

About: **SHEN QI**

STATES OF CHANGE

I am fascinated with the interaction between art and healing. Can the energy of a painting affect the viewer? I search for insights among the inherited philosophical wisdom systems of our kind. Over the last fifty years, my study included both well-known systems and those more esoteric; incorporating these teachings into my life and into my art constitutes an evolving process.

In 1995 while ill with chronic fatigue, I chanced upon *Shen Qi* teachings when I praised a stranger in a supermarket line for looking so beautiful and healthy, and she credited what (to me) was an obscure philosophy. Soon thereafter I began studying and practicing this body of knowledge, often as much as four hours a day for over a year. After one year of not painting, I sought to visualize what I had learned from *Shen Qi* in a new series by making a metaphoric association between the glow radiating from a person healthy in body and mind and the way light glitters and shimmers when reflecting from gold as happens, in this series of paintings.

Equally important to appreciating the glow that may emanate from paintings or people may be an understanding of the concept of *Maya*. In Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism and Sikhism, the Sanskrit word *Maya* conveys multiple nuances centered on the concept of "illusion." The goal of enlightenment is to understand and experience intuitively that the distinction between the self and the Universe is a false dichotomy. The distinction between consciousness and physical matter, between mind and body, is the result of an unenlightened perspective. It is illusion to believe that objects such as gold or jewels possess value.

In *Shen Qi* and *States of Change* art, I obscure symbols representing major philosophic thoughts behind an illusory veil of gold, or, as it sometimes is called, the trick of the *Maya*. The gold in the paintings seems to shimmer and shake; it reflects the viewer's thoughts. Our baser instincts react to the noble metal while all the while more worthwhile truths may be found behind a golden haze.

Shen Qi Philosophy

In Chinese philosophy, "The Three Treasures" or "Three Jewels" are the essential energies sustaining human life; they are the theoretical cornerstones in traditional Chinese medicine and practices such as *Qigong*, *T'ai chi*, and *Neidan*.

The "Three Treasures" are:

<i>Jing</i>	精	Essence, specifically kidney essence; vitality, energy, refined, perfected; spirit, sperm, seed"
<i>Qi</i>	氣	Translates as "air" and figuratively as "material energy", "life force", or "energy flow." <i>Qi</i> (a.k.a., <i>chi</i>) is the central underlying principle in Chinese traditional medicine and in Chinese martial arts. The practice of cultivating and balancing <i>qi</i> is called <i>qigong</i> .
<i>Shen</i>	神	Spirit; soul, mind; god, deity; supernatural being

(This *jing-qi-shen* ordering is more commonly used than the variants *qi-jing-shen* and *shen-qi-jing*.)

Linguistically, *Shen Qi* may be considered as “spirit breath” or even “God force.” For adherents to its teachings, *Shen Qi* suggests the energy from which the universe is formed; it is the force that gives us spirit, creativity, health, happiness, life itself.

Whatever the literal meaning of *Shen Qi*, this philosophy evolved from *qigong*, a Chinese system of physical training, philosophy, and preventive and therapeutic health care. Reputedly, there are more than three thousand varieties of *qigong* although there are perhaps only five major *qigong* traditions: Taoist, Buddhist, Confucian, marital arts, and medical.

Shen Qi evolved from the medical tradition of *qigong*. In *Shen Qi*, energy is transmitted through talk; hence, *Shen Qi* is practiced in groups, never alone. *Shen Qi* works in a manner analogous to group therapy sessions; however, to benefit from *Shen Qi* sessions the student only needs to be present, not an active participant, although active participation aids the healing process.

States of Change Philosophy

The *States of Change* series paintings look similar to those of *Shen Qi* in that they are on shaped canvases within which the central area is organized using an ordered grid created by rows and columns of square gold metal. The golden squares create order, an order that is counterbalanced by the disarray and randomness of the disorder generated by mutilating the individual gold squares in a chaotic manner.

The difference between *States of Change* and *Shen Qi* may be one of the philosophies being explored and expressed.

The concept of “elements” evolved in many cultures as expressed in their philosophic attempts to order the material world and through classification . . . through knowledge . . . through science . . . attempt to control that world. The alchemical struggle at transmutation of glass into gold was one manifestation of this evolution; modern chemistry and physics is another.

Classical Western “elements” typically refer to the concepts of earth, water, air, fire, and (later) aether, which were proposed to explain the nature and complexity of all matter in terms of simpler substances. Ancient cultures in Greece, Persia, Babylonia, Japan, Tibet, and India had similar lists. In India, the concept developed differently in Hinduism and Buddhism. For example, in Hinduism, the four states-of-matter describe matter, and a fifth element describes that which was beyond the material world (non-matter).

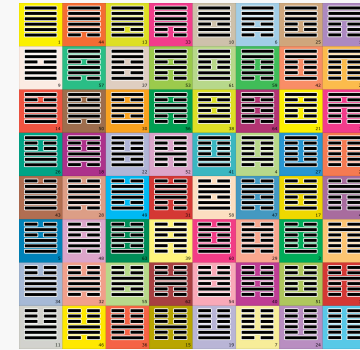
Five symbolic entities, often translated into English as “elements,” are known in Chinese as *wǔxíng* (五行) and more appropriately interpreted as “five states of change” or “five forces.” These five “elements” also have correspondences to the five cardinal points and the five seasons, the center (earth) being added to the West’s traditional four directions/seasons. The five phases, five *States of Change* are: wood (木), fire (火), earth (土), metal (金), and water (水). In the Chinese system, the “elements” are not fixed entities, but rather phases describing interactions and relationships between phenomena.

States of Change paintings include archetypal symbols from our collective pasts in a manner similar to those inspiring the *Shen Qi* paintings, so the distinction between the two may be a false duality. For me, the commonality of wisdom across cultures and belief systems emphasizes that all humans are equal, all views deserve respect, and all lives are sacred.

ABOUT: SHEN QI GOLD SQUARES

The visual concept for squares of gold in the *Shen Qi* and *States of Change* paintings was derived from my reading of the of *The I Ching* or *Book of Changes* with its “trigrams”, diagrams used in Taoist cosmology to represent the fundamental principles of reality. Each trigram consists of three lines, each line either "broken" or "unbroken," representing *yin* or *yang*, respectively. Due to their tripartite structure, they are often referred to as "trigrams" in English. (The *I Ching* consists of 64 hexagrams, but it's really the eight trigrams whose combinations form the basic component.)

乾	兌	離	震	巽	坎	艮	坤
Qián	Duì	Lí	Zhèn	Xùn	Kǎn	Gèn	Kūn
							
Heaven/Sky	Lake/ Marsh	Fire	Thun- der	Wind	Water	Moun- tain	Earth
Tiān	Zé	Huǒ	Léi	Fēng	Shuǐ	Shān	Dì
天	澤(泽)	火	雷	風(风)	水	山	地
The eight trigrams or 八卦 (Bā Guà in Pinyin)							



The *I Ching* consists of 64 hexagrams

ABOUT: OM (Buddism) and AUM (Hinduism)

Mantras that include the sacred sound of 'Aum / Om' are used in many different religious contexts for different purposes. Buddhists almost never transliterate it as 'Aum,' but use 'Om' instead.

For Hindus, 'Aum' is said to have *four* sounds when correctly pronounced: "A" emerges from the throat, originating in the region of the navel, "U" rolls over the tongue, and "M" ends on the lips. The last sound is silence.

The symbol of 'Aum / Om' contains three curves, one semicircle and a dot. Each aspect of its appearance symbolizes something. The large lower curve represents the ordinary waking state of consciousness; the upper curve denotes deep sleep (or the unconscious) state, and the lower curve (which lies between deep sleep and the waking state) signifies the dream state. The dot signifies the Absolute state of consciousness (known as *Turiya*), which illuminates the other three states (A - waking, U - dreaming, M - sleeping). The semicircle symbolizes *Maya* and separates the dot from the other three curves.



Aum, (also rendered *Om*) as written in Devanagari script

ABOUT: TETRAGRAMMATON

Hebrew	Letter	Pronunciation	As written, right-to-left
י	Yod	"Y"	יהוה
ה	He	"H"	
ו	Waw	"W" or placeholder for "O"/"U" vowel	
ה	He	"H" (often a silent letter at end of word)	

The term *Tetragrammaton* comes from the Greek; it means, "[a word] having four letters"; the concept refers to the Hebrew name of the God of Israel as used in the Bible.

These four Hebrew letters usually are transliterated as **IHVH** in Latin, **JHWH** in German, French and Dutch, and **YHWH** or **JHVH** in English. The English visualization has been rendered variously as "Yahweh" or "Jehovah" based on the Latin form of the term, though the Hebrew text does not clearly indicate the omitted vowels.

English translations of the Hebrew letters often render the word as "the LORD", following Jewish tradition that reads the word as "Adonai" ("Lord") out of respect for the interpretation of the commandment not to take the name of God in vain. Observant Jews write down, but do not pronounce, the *Tetragrammaton*, because it is considered too sacred to be used for common activities.

A Hebrew tetractys has the letters of the *Tetragrammaton* inscribed right to left on the ten positions of the Pythagorean tetractys. It has been argued that the Kabbalistic *Tree of Life*, with its ten spheres of emanation, is connected to this tetractys.



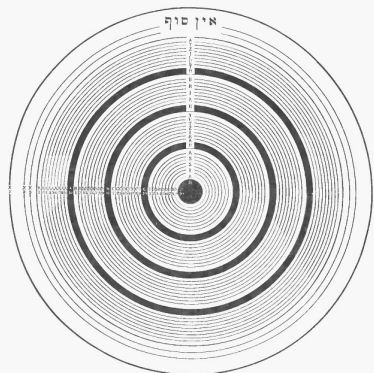
ABOUT: OM MANI PADME HUM (Sanskrit) and OM MANI PEME HUNG (Tibetan)

A literal translation of the Sanskrit mantra *OM MANI PADME HUM* might be, "OM. jewel-in-the-lotus, HUM"; in other words, two syllables ("OM" and "HUM") enclosed by so-called "seed-syllables" that mean "jewel-in-the-lotus." The intended Buddhist image is of the "jewel" of an enlightened mind that flowers from the "lotus" of human consciousness.



Om Mani Peme Hung in Tibetan script (abugida)

ABOUT: THE CABALISTIC SCHEME OF THE FOUR WORLDS



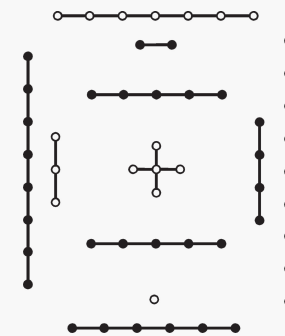
The above diagram transforms *The Tree of Life* map into four spiritual realms. These four worlds possess correspondences to four senses (vision, hearing, smell and speech) and to the four classical Greek elements. The worlds (in descending order) are Emanation, Creation, Formation, and Action.

Beth Ames Swartz
central area of:
The Cabalistic Scheme of the Four Worlds #3

ABOUT: YELLOW RIVER MAP

The "Yellow River Map" (*Hetu*, 河圖) and "Inscription of the River Luo" (*Luoshu*, 洛書) are two cosmological diagrams from China dating to about the 8th century BCE. They were employed by both Daoists and Confucians and served to explain the correlation of the hexagrams of the "Book of Changes" (*Yijing*, 易經) with the universe and human life. They are also used in geomancy (*fengshui*, 風水).

Five forces (*wuxing*, 五行) have correspondences to the five cardinal points and the five seasons, the center (earth) being added to the West's traditional four directions/seasons



The five "states of change" are: wood, fire, soil (earth), metal, and water.

Yellow River Map
(*HeTu* or *HoTu*, 河圖)

ABOUT: ETERNITY

In Mandarin, the character 永 (yǒng) may be translated into English as “permanence, always, eternal.”

The **Analects** (of Confucius) report (9.16), “The Master, standing by a river, said, ‘It goes on like this, never ceasing day or night!’”

Permanence and change are two opposing aspects of one concept in Chinese philosophy. Permanence is what endures within change. Permanence is fundamental while change is a deviation.

By hiding the Chinese character for eternity behind the ordered and disordered squares of gold, I intend to imply that eternal wisdom may be found if we look behind the illusion.



(The Eight Principles of Yong explain how to write eight common strokes in regular script which, uniquely, are found all in this one character)