

## WOOD EXCESS PATTERNS

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One of the most important things about a person's Wood element is...looking at what kinds of force they are willing to exert in order to get their way. Very often we speak about Wood in terms of justice, and of anger as being the sign that justice has not been done: "That's not fair - you are taking my thing, stepped on my foot, you are holding me down!" Theoretically, things happen that are not fair, and I get angry because this is not fair.

This is of course quite idealistic. Wouldn't it be nice, if the only times we got angry were times when an injustice has been done. It would be even nicer to think that, whenever we start to fight about something, it is because what we want is justice. Usually, however, by the time we start embarking into battle mode, by then we want a whole heck of a lot more than justice; we want dominance. We felt dominated; and in turn now what we want is not justice but for our own dominance to prevail.

There are even times when it isn't about justice at all; not even to start with. The anger is simply about want to do something: "I want that, I am heading this way, I want to pursue that, I have a goal in mind, and what I planned is not working out." And so we get really really really mad. Check into yourselves. How often do you get mad, not because of an injustice, but because you did not get your way? This is something that is so hard to admit, and yet so vital to look at. Right now, see if you can come up with an example of some place in your life where you do not get your way and it galls ya; whatever it is, it is not the way you want it to be and it's *infuriating*.

Honestly? Looking at it really honestly: how willing are you to admit that in this case, it's not about injustice; it's about YOU not getting what you want, and that actually in that case YOU are the problem. You are the problem; you are getting all pissy and making the world a worse place. Just because you didn't get things your way.

Before we start talking to other people in the treatment room about their anger, it's *really important* not necessarily to have this completely taken care of in ourselves (because then we probably wouldn't be able to show up in the treatment room), but at least to be in the process of being honest about how very much that goes on in us is, in fact, the wish to dominate, and being very upset about it when things don't go that way.

What I'm talking about is looking at that and being willing to shift it; being willing to give up the pleasure of dominance and the pleasure of thinking that "being right" means that you should have power over. Especially when we are the loser, when we are powerless to get our way.

It's also very important to look at: To what extent am I starting to *hold onto* my anger as my opportunity to feel powerful? I am powerless over your doing x, y and z. How much am I using rage to say, "At least I am not a total loser"? I can have rage, and thereby hold onto self esteem through anger. There is a way in which being angry can be a substitute for self esteem.

Does everybody feel in themselves where they do that? I'm getting angry, but why? Just to keep some self esteem. I'm mad and I'm going to stay mad for a long, long time. And storm around - why? Because I don't have very high self-esteem; because you are stronger than I am and I couldn't get you to do what I wanted you to do - so this kind of internal self-bolstering comes up.

Beware: this is the door to the dark side of the force, this using of anger to keep self respect and self esteem. There is a way in which those who are on the losing side may perpetuate war for the sake of keeping up self-esteem.

The way that this usually shows up physically is heat in the blood that develops underneath long-standing qi constraint. So that is the next pattern we are going to look at: liver qi constraint generating heat. I.e. not being able to do what you want to do. Being blocked. Having an obstacle. Staying in this place of feeling stuck. Blaming it on circumstances. And then, starting to simmer inside... Starting to have this kind of simmer which is a kind of poisonousness. It really is a movement over to the dark side, an inner movement over to the capacity for evil, the opposite of the Wood virtue of benevolence. Now we are saying: you've held me down for so long, now I don't just want to get free; I don't just want to stop you from curtailing my movement, I actually want your head smashed.

This is liver qi constraint generating heat in the blood, and it's very hard to work with integrity with this energetic in other people unless we are willing to be rigorous about how we personally get to the place where the door of the bank is closed, and we know that we no longer want the bank to be open, we want the bank **smashed** open. We no longer want the lid off the spaghetti sauce jar open, we want to see the spaghetti sauce jar smashed against the wall. This is when constraint has started generating heat.

To recap: What is liver qi constraint generating heat? The natural rhythm of the liver is pressure building up, then bursting forth with vigor and creativity. Crouch and leap, then repeat: crouch and leap. If pressure builds up without being released in a timely, creative and healthy manner, heat simmers and eventually bursts upward.

How long does it take? It is different for each person. Some people can be stuck in a crouch for a long time and not go into *sissssss* in the blood about it. For others, it doesn't really take that long at all; it could take only 10 to 15 minutes.

This is usually a reflection of how many wars have already been lost but not forgotten, how much heat is already in somebody's blood.

There is a pleasure to anger that makes a feeling of fullness; boiling blood, hot blood, feels fuller, like there's more of it. When a person already has a lot of war simmering in their blood from the last war they lost, then the next war that they lose, it doesn't take nearly as long for this heat to build up to a kind of potential lashing. One of my favorite examples of heat in the blood is from *The Princess Bride*, Inigo Montoya, remember him? "My name is Inigo Montoya. You killed my father; prepare to die."

This is heat in the blood, this is the war lost but not forgotten, simmering in the blood. He was completely dominated at the start. He lost, he was the weaker; and for self respect, for self esteem, he turned this into a simmering on the inside... Now you are the war. You are no longer looking for peace; you are looking for winning the war. And it feels really good. Does everybody know what I mean about that? Does anybody *not* know what I mean about that? About how good it feels to want to hurt, to want to win, to want to do something violent and decisive? Good. You need to admit to this, before you have the right to work with it in others, or you are a total pain in the ass.

I'd like to bring alcohol into the discussion of Wood patterns. Among other things, alcohol disinhibits; it opens and allows flow. But what it opens and allows flow *of* is not just qi; it's whatever the qi has been holding back.

How to put this really coherently... Liver qi constraint comes from two places. One place is feeling unequal to an obstacle in your way. You have a direction. Your Liver qi is moving you forward to your goal and BAM! for some reason you can't get there. Liver qi will naturally "stagnate" at that point as part of the gathering for the sake of the next bursting forth.

That's one way it happens. Life stops you.

The other way that liver qi stagnates is that YOU stop you. It says in the *Su Wen* (I forget where), "The power of the Liver is movement and cessation." It is the power to punch someone in the nose, but just as significantly, *it is the power to refrain from punching someone in the nose*. It is the power to restrain yourself from taking action on whatever emotions you have inside of you that you are justifiably or unjustifiably uptight about. This is voluntary liver qi constraint: your ability to inhibit or hold yourself in tightly.

There are lots and lots of people out there with liver qi constraint, without any exterior sense of obstacle. What they have is an interior sense of not feeling comfortable letting go or letting flow what is inside them. What alcohol allows is a disinhibition of the qi that allows your insides, your agenda to flow, but not your...it decreases awareness of the Other. What Wood is about, is this balance

between movement and restraint; between freedom and lawfulness. I am defining lawfulness as restraining myself so that others may be free, and being aware that when I stop at a red light, it is so that other people are able to go. I'm holding back from fully doing my thing in order to be fair, in order to allow you equal freedom, because you have some rights around here too. I'm NOT saying "turn off that crazy music" because right now it's your turn to play something and I don't have to like it. It's your house, too. Lawfulness is about there being more freedom for everybody if we each curtail our movement a little bit. This awareness is an important part of the virtue of Wood.

Alcohol blurs that awareness. It's freedom without law. Forget about law. Including the good laws. Just forget about law. Now, some people have overconstrained themselves to the point where they can't really belly laugh at a good joke unless they're drunk, can't dance, can't flirt, can't do all kinds of things because they've overconstrained themselves; and at first and in moderation the alcohol feels like a good thing as it blurs awareness of the law. So everything relaxes and the emotions are free and begin to flow, but that doesn't make it a good idea. It's not a healthy Wood space because there's no response, no conscious awareness of the play between yourself and life; it's just me unconstrained but without awareness of red lights, of law.

I sound like a temperance league lady: "Alcohol makes lawlessness!" ...does, tho. It makes the energetic of lawlessness. One drink makes one drink-worth of lawlessness; it doesn't make complete lawlessness.

I'm not arguing for the preservation of uptightness, you know; what good Wood and healthy freedom is about is the overcoming of constraint but keeping lawfulness. And what that comes down to is constant creative negotiation with other people's pursuit freedom, other people's agenda.

So let's look at a couple of patterns of disharmony where a person is a law unto him or herself. The first is Liver Fire. What is Liver Fire?

Any kind of organ fire is sort of like the yang of that organ but gone pathological. Organ fire is like an egoic version of yang. If healthy liver yang is about goal-setting and assertion and movement forward, then liver fire is the willingness to resort to war in order to forward an agenda. You're moving forward, you're marching, ready to blaze with dominance. In this state I am not concerned with the rights and freedoms of others; I'm concerned with where I'm going. I'm going where I'm going, that's where I'm going.

How does it manifest? You know the usual physical stuff. How do we get liver fire? Long standing full anger or disregard. Total one-eyed ness. I see it my way. I do not see it anyone else's way. Only my way. There is only one "I", there is only one eye in the universe. I don't need to be aware of anyone else's perspective.

In the treatment room, it's really a terrific exercise working with people who have liver fire – i.e. who have full longstanding disregard, inability to see from another's point of view - to keep on asking over and over again, as they describe situations, "How do you think it looked from so and so's point of view?" or "What do you think so and so was thinking at the moment you said that?" And at first, usually there's almost an indignation that the question was asked, that it is even a consideration. But if you keep at it, it's incredibly helpful. I have found that without at least some of that direct wu xing shi yao, that Medicine Without Form intervention, it's very hard for just the acupuncture and herbs to make a real change.

I have clients... there is this one guy I am thinking of particularly, who would come in for acupuncture treatment whenever his co-workers were calling him an asshole more often than usual. That was his signal that it was time to come in and be treated. And you know, I'd sedate liver 2 for an hour and a half ...but what actually makes a difference, as opposed to just simmering him down but leaving it to build it back up again, is to start giving the central teaching of the Wood element, that there is more than one way of looking at things.

Excessive self-esteem breeds liver fire, i.e. thinking way too highly of oneself. This usually has its roots in childhood, in not being taught that there is another eye, that one is not alone in the universe. I am definitely in that dance with my 5 year old son at the moment. How to manage a space of freedom and law, such that I'm not dominating him and he isn't dominating us; how to foster in him the balancing awareness of the other eye, the other I. It is a problem when, in childhood, a little person comes blazing into this world quite unchecked and is not given sufficient opportunity to discover that other people also have an agenda. It is very hard, when very young, to figure this out by ourselves; that the world you see it is not the world, and that there is another eye. Adults often have a hard time remembering this, too.

This excessive self-esteem right from the beginning can lead later to liver fire, as the liver movement unchecked gathers momentum out of control and then when stopped is completely indignant and seeks to override: Why should I be stopped? I should not be stopped. Get your toe out from under my foot. You are in my way.

It is such a dialectic; on the one hand there really needs to be something to push against and sometimes it needs not to give in, from the point of view of helping a growing person learn a number of things about the Wood element. One possible lesson, or course, is figuring out how to sneak around their parents and get what they want anyway, which is a terrific teaching about Gall Bladder and flexible alternative logistics. And two, even in the process of sneaking around and getting your way anyhow, the fact of *sneaking around* to get your way means that you at

least had to factor in someone else and their viewpoint, so you actually are getting the lesson of another way of looking at it, even in the thwarting of it.

And of course this needs to be balanced with not being overly dominant as a parent, such that the little person's Wood ends up crushed or constrained or with this thick fester on the inside-- which is more the next pattern. Yes, how to hold the line knowing that if you are doing it right, that there will be struggle. Struggle is actually a sign of doing it right.

Some people definitely come in with a bigger hun than others, and right from the get-go there is a tendency towards blazing personal agenda. We need to work with that, to be able to keep saying o.k. you are incredibly strong, not everyone is as strong as you; how are you going to live lawfully?

Or inside ourselves: I have passion behind my viewpoint, I have an incredible blazing vision and I want to go where I want to go, but how do I keep aware not to step on people at the same time, even if I could get away with it? Because yeah, some people are just given that extra strength; but for the full creative vision, in order to know my world, I need to know how you see it, too.

Liver fire can be a chronic pattern, or liver fire can be an occasional or acute pattern, usually in a person with a strong will, when thwarted to the point of blind rage...

We looked before at the pattern of liver qi constraint breeding heat in the blood. And there can come this place, this time, of feeling deeply thwarted, unable to move forward, unable to forward your agenda - but with a strong enough will that you are able and likely to throw a really really really really really big fit about it. That fit will either be effective or ineffective as far as helping me get my way; but what I am really trying to point up here is the quality of the Wood element that says: I'm just going to try getting my way by throwing a really really really big fit. Or a really big bomb or a really big... anything I can think of. This acute blaze of liver fire is when the person who is not normally particularly assertive sees fireworks in front of their head and goes completely nutso, bazonkers. And everything flees except how I see it, and how I see it just caught fire.

Liver Fire also combines with another pattern that I want to go over, namely Damp Heat in the Liver and Gallbladder. These two patterns- Liver Fire and Damp Heat in the Liver and Gallbladder - are different, although they often show up in the same person - but there's a difference of emphasis here.

The liver fire is the momentum, the forwardness, the willingness to resort to war, in order to follow the plan. My hun has flown over there, and now I'm going to blaze a trail straight through whatever is standing in my way, because that's where I'm going.

Damp heat in the liver and gallbladder, that's where we get to a discussion of bile management. Here we have excessive bile, due to a combination of overproduction and stagnation. Bile building up in the gallbladder, i.e. stagnation, is more the dampness aspect predominating over heat. Then there is also bile overproduction, which is more about the heat aspect predominating. Especially when there is liver fire too, there is more likely to be bile overproduction.

Bile is the power to overcome big obstacles by using main force to break them down. This is what bile is for. Not subtlety. You could combine it with subtlety, but nothing says you have to. Bile is the capacity for direct assault. Hammers. Using force. Demolition power. All right, here comes my best shot; I'm going to tackle this situation. There's a lump of fat in your gut, and bile breaks it up no matter how thick and chunky it is.

This kind of power is what makes bullies, and conversely what gives us the power to stand up to bullies. Bile is really great for taking on bad guys. Bile makes you feel strong, able to demolish obstacles.

Now a big potential problem with this is bile obstruction, i.e. bile is being produced but it's not flowing. Often this is a situation where there is either some constraint in Wood, or some overly sweet damp Earth that always wants to Be Nice. The person's boss says this or the person's parent enforces that. Somebody is making stupid rules, and your Kick Ass Vigilante Superhero bile self is held in, is squelched, is not coming out and saying "you can't do that!" boom, boom, boom, like cannon fire, bringing up your full forcefulness out there... and so, that's what usually leads to gallstones: the built up bile in there that isn't coming out, to kick someone's ass in this world that needs to be kicked.

When someone is being unlawful, somebody needs to say "Hey, I'm a cop, I'm bile, you can't do that around here." That's proper use of bile, is dealing strongly with stuff that should be broken up. Hey break it up, you can't do that. Hey boss, you can't do that, you can't tell a whole bunch of workers ta da ta da, it's not right.

And if that energy is aroused and then held in, this leads to damp heat, a simmering "muzzled dragon" syndrome. There are a lot of people who have this; often they are constrained and unable to assert on the outside, but inside they live with a very acute awareness of just how much ass ought to be kicked. That constant awareness is arousing bile in them - and then it's not coming out into the world where it is needed, where it could be used constructively and heroically for the betterment of all beings. It's just held as simmering simmering simmering rage that then starts getting squirted out at inopportune moments in the gut and they end up with colitis or they end up with gallstones, held in there.

One of the most important wu xing shi yao for damp heat in the liver and gallbladder, especially for nice sweet Earthy people who really always want to be

kind and make you comfortable and meanwhile have dragons festering up in here, is helping them recognize right use of bile. Helping them recognize that there is a use for this stuff. That warrior energy is not necessarily bad. That there are times when you fight, there are times when you say that that's not o.k., and you rear up boldly and face someone who is dominant, unfairly, unjust. Yes, bile is the making of superheros. It's important to teach people to use that energy, to do something with it. A lot of people constrain it because they feel that it's not nice, it's not spiritual, it's not peaceful, it's not sweet. Heck the world needs more ass kicked, if you ask me in some ways. There's a lot of work to be done with some bile, in the name of justice. We could use more superheros, more activists.

What I've seen often when people come to me and say "I have gallstones, doctor says I should have my gallbladder removed," is we do a very tricky negotiation of exactly how much time we can buy. Get the ultrasound, find out what it looks like; and I want a three way agreement between me, the client and the physician because certainly we are taking a chance, obviously we are taking a chance if you don't remove the gallbladder immediately. But how long does the doctor feel comfortable letting us wait, how long does the client feel comfortable letting us wait while we go to work on this stuff and use herbs to break up the stones and help the client stop over producing the bile, and teaching them to start to use that energy in a benevolent manner. I have had more clients come in with the threat of having their gallbladder removed and ending up having three or four promotions on their job. I've seen this happen over and over again - they become leaders in the community. This huge leadership potential starts coming out as they start bringing their bile out of their gallbladder into the world in a responsible way. It begins with acknowledging that the bile was produced by them because they saw something that was making an obstacle to everybody's freedom and that wasn't right. And then they start speaking out and using that bile for everybody's benefit.

I remember this very nicey sweet woman - she's was really really sweet with this dragon underneath. Every now and then, you'd see her face change and you'd actually get to see how much aaacchhhhhh was under there. It scared the shit out of her because she couldn't handle that in herself. As we worked together she started practicing saying strong things. Over time she became the person in her organization that everyone came to, to say "could you please speak to so and so about da da da" because she had the bile, she could get out there and say to people everyone else was intimidated by, "you can't do that." That feeling of strength, that's the bile thing.

On the other hand, sometimes it's just overproduction of bile. This is generally the case if you've got liver fire or if heat is predominating over dampness in the Damp Heat in the Liver and Gallbladder scenario. When there is liver fire you are all about forwarding your agenda, and you're producing all this bile. Once you've got all this uninhibited bile flowing, everything looks like an obstacle to you and you demolish it because it's in your way.

So when the bile is excess because it's not moving, we need to get it moving. When it's moving too much because there is just too much of it and the person is basically using their bile to get their way right and left, oh boy, you've got a problem here.

There's a kind of belligerence that's very common for this damp hot gall bladder scenario. How to give a feeling for the difference between the liver fire "this is my agenda and I'm moving forward"... The liver fire energy is a very straight line or explosive outward moving energy.

But the damp heat of the gallbladder, it's a fu organ, it's much more about breaking this thing down, the things that are in my way. It's much more here in the process. Here I have all this extra stuff to dissolve obstacles, so of course I'm going to see everything as an obstacle and just start demolishing things.

People get the difference? The liver fire person will blaze right through you to get where they're going, knocking you over or crushing you in the process. You're incidental. They punch you out and then they go on and do what they meant to do.

The damp heat person grabs you by the collar and shakes and shakes and lets you know and argghharhhhhha, because their whole thing is surrounding you with bile and demolishing you. That's the point, the demolishing thing, that's what the gallbladder does, is demolish the obstacles. Whereas what the liver is about is movement towards the goal. It's a different kind of thing when you've got a liver making war on you to forward their agenda, versus a gallbladder demolishing you. Or a person who's a client who's more of a gallbladder: they are sitting in wait, full of bile, that they will then squirt on you. Or it's a flowing river of bile, but it's object-breakdown oriented. As opposed to I'm-headed-where-I'm-headed oriented. You're in my way and the point is where I'm headed, not you. But the gallbladder is more like, there's a real relishing of the feeling of power of demolish this obstacle, that's what makes me feel strong. People who are more gallbladdery than livery will get so stuck on the problem and producing and producing more and more bile over their boss, that in a sense they're not enough focused on where it is that they're headed anymore. They're busy building bile to demolish something.

So people can be more on the liver or more on the gall bladder side. Or some folks they're winners, man, they are going to be totally both.

I worked with one client who, he'd been checked out by doctors, there was nothing there. But he said he felt like his dick was rotting off from the inside, that he felt like there was some kind of corrosive awful thing happening in there. And what it really was was this kind of festering, bitter anger from all the women he wanted to go to bed with who were not interested and he could not really see it

from their point of view, at all. He had an agenda and they were being an obstacle to it. I mean, he had enough social consciousness to know that this wasn't cool, so he constrained this energy but it was coming out through here.

Festering belligerence, grudge holding. Again, there's this way in which because we love power, because we love dominance, we can hold a grudge just because it gives us an opportunity to produce bile on a regular basis and be filled with this "you rotten dirty ahahhh" and that makes us feel strong on the inside. You may have the job, maybe you got the girl or the promotion instead of me, so in that sense you won but I can solace myself with grudge holding, with festering stagnant bile.

This, too, has a virtuous aspect—the people who tend towards the pathology of grudge-holding are the same people who, in health, are the ass-kicking vigilantes who DO NOT GIVE UP on the cause no matter what, and they will stand there on the beach until the whole oil spill has been cleaned up. Everyone has given up and gone home and they are still giving the corporation what-for and not letting up. This is the activism and benevolence of Wood crossed with the damp tenacity of Earth. The dogged stubbornness and relentless passion for progress of a damp hot gall bladder really cannot be matched for slogging through any amount of mud and trouble to make this world a better place.