



The Role of Aromatherapy in Supporting ADHD and ASD Students: Enhancing Focus, Calm, and Well-being

By Xiaoya Gao

Introduction

Today, I'm honored to share how TCM concept-based aromatherapy became that lifeline, offering hope, focus, and calm to two remarkable students and their families.

In this presentation, you'll discover:

How It Began

TCM Concept-Based Aromatherapy

Case Studies:

Case Study 1: A 6-month participant whose journey taught us the power of flexibility and sensory-friendly protocols.

Case Study 2: A 12-month participant whose progress, from restless nights to focused days, revealed the magic of consistency.

Common Essential Oils for ADHD/ASD

Practical Applications & Safety

Future Directions

Q&A: Your questions, insights, and shared wisdom.

This is not just a presentation, it's a story of tiny victories, unexpected partnerships, and the quiet power of nature.

Let's begin!

How It Began: A Journey of Purpose

My holistic aromatherapy journey began in 2018 at Jennscent's Aromaversity, where I immersed myself in the science and art of essential oils. In early 2024, I proudly earned my Clinical Aromatherapy Certification, a milestone that filled me with both pride and a quiet question: How could I use this knowledge to serve those who need it most?



How It Began: A Journey of Purpose CONT.

During a trip to China, a conversation with my mother shifted everything.

She shared stories about a close friend who had founded a school for 70 neurodivergent students, children diagnosed with autism and ADHD. Many came from low-income families; over half were raised by single parents working tirelessly to provide, while others lived with grandparents due to their parents' demanding work schedules.



How It Began (cont.)

Hearing their struggles, I felt a deep pull to act. *What could I do? How could I help?* I carried these questions like a quiet fire until I reached out to the school's president. Introducing myself and my background, I proposed a nonprofit initiative to support two students through TCM-based aromatherapy, a small but heartfelt start.

On April 26, 2024, my nonprofit initiative began a humble step toward bridging ancient healing wisdom with modern needs.

Those two students, their families, and the school's trust in my work became the foundation of a journey I now share with you today.



TCM Concept-Based Aromatherapy: A Pathway to Balance



At the heart of my work lies a simple yet profound truth: health is harmony. Rooted in Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), this approach views ADHD and autism not as conditions to “fix,” but as signals of deeper imbalances in the body’s Qi (vital energy) and organ systems.

1. Holistic Lens:

TCM sees the body as an interconnected whole. Symptoms like hyperactivity, anxiety, or sensory overwhelm are clues to imbalances in organ networks (e.g., Liver Fire, Heart Fire, Kidney Qi deficiency).

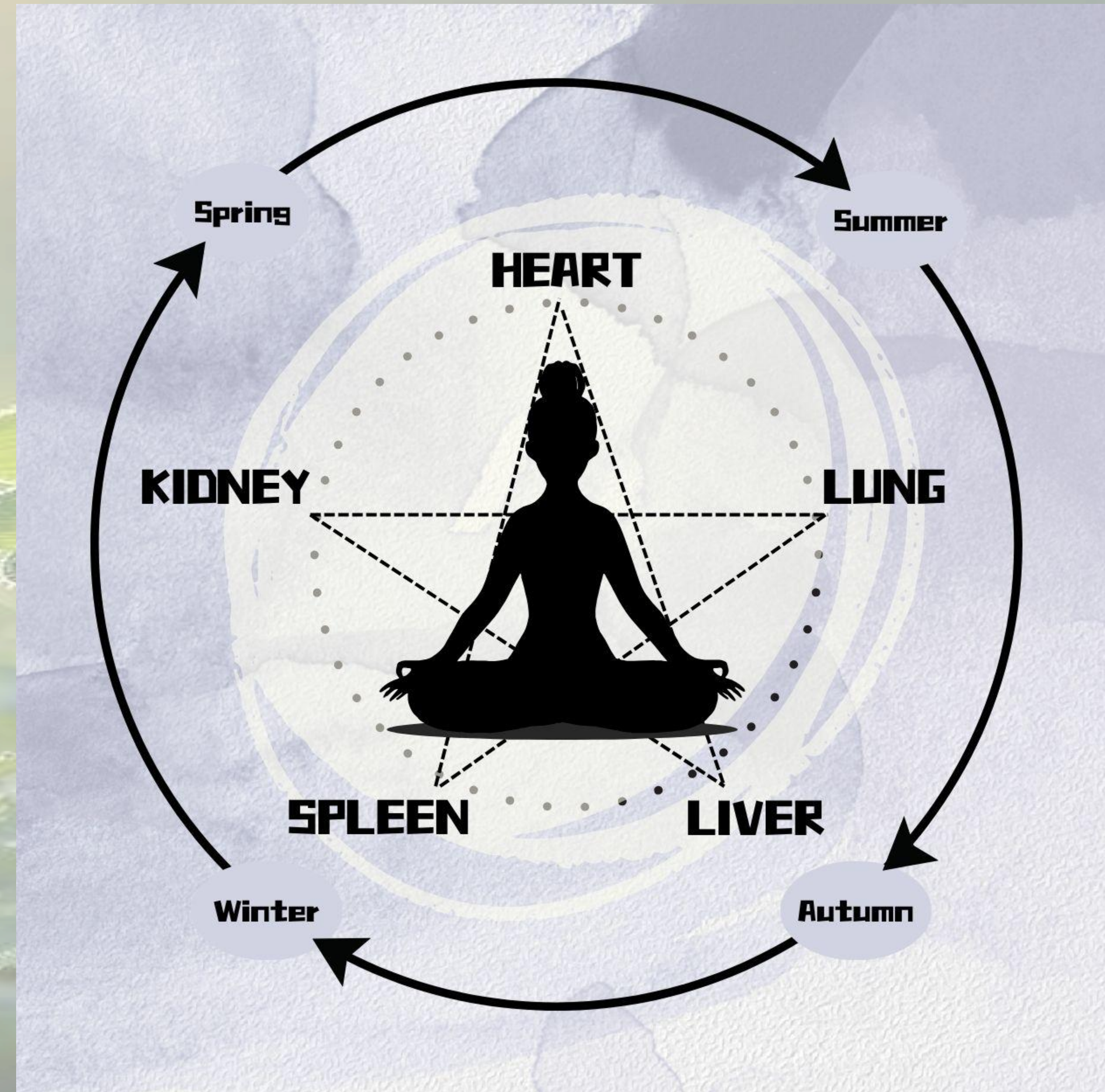
My focus shifts from “Why does this exist?” to “Where is the stagnation or deficiency?” a question that guides me to restorative, personalized solutions.



2. Qi and Harmony

Stagnant or disrupted Qi can manifest as emotional dysregulation, poor focus, or sleep disturbances.

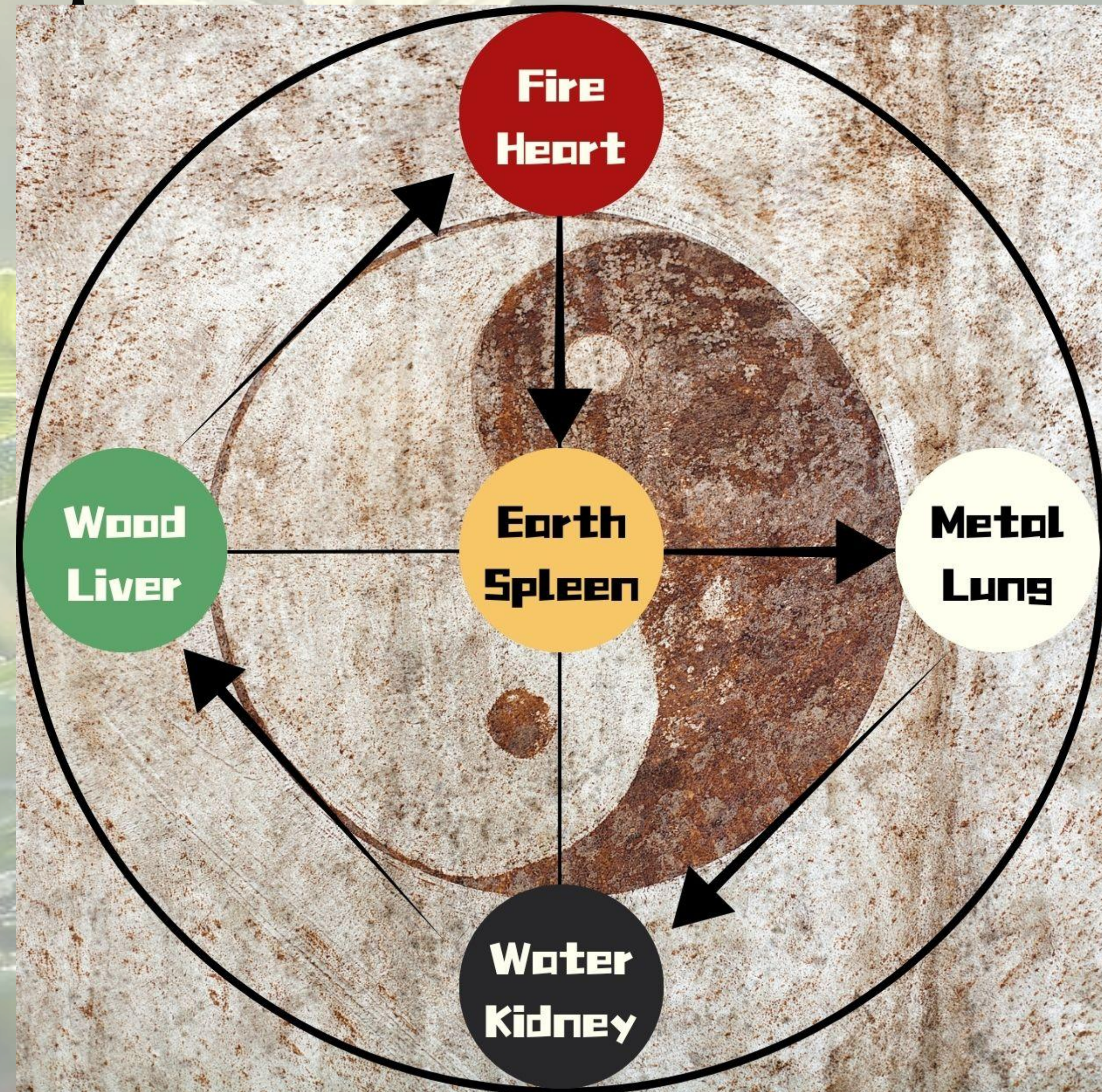
Aromatherapy acts as a gentle “conductor,” using plant essences to unblock Qi pathways and restore equilibrium between Yin (calming) and Yang (activating) energies.



Five Elements as a Map:

By applying the generating, controlling, and weakening cycles of the Five Elements (Wood, Fire, Earth, Metal, Water), I tailor blends to each student's unique energetic profile.

Example: A child with hyperactivity (excess Wood/Liver heat) might benefit from oils that strengthen Water/Kidney (e.g., vetiver) to “weaken” Wood's overactivity, fostering calm.



Why This Matters:

For the students in my case studies, this approach became a bridge between overwhelm and ease.

By meeting them where they were, energetically and emotionally. We co-created a language of healing that respected their needs and honored their strengths.



Case Study 1: Autism Student (6-Month Participant)

This case focuses on a 5-year-old boy diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). When he first began the aromatherapy support program, his main challenges included:

Fearfulness: Easily startled, particularly by loud noises such as traffic.

Mimic Speech (Echolalia): Constantly repeated numbers and words spoken by others.

Lack of Eye Contact: Avoided visual connection.

Digestive Issues: Poor digestion and chronic constipation.

Limited Expressive Language: Rarely used spontaneous language, mostly imitated speech.

Emotional Stability: Generally calm but struggled with self-regulation in stimulating environments.

Case Study 1: (CONT.)

TCM Assessment

- ◆ The Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) evaluation revealed imbalances in three key organ systems:
- ◆ Kidney Qi Deficiency (Water element) – Associated with fearfulness, low vitality, and sensitivity to sound.
- ◆ Spleen Qi Deficiency (Earth element) – Linked to poor digestion, constipation, and difficulty processing sensory information.
- ◆ Heart Fire Excess (Fire element) – May present as scattered focus, restlessness, or overactivity in mental-emotional functions.
- ◆ These diagnoses guided the personalized aromatic blend.

Case Study 1: (CONT.)

Blend Design

◆ Essential Oils:

- ◆ Carrot Seed, Cedarwood Atlas, Elemi: Strengthen Earth element and support digestive function.
- ◆ Neroli, Lavender, Rose: Soothe Heart Fire and promote emotional balance.
- ◆ Pine, Frankincense, Peppermint: Stimulate Kidney Qi, promote circulation, and improve vitality.

Flower Essence: Distress Remedy flower blend to support emotional awareness and calmness.

Carrier Oil: Fractionated Coconut Oil.

Case Study 1: (CONT.)

Protocol

- ◆ The blend was applied three times daily using the following methods:
- ◆ Topical Application:
 - ◆ Apply 10–15 drops (total) to the abdominal and liver areas: Using the dropper top on the 60ml massage oil bottle, dispense 10–15 drops of oil divided between the abdominal area and the liver area.
 - ◆ Place 3–5 drops on each wrist and 3–5 drops behind each ear.
- ◆ Nighttime Massage:
 - ◆ A gentle foot and lower leg massage was performed nightly, following the Kidney meridian pathway to calm the nervous system and support sleep.



Case Study 1: (CONT.)

Results

- ◆ Improvements were observed steadily over the 6-month period:
- ◆ Within 8 Weeks:
- ◆ Noticeable reduction in fear responses.
- ◆ Improved sense of safety in noisy environments.

By Month 3:

- ◆ Circulation visibly improved (warmer hands and feet).
- ◆ Regular bowel movements once daily, with formed, soft stools.
- ◆ By the end of the 3-month period, he made direct eye contact with me twice during a 30-minute session — a meaningful breakthrough, as he had previously avoided eye contact altogether.

Case Study 1: (CONT.)

By Month 5:

- ◆ Increased moments of spontaneous speech.
- ◆ Enhanced emotional regulation and improved focus during play and interaction.
- ◆ Parent noted: “Before using the blend, he cried easily and constantly repeated words. After consistent use, his emotional control improved significantly.”

By Month 6:

- ◆ Emergence of developmental milestones:
- ◆ Began grabbing toys assertively.
- ◆ Displayed impulsive running, a sign of increased energy and initiative.
- ◆ Showed early signs of self-awareness and autonomy.

Case Study 2: A 12-month participant

Background

- ◆ This case involves a 6-year-old boy diagnosed with autism who began aromatherapy support on April 26, 2024.
- ◆ After his diagnosis, his mother left the family, leaving his father to work and his grandmother as his primary caregiver.

Case Study 2 CONT.

At the start of the program, the child displayed:

- ◆ No eye contact
- ◆ Frequent self-harming behaviors under stress (e.g., headbanging against walls or the floor)
- ◆ Difficulty staying in class, he would run out repeatedly, requiring his grandmother to chase him multiple times each morning
- ◆ Poor sleep, waking at 2 AM or 5 AM and remaining awake
- ◆ A strong preference for sweets and snacks, with many cavities and minimal intake of balanced meals
- ◆ Noticeably low muscle tone, with loose and soft skin
- ◆ Irritability and difficulty regulating his emotions
- ◆ Key challenges included: anger, poor sleep, and digestive imbalance.

Case Study 2 CONT.

TCM Assessment

- ◆ The child's condition was assessed through the lens of Traditional Chinese Medicine, revealing a combination of imbalances:
- ◆ Liver Heat (Wood): Manifested as irritability, restlessness, and impulsive behaviors.
- ◆ Spleen Qi Deficiency (Earth): Indicated by poor digestion, low appetite, and soft muscle tone.
- ◆ Lung Qi Imbalance (Metal): Related to low immunity and emotional withdrawal.

Case Study 2 CONT.

Blend Design

- ◆ A custom blend (60ml bottle with dropper) was developed to target these elemental imbalances:

Essential Oils:

- ◆ Lavender, Cedarwood Atlas (calming, supports Liver and Heart)
- ◆ Peppermint, Thyme, Ginger (stimulates digestion and strengthens Earth)
- ◆ Helichrysum, Bergamot, Frankincense (emotional support, lung and spleen regulation)

Flower Essence: Distress Remedy flower blend to support emotional awareness

Carrier Oil: Fractionated coconut oil.

Case Study 2 CONT.

Application Protocol

- ◆ Frequency: 3 times daily (increased to 6 times per day during early months, adjusted based on needs)

Method:

- ◆ Apply 10–15 drops (total) to the abdominal and liver areas: Using the dropper top on the 60ml massage oil bottle, dispense 10–15 drops of oil divided between the abdominal area and the liver area.
- ◆ Place 3–5 drops on each wrist and 3–5 drops behind each ear.
- ◆ Evening massage along the Liver meridian (lower legs and feet)

Case Study 2 CONT.

Results and Observations Over Time

May 2024 (Week 4):

- ◆ Irritability improved; he could enter the classroom without resistance.
- ◆ Sleep and digestion showed initial signs of improvement.
- ◆ No allergic or adverse reactions noted.

June–July 2024:

- ◆ Emotional outbursts became shorter and less frequent.
- ◆ Although hyperactivity and attention issues persisted, he began interacting with peers.
- ◆ Sleep stabilized significantly.
- ◆ Digestion improved; fear response reduced.



Case Study 2 CONT.

July 23, 2024:

- Able to sit through a full class session.
- ◆ Digestive health continued to improve; fear still present but less intense.
- ◆ Sleep much better; waking less frequently.
- ◆ Grandma reported:
 - ◆ “He used to run all over the school. Now he can stay and finish class.”

September 2024:

- ◆ Attending full school days.
- ◆ Reduced application (2x/day) correlated with a dip in emotional regulation.
- ◆ Developed a strong sense of autonomy—bit clothes when upset, indicating emotional ownership.
- ◆ Grandma noted marked improvements in group class attention.

Case Study 2 CONT.

April 2025 (12-Month Mark):

- ◆ Self-harming behaviors completely stopped.
- ◆ The child began initiating contact: lifting his shirt when he saw the oil bottle, asking for massage.
- ◆ Now sleeps through the night and must be awakened in the morning. His grandmother noted “He used to wake up at 2 AM and never go back to sleep. Now I have to wake him at 7!”
- ◆ Regular meals established; eats all three meals after eating snacks.
- ◆ Muscle tone became firm and healthy.
- ◆ Learned to play hide-and-seek and laughed joyfully when found.
- ◆ Developed emotional communication: no longer lashes out when corrected, but verbalizes feelings and self-advocates.

Grandma shared: “He used to scream and hurt himself when upset. Now he explains what he wants, and even argues back when scolded!” “My whole energy has changed, he’s helped me become younger, too.”



Common Essential Oils Across Both Case Studies

Safety: 1%-2%, Gentle, well-tolerated by children; used topically with carrier oil

Lavender (*Lavandula angustifolia*)

Extraction method : Steam distillation	Scent: Soft, sweet, and herbaceous floral tones	TCM Elements: Wood, Fire, Water	Energy: Cooling
Part: Flower	Contraindications: None irritation		

Role:

Fire: Calms Heart Shen (spirit), reduces anxiety, and stabilizes sleep.

Wood: Clears Liver Heat (hyperactivity, anger).

Water: Indirectly supports Kidney Yin by calming Fire (Heart-Kidney communication).

Case Study Use:

Case 1: Addressed Heart Fire (anxiety) and Kidney Yin deficiency (fear).

Case 2: Cooled Liver Heat (self-harm tendencies)

Cedarwood Atlas (*Cedrus atlantica*)

Extraction method : Steam distillation	Scent: Woody, warm, hearty earth scent with sweet balsamic undertones	TCM Elements: Wood	Energy: Warming, tonifying
Part: Wood	Contraindications: None irritation		

Role:

Regulates Liver Qi stagnation, disperses excess Wood energy (anger, irritability).

Grounds rising Liver Yang (e.g., hyperactivity, restlessness).

Case Study Use:

Case 1: Supported Kidney (Water) by calming Liver (Wood) via the Controlling Cycle.

Case 2: Directly cooled Liver Heat to reduce self-harm urges.

Frankincense (*Boswellia carterii*)

Extraction method : Steam distillation	Scent: Balsamic, woody, dry, rich, intense scent	TCM Elements: Metal ,Earth	Energy: Harmonising
Part: Resin	Contraindications: None irritation		

Role:

Metal: Strengthens Lung Qi (supports grief release, deep breathing).

Earth: Stabilizes Spleen Qi (improves digestion, nutrient absorption).

Case Study Use:

Case 1: Addressed Spleen Qi deficiency (digestive issues).

Case 2: Harmonized Lung function (grief release) and supported Spleen (diet regulation).

Peppermint (*Mentha piperita* L.)

Extraction method : Steam distillation	Scent: Fresh, cool, minty, sweet, invigorating with earthy undertones	TCM Elements: Wood ,Earth	Energy: Cooling external, warming internal
Part: Leaves	Contraindications: None irritation		

Role:

Wood: Clears Liver Qi stagnation (supports focus, reduces frustration).

Earth: Gently stimulates Spleen Qi (improves appetite, digestion).

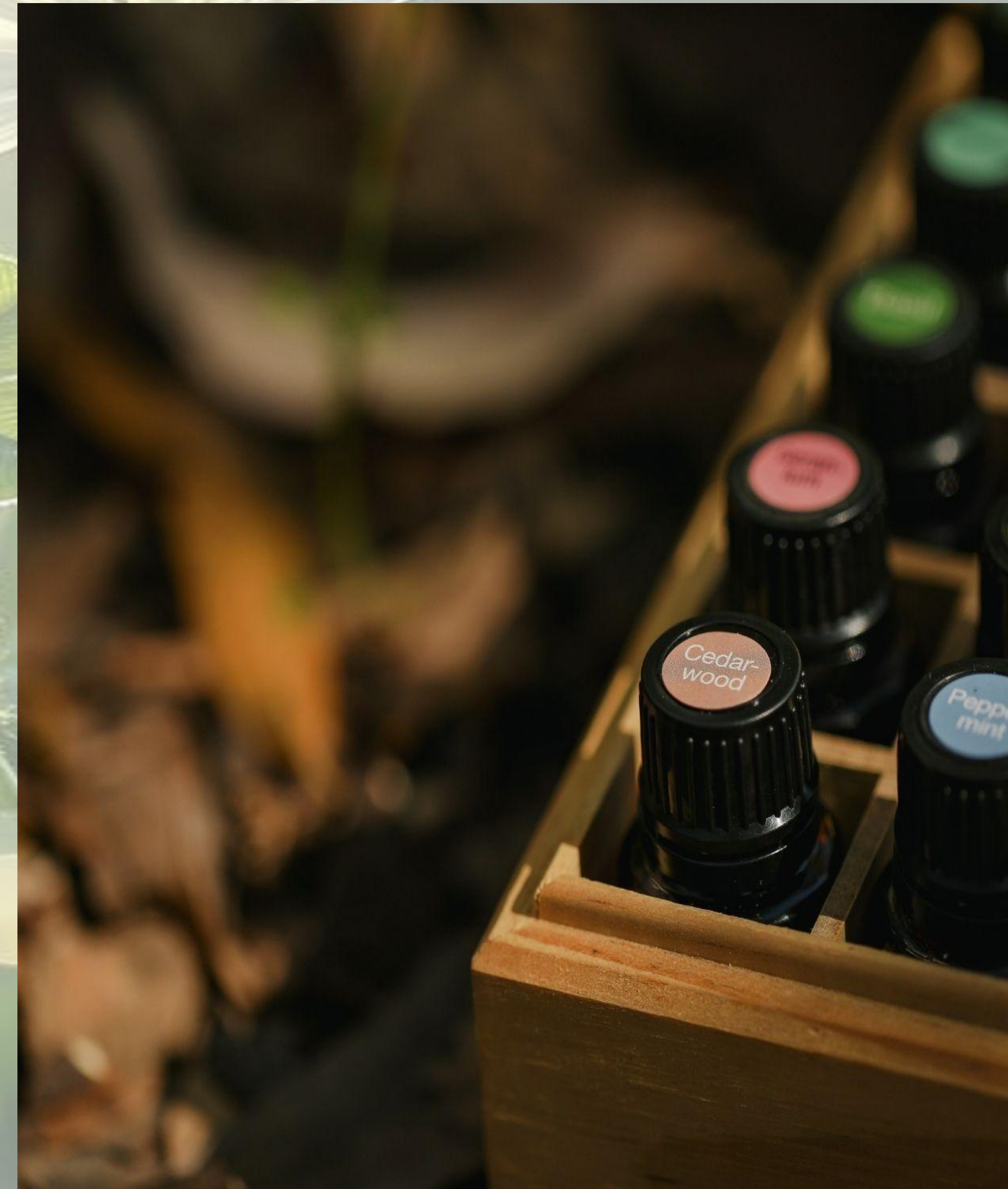
Case Study Use:

Case 1: Enhanced Spleen function (constipation) and Liver circulation.

Case 2: Supported Liver (anger) and Spleen (sugar cravings).

Other Essential Oils to Use

- ◆ Bergamot (*Citrus bergamia*)
- ◆ Pink Grapefruit (*Citrus paradisi*)
- ◆ Lemon (*Citrus limonum*)
- ◆ Neroli (*C. aurantium* v. *amara*, flower)
- ◆ Sweet Orange (*Citrus sinensis*)
- ◆ Sandalwood (*Santalum spicatum*)
- ◆ Helicherysum (*Helichrysum italicum*)
- ◆ Vetiver (*Vetiveria zizanioides*)
- ◆ Yuzu (*Citrus junos*)
- ◆ Pine (*Pinus sylvestris*)
- ◆ Rose otto (*Rosa damascena*)
- ◆ Carrot seed (*Daucus carota*)



Video from the Grandmother



This video was filmed on April 2, 2025, World Autism Awareness Day, capturing a historic moment: families affected by autism met with local government officials for the first time. Following this meeting, the officials began drafting proposals to establish free autism screening exams for children aged 0–3 years, ensuring early detection and support for neurodivergent children in our community.

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A Future Rooted in Balance & Hope



These case studies were only the beginning. They showed us what's possible.

Moving forward, I am committed to:


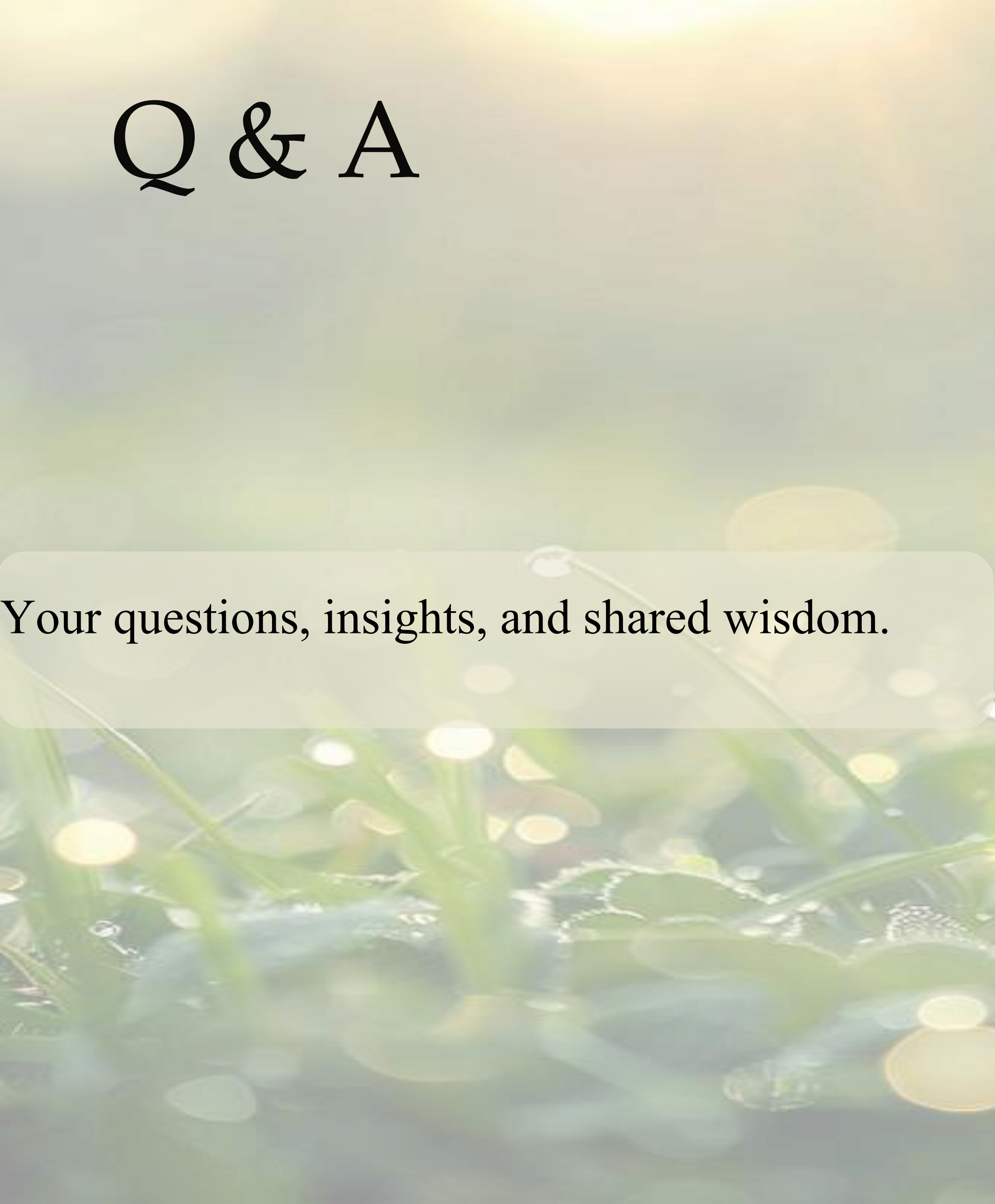
- Continuing this work through non-profit channels.
- Building bridges between TCM wisdom and modern neurodevelopmental care.
- Empowering more families, practitioners, and communities with tools they can trust.

“With confidence and care, we can help more children thrive.”

——— Xiaoya Gao

Q & A

Your questions, insights, and shared wisdom.



Scent is
a Time Machine to
Emotions



Thank you!

For the honor of sharing this journey with you today.

Together, we can nurture resilience, one breath, one blend, one child at a time.

— — — Xiaoya Gao