

Gratitude for Autumn & reflection from the Swiss Alps By Dr. Mao Shing Ni

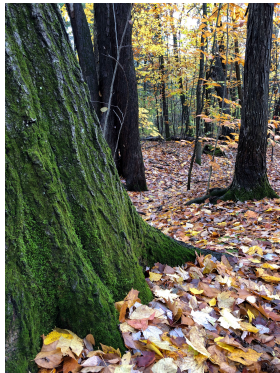
The beginning of fall brings a palpable change in the weather, a cooling down and much needed relief from the scorching heat of the summer. This summer was the hottest on record for Europe and China since record-keeping began in 1880.

Lucky for me and the participants of my annual meditation retreat in the Swiss Alps in the first week of this month where we enjoyed delightful temperatures in 60s to 70s Fahrenheit.



Looking out the window of our chalet under Mont Blanc you can't help but be awed by the grand expanse of the mountain ranges. It brings such joyful contentment and for a moment I thought I saw Julie Andrews running across the grassy fields singing "the hills are alive..." Here, you feel the energies of the mountain rooting you deeply, returning you to the center with naught a worry in mind.

We meditated by the waterfall and channeled the cleansing and revitalizing powers of water energy to rid ourselves of negativity, replenished our essence and returned us to the source.

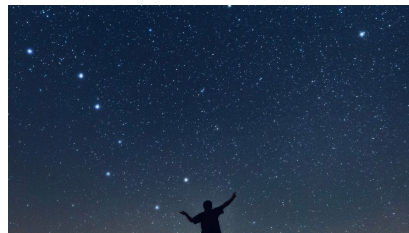


Practicing tai chi and qi gong in the forest as our beings merged with that of the trees, we heard the tree spirits whispering ancient wisdom in our ears, reminding us that we are all connected, as one.

We were delighted with a gentle rain one afternoon which refreshed and moistened the dry mountain air. The air smelled sweet like freshly cut grass. And the best part—the rainbow appeared and beckoned...



Each night, we practiced the North Star and Big Dipper meditation with stars splashed across the heavens, there I laid, surrounded by fellow sojourners, sailing on the solar winds of the galaxy, dancing tai chi to the cosmic pulse, I am free and in the flow...and then we fell asleep under the mother universe's embrace.



Autumn is a time of taking stock, reflect on the end of summer and prepare for the oncoming winter. It is a time to slow down our rhythm and contemplate our connection to the whole. The realization that we are inseparable with nature and nature is us is essential to our ultimate survival. The modern exploitation of the planet's resources is akin to the way modern medicine

approaches disease care—by extracting blood and fluids, cutting into tissues and infusing ever more toxic drugs into the body. We need to take care of Mother Earth, like the way Chinese medicine cares for a patient's health, by empowering prevention, promote functional equilibrium and harmonize with nature and not supersede nature as each of our acts have consequences for both our individual health and that of the planet.

This past summer was the third-hottest summer on record in the U.S. Both China the U.S. have experienced devastating drought with 60% less rainfall in China affecting 900 million people and in the U.S., almost half of the lower 48 states in severe drought where farms have been fallowed and water use seriously restricted. Combined with the war raging in Ukraine which drastically curbed food production, it does not bode well for the winter ahead.

The ancient sage, the Yellow Emperor cautioned that when a season and its expression is extreme it will be followed by similarly extreme season in the opposite spectrum so in this case, extreme summer heat shall bring extreme winter chill. Insecurity of food, energy and recession will plague our fellow citizens world over. Humanity's fingerprints are all over climate-related catastrophes, not the least, wars waged against others and between people.

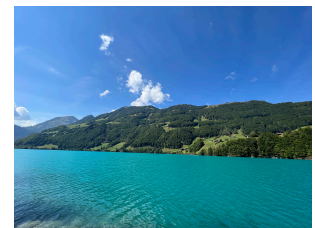
We are one human family, no matter the color, gender or nationality. While we individually may escape natural disasters, we are defenseless against human-made devastations. The actions of individuals affect the rest of the planet. We are not separate from one another and certainly not separate from the universe.

Have we not learned from thousands of years of armed conflict that wars benefit no one except a few egomaniacal individuals and companies that manufacture weapons and munitions? You and I are the offspring of the divine feminine and the sacred masculine, whatever humans can conjure with their brilliant consciousness they can manifest. There's room for all types of innovation and energy to fuel them, be it the black or green as long as the price is not human bloodshed.



As I sipped a glass of sparkling mineral water overlooking Lake Geneva from the terraced hillside of Lavaux established by the Romans nestled between Lausanne and Montreux, I can see why the United Nations is headquartered in beautiful Geneva so is the International Olympic Committee located in Lausanne. Its neutrality and maintaining peace is sacrosanct to the people here.

The hidden treasure of this place is actually the water. Switzerland is sometimes called the “water tower of Europe” as its reaches all northern, southern, western and eastern parts of Europe. Switzerland is in the intersection of three countries and provides the source of water from its glacial and snow melt to the Rhône in France, Rhine in Germany and Po in Italy. The Danube even reaches all the way to Romania and Ukraine. The water feeds the North Sea, Mediterranean Sea, Adriatic Sea and the Black Sea.



I marveled at the paradise that some have come to refer to this place. But even here in paradise, all is not well as Switzerland was hit with record drought this year and the levels of all the rivers downstream have declined to their lowest in history. Many of the glaciers in the Swiss Alps have disappeared or are disappearing rapidly due to the rising heat. So drought in Switzerland can affect wine production in France, grain production in Ukraine and hydroelectric generation critical for industries in Germany. No one is spared.



The extreme climatic and planetary changes—drought, floods and hurricanes affect everyone and it doesn't care of your color, education level or nationality. Although it does disproportionately affect the poor. However at the end of the day, even the well heeled cannot escape—we are all in this hot oven together so together, you and I must try to be the solution and not to add to the problem. We must raise our awareness of how our actions can have ripple effects on others and the planet.

The season of Autumn corresponds to the Metal Element and teaches us to reflect on our actions and our life. The ancients considered glaciers as part of the Metal element and since Metal is the source of Water element, we can see the receding glacier resulting in water crisis. We reap what we sow. So go ahead, get rid of plastics, buy food in bulk, filter your water and bring it with you, walk more and drive less, grow your own food, water plants with gray water, reuse, recycle, repurpose, and most of all, use less, own less and live simpler lives.

Water Element corresponds to the season of winter and a time of rest and restoration. Let's hope that in the coming season, we will get through what is sure to be a long winter, unscathed. In the meantime, I am grateful for the lessons of autumn in desiring less, do less, gather my energy through qi gong, tai chi and meditation and looking inward while doing what I can to help others, and the world.

I took my last walk on the trail, bidding farewell to the mountains, trees, waterfall and the retreat participants. I sincerely hope that the beautiful nature of the Alps will remain for future generations of living organisms, humans and animals alike and not disappear because we have neglected it while it was under our watch.

I would like to end this article by sharing a quote from Lao Tzu's *Tao Teh Ching*:

The ancient ones who knew how to live according to natural truth of wholeness were simple and genuine—they were like trees in the forest. Empty and receptive, they were like a cave in the mountain. Comprehensive and unprejudiced, they were equally kind to all things, like the water of a stream flowing down a mountain, they benefited all things...

P.S. If you'd like to join me, I invite you to sign up now at chirivers.com for next year's retreat in Europe. Maximum number is capped at 25 because we prefer to tread lightly and leave no footprints.

