

Clearing Clutter

One of the most widely read feng shui books in the west is called *Clearing the Clutter with Feng Shui*. Its popularity is probably due to how easily we identify with the main theme: how clutter gets in the way of our lives. In this article we will explore how clutter can influence us in our physical surroundings, internal organs, and mind.

A dictionary defines clutter as a disordered state or collection. Like beauty, clutter is ultimately in the eye of the beholder. People have widely varying definitions of what constitutes clutter, but by our own instincts we know it when we see it. That is, we can experience the state of disorder clutter engenders. When we walk into a cluttered space, if we are paying attention, we notice the change or difference. It feels uncomfortable, restricted, cramped, crowded...disordered.

This is an important element of feng shui, the Chinese energetic art of place and space. Noticing the intuitive feel of a place is a crucial, although not the only, aspect of a feng shui evaluation. Obviously we don't have to be formally trained in feng shui to recognize clutter. The principles of feng shui can help us understand how a generalized sense of disorder in a cluttered environment translates into energetic terms.

Feng shui is based on the Taoist arts of observing nature. While attentively observing nature a sense of orderly flow emerges: seasons follow one to another; water moves from lakes to streams to oceans; winds, clouds and weather orchestrate a complex, balanced dance.



The cycles of plants, animals and land constantly display a natural flow, a rhythmic process, which demonstrates harmony when in balance; disorder when out of balance. What we notice on a larger scale in nature may be applied to a smaller scale in our environments. This is the foundation of feng shui. Harmony follows when there is a sense of balance flow within a space. Clutter, by its definition disorderly, disrupts balance, reduces harmony, eventually negatively influencing the people within the space.

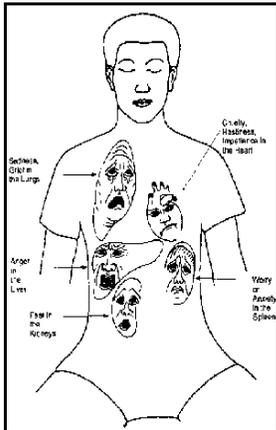
Clutter is about things, material things. Things we buy, collect, sort, store, pile, and dump. Sometimes a room is cluttered only because things are not ordered, not organized in a harmonious way. Possible solutions to this situation might involve shelves, closets, file cabinets, hooks, racks, or display cases. Bringing things into a state of order, *which makes sense to you*, changes the disorder of clutter into harmony.

More often than not, physical clutter is brought on by having **too much stuff**. All of the organizational consultants and storage solutions in the world can't cure a room of too much stuff. There is only one solution in this situation: less stuff. Recycling, garage sales, give away parties, donations to thrift stores all can reduce a room (or house) of clutter to a more orderly, harmonious state.

There seem to be advantageous times to take on the clutter in our environments: spring-cleaning, before moving, summer garage sale season. Clutter clearing also seems to naturally

occur during transition phases of our lives: moving, adolescence, marriage, menopause and mid life transitions.

Taking the time and opportunity to clear clutter from our lives can go a long way toward improving the energetic flow within our physical surroundings. It doesn't have to stop there.



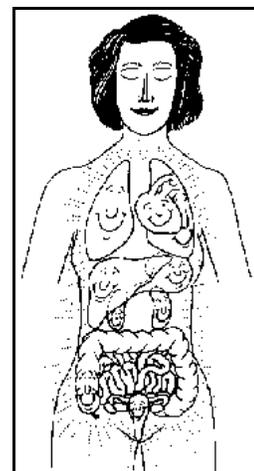
What we've just learned about clutter in physical surroundings may also be applied to our body's internal environment, particularly the organs. Chinese medicine uses the organ systems as a foundation for maintaining health and treating disease. One definition of disease might be disorder within the organs – that is, clutter. Clearing the clutter from our organs has the same positive impacts as clearing clutter from our rooms. Rather than material things, more subtle energetic clutter tends to internally accumulate. These may be emotions, memories, grudges, plans, past hurts, future worries, etc. Just like dealing with material things, these subtle energetic aspects may need to be explored in order to put them into a more harmonious order. And, like material things, there may be just too much energetic stuff around. Rather than carry it around, the time could be ripe for letting go. There is nothing more freeing than creating spaciousness within our own body/organs. While

this might not be as simple as recycling material things, learning some simple meditation or emotional processing can give us plenty of tools to clear this clutter. Good examples include the six healing sounds and the inner smile.

For the very adventurous we can even extend clearing the clutter to another level, the mind.

Clutter accumulates in minds as easily as homes or organs. This type of clutter may be even subtler, but just as disruptive to a smooth and harmonious energetic flow. Sometimes it is difficult to recognize mind clutter, as it tends to be so prevalent. We don't realize the existence of anything but the cluttered mind, as if there were no other possibilities. Mind clutter may manifest in a myriad of ways. Typically, it is conditioned thinking, a way we were taught or learned to view ourselves, our world. Reinforced by repetition, this clutter seems to expand until it is impossible to find a place without it within the mind. In extreme situations this may be a part of mental illness. However, even 'healthy and successful' people may have serious clutter occupying valuable mind real estate.

Meditation has long been used to clear mind clutter. At some point along a meditative path, people begin to recognize how mind clutter impedes their progress, whether they meditate for physical, emotional, or spiritual well-being. When I first become interested in meditation I tried, without instruction, to sit and quiet my mind. Even today I vividly recall how those initial attempts were difficult and physically painful. The constant mind chatter was so overwhelming I couldn't sit for more than a few minutes. While I abandoned this approach fairly quickly, I did explore other techniques and forms of meditation, which gradually gave me tools and skill. Now, sitting quietly and calming the mind, clearing the clutter, is one of my most enjoyable and rewarding activities. It is not always easy, but the results more than make up for the difficulty.



Clutter may take on many forms in our lives, in our physical surroundings, in our organs, and in our mind. Frequently we'll take action when we recognize our physical surroundings become cluttered. We may also take that to deeper levels by clearing clutter both from our organs and our mind. The resulting unobstructed, balanced energetic flow leads to a more harmonious way of life.

I offer a beginning class in Taoist meditation techniques, that are helpful for clearing internal clutter. The next class begins in September. See the class schedule on the following page.

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