study with Efrem, he gave me one of the great homeopathic books—Borland’s *Homeopathy in Practice*—which, like Chinese medicine, organizes remedies into families, and the

*Graphites* remedy was the family cluster for skin issues. In my practice I have organized Borland’s remedies within the Five Phase model to better understand their interrelationships (see diagram at left). This allows me to orient myself, using the big picture of Chinese medicine dynamics and then research the remedy accordingly. *Graphites* is the remedy oriented around Metal, the starting point for Daniel’s block. I gave him *Graphites*, and it did shift him. The mom was thrilled afterwards because the skin was dry and thickened, but it wasn’t as itchy.

“The next step was to move [around the nourishing cycle, see diagram at left] to the remedy *Capsicum*. And that really hit it. In my mind, *Capsicum* is moving things to Wood. Freeing up destiny. (*Capsicum* is also a remedy for homesickness, which is a womb-sickness.) After taking *Capsicum*, Daniel was stabilized, but the rash wasn’t completely removed. We pushed to get the cast off, which resolved the rash. Mom was happy, Daniel was happy, and he started to walk.

“A year later, he started wheezing. That meant the treatment was incomplete. Lung and skin are both aspects of Metal in Chinese medicine. Daniel’s skin was better, but the illness was now showing up in the lungs, as if to say, ‘I don’t know if I want to go forward in life.’ This is a Water moment, a nostalgia for the womb. *Capsicum* has an affinity with homesickness and the bones (Water), as well with the lungs and skin (Metal). Daniel was at this Metal to Water transition. I had relieved it at one level, but not completely; the treatment needed to go deeper. Now the mother of Metal is Earth. So I had to back up even further to look at the nourishing relationship of Earth to Metal and the challenging relationship of

CONTINUED ON PAGE 44

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Juan Heng, PhD, CCH, decided to enroll in homeopathy school when she saw her son, who was diagnosed with autism at the age of three, improve dramatically with homeopathic treatment. She brings a tenacious optimism, a skeptic’s mind, and an open heart to her practice in New York City and

Long Island. Her dream is to collaborate with holistic healers of different modalities to help clients. Her website is: [www.homeopathystudio.com](http://www.homeopathystudio.com)

tions nor the rashes returned, and Nicky continued in good health.

### Patterns of suppression...and healing

In Nicky's case, the diaper rashes were not caused by an external stimuli but were the result of an internal imbalance that needed to be corrected. The *vis medicatrix naturae* could not resolve the rash on its own. A symptom on the surface of the skin is frequently the first indication of an internal imbalance, a clear signal that some help is needed. If that symptom is suppressed rather than being regarded as a signal, a deeper problem can ensue.

Initially, Nicky's imbalance was not corrected but was actually suppressed, so his problem went from the skin (a superficial level) to problematic ear infections (an internal level). We often see similar patterns of suppression of symptoms in children treated for recurrent ear infections; their ear problems may disappear after the use of antibiotics, but this is followed by the development of asthma. The health issues become more problematic, going deeper and deeper into the child's system. With the help of homeopathy, Nicky was able to

move forward in a healthy way.

Here's another common pattern of suppression I often see. Women with a history of painful menstrual cramps, who have been treated with pain-relief medication over time, are no longer bothered by cramps. Healing has not occurred, however, because now the women are suffering from emotional symptoms during the premenstrual time. In my experience, both the intensity and the duration of the premenstrual symptoms tend to increase without homeopathic treatment.

With a few months of homeopathic treatment, however, the women will report that the emotional symptoms have gone away, and now they have menstrual cramps, "kind of like I had in high school." These, too, will disappear in a short time, because true healing is occurring.

### Realities and healing

So, what is healing? As you can see from these examples, it is much more than the elimination of symptoms, especially when their elimination gives rise to deeper symptoms. True healing stems from the body's innate healing mechanism, the *vis medica-*

*trix naturae*, and moves a person toward a higher level of functioning. Homeopathy, when thoughtfully applied, works in concert with the *vis medicatrix naturae*.

I want to be clear here that I am not opposed to the use of conventional pain relief medication or antibiotics. Most of us have benefited from their use at some point in our lives. They most definitely have a valuable, sometimes lifesaving place in medicine.

However, where there is an opportunity to strengthen the *vis medicatrix naturae*, homeopathy provides a vital service, allowing the body to truly heal.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Pearlyn Goodman-Herrick, ND, DHANP, is a licensed Doctor of Naturopathic Medicine in the San Francisco Bay area. For close to 40 years, she has specialized in classical homeopathy, mind-body work, nutrition, and women's health. She has taught at NCH and Atlantic Academy of Classical Homeopathy and is an adjunct professor at Southwest College of Naturopathic Medicine. She also consults by telephone and Skype and mentors practitioners in private trainings and supervision. Passionate about helping people heal, she has helped thousands recover and maintain good health. [homeopathyamerica.com](http://homeopathyamerica.com)

## HOW WE WORK (Continued from page 39)

Earth to Water. Was Earth holding back Water's liberation? Because Earth corresponds to taste and digestion, I knew we had to look more deeply at his diet.

"I ended up testing him for celiac disease, and it turned out he had it. The model had led me directly there. When we took gluten out of his diet, Daniel never wheezed again. More to the point, Daniel's father had suffered since childhood from debilitating asthma. He was tested and also had celiac. This transformed his father's life. He quit his job, and the family opened a gluten-free bakery. So destiny

was manifesting in this old soul Daniel, this Water child, this sage, to heal his father. This is a brilliant, brilliant kid, and he was able to be liberated into the world."

### The child heals his family

What a moving story of healing! A child heals his family through his sickness, thanks to a visionary doctor who beholds the child's heroic journey and helps his family to stay on course.

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- 1 The ideogram of 應 *ying* is a symbol of two birds talking at dawn. One calls; the other answers in resonance. 感 *gan* is to feel, to be touched; 感應 *ganying* happens when similar hearts-and-minds feel and echo one another when they meet in resonance.
- 2 Reston, J. *The New York Times*, "Now About My Operation in Peking," July 26, 1971. <https://www.nytimes.com/1971/07/26/archives/now-about-my-operation-in-peking-now-let-me-tell-you-about-my.html>
- 3 Prensky, W. *The New York Times*, "Reston Helped Open a Door to Acupuncture," December 14, 1995. <https://www.nytimes.com/1995/12/14/opinion/1-reston-helped-open-a-door-to-acupuncture-011282.html>
- 4 As nature is fundamentally dynamic in the Chinese worldview, the Phases are also dynamic and may be better understood as phases in transition. They are not Platonic objects with immutable essences.
- 5 For case studies and examples, see *Fire Child, Water Child*, by Stephen Cowan, New Harbinger Press, 2012.