



THE YIN AND YANG OF CLIMATE CHANGE

BY BRENDAN KELLY

Almost all of what we hear about climate change comes from our usual western perspective. We hear about the rapid warming of the planet, melting glaciers and increasing intensity of storms. We also hear about the importance of reducing our impact on the planet by reducing greenhouse gas emissions through driving efficient cars, installing solar panels and eating local food. All of these are undoubtedly important. But if we were to look at climate change from a different view, we can see that what is happening ecologically is being mirrored by what's happening within us, including the assumptions that shape our lives.

For thousands of years, Chinese medicine has understood the world as an integrated whole. Rather than seeing our individual lives as being separate from what's happening in nature, an eastern view sees the world holistically, where we are part of the world around us. Part of the importance of this time-tested medical tradition is that we can see how the same dynamic that's creating global warming appears in how we see the world.

In addition to the well-documented warming of the planet, it's understood that the planet's ability to maintain its coolant has decreased. Due to the loss of forests and permafrost and the acidification of the oceans, the planet is less able to absorb the gases we're emitting.



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In looking at this dynamic through the lens of Chinese medicine, what's occurring is that the climate's heat – which Chinese medicine associates with Yang – is increasing, and its coolant – which is associated with Yin – is decreasing. And rather than being something that's only happening outside of us, using the wisdom of Chinese medicine we can see that this same dynamic of increasing Yang and decreasing Yin is happening within us.

In addition to being associated with heat, Yang is also about activity, the desire for more, and newness. Yin is about not doing, the satisfaction of having less, and the old. The fact that so many of us favor activity over inactivity, more over less, and the new over the old speaks to our internal overvaluing of Yang and undervaluing of Yin. There are ecological consequences of the busyness of constant driving and flying and the climate effects of the consumerism of constantly buying more new things. There are also similar effects to our internal environment, where many of us find it difficult to relax and often feel less – not more – satisfaction from getting more new things.

Understanding what creates balance within us is essential to addressing the imbalance in the climate. Just as the climate is warming, we often overvalue Yang. And just as the planet's ability to maintain coolant is decreasing, we often undervalue Yin.



Here are three things we can do to promote personal health and ecological well-being:

1 Realize that “doing” is not always better than “not doing.”

There is a time to work and a time to rest; a time to be busy and a time to slow down. In our era of climate change, it's essential to move towards a balanced life, which includes a balance of doing and not doing.

2 Recognize that more is not better than less.

In addition to the ecological consequences of overconsumption, having more than we need doesn't lead to internal balance and well-being. Just as the climate is warming rapidly, we're often encouraged to want more. And just as the planet's ability to maintain coolant is decreasing, many of us are losing the contentment that leads to having less.

3 Appreciate that new is not better than old.

We're often encouraged to believe that simply because something is new it's better than something that's old. But again, this is the same imbalance of Yang over Yin that's leading to climate change. ■

Brendan Kelly is the author of “The Yin and Yang of Climate Crisis,” which looks at the bigger and deeper issues of climate change through the lens of Chinese medicine. The co-founder and co-owner of Jade Mountain Wellness, where he currently practices acupuncture and herbalism, Kelly has also been actively involved with environmental issues for 25 years. For more information about Kelly, his book, recent articles and classes, visit personalasecological.com.

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