

Some thoughts on what's happening

Part 2

So, what's up with all this anger? Of course, we are all looking for positivity; to be calm, open-hearted, compassionate. (I'm going to teach you literally how to do all that in a near-future post.) But at the same time, there are pops, bursts, occasional tsunamis, of irritation, frustration, misdirected anger that blow up in our bodies, rattling us and leaving us spent, and curious at best. Unless I've created a mess by letting the explosion rip. Then regret, repentance, and repair are in order. As I hopefully shake it off like a dog that's just come out of the water, I'm stunned at the fire that's blown through me. Last night, my wife, Jane, went into a most impressive rant about many things. Everything she said, as usual, was right on, clear, insightful, true. And it was fueled by a fire of anger that was way more than normal. We laughed, but it got me thinking.

Of course, we're presently severely restricted in our activities, deprived of what we have held up as the symbols of our freedom. That restriction can feel like someone put a straitjacket on us. Choosing where we go, when we go, what we do when we get there is what we are used to and what we have come to expect. What about going to that restaurant? What about the gym? What about just going out for a walk? What about leaving for the job at 7 am and getting home at 7pm? What about sitting on the subway or in traffic? That's freedom, dammit. Now we're in our house-box with people who are in their own state of restriction. Of course, friction is inevitable. The conflicts growing out of close quarters give us a chance to learn about our relationships, what we have ignored in our outward focus. And we get to learn new strategies for resolving conflicts, bringing calm to the volatility, inner and outer. All of that falls into a category of making

lemonade out of the lemons that fall on your head as you walk through the suddenly windy orchard.

More seriously, and in some increasing number of cases tragically, many people are not only homebound, but have lost their jobs. And more will do so. The temporary alleviation of the hardship that so many are facing is in the hands- those hands exhibiting a very wide range of capability- of government and social agencies, and the more reliable, charitable hearts of family members, neighbors and people of good will and faith. How far the organized structures will fall, how completely will be the necessity of rebuilding, how complete the opportunity for new ways of being social and doing the necessary business of communal life, is yet to be determined. No one knows how far this will go, and no one knows what its outcome will be. Which leads me to my main point of this little essay.

I have found it most useful in my life to look at reality from as many angles as I can; to embody as many of the blind men feeling the elephant as my present state of evolution will allow. Each training, teacher, and each arena I've operated in has expanded and deepened my view of myself, my own life, humanity, our world, and what is within and beyond all that. I have come to see both the micro level of my own process, psyche, path, life decisions, health, relationships, challenges, and glories, which can easily fall into narcissism and then eventually boredom with the chronic examination of my own navel. I also have come to see the expanded macro levels of humanity in general, the world we've made and the planet we inhabit, on to the stars and cosmos. Which can pull me away from living my blessed, sometimes complicated and painful life in the here and now. And then there are the spiritual levels of all that, and beyond all that, which can provide context and comfort, or disconnection and bypassing. As my fundamental prayer to live through my heart (the answer, as it turns out, to all my questions) has been step-by-step realized, the ability to

hold all those levels in a shifting kaleidoscope of harmonious colors, one color coming to dominate in a moment and then receding in the face of a new understanding or necessity, has become second nature. I'm able, at my best, to be grounded and expanded at the same time, functional and non-attached simultaneously. It's proving most useful in this moment we are inhabiting.

So, let's accept that the anger and its partner confusion are real. (In fact, anger is a natural and most useful, necessary, and blessed energy when it is used for growth and transformation.) They are in my body and my family, in my people and my world. What helps me in this moment is to expand my view, to be able to hold the emotions I'm feeling and sensing in context, so I'm working with them, not having to swim like crazy to keep my head above the emotional water with its flapping mental fish.

One of those windows into reality, one I referred to yesterday, is Chinese Medicine. I like it because, when understood at its roots, it sees the world in both the micro and macro levels. Also, when practiced well it can be very useful medicine.

Anger is the emotional level, the fuel and the challenge, the expression and the overflow, of the Wood Element. The organs associated with that element are the Liver and Gallbladder. For those who are unfamiliar with the inner intimacies of your anatomy, those organs are on the right side of your abdomen, the liver right under your ribs, the gall bladder below that, above your waist. They have lots of physical functions, but the Chinese understood that the physical organ is only one level of the function of the element. The physical job of the organs includes things like filtering blood, helping you digest proteins and fats, and detoxing poisons (that includes all drugs alcohol, marijuana, sugar...). You know that right sided headache you get when you're stressed out? Gall Bladder. Or the one behind your eyes and at the back

of your neck? Same. You know when your eyes stop focusing and burn when you've looked at screens for hours? Liver. When you can't get to sleep or wake up at 2 am and lie there awake, your mind thinking about what you have to do until you want to rip your brain out and become a zombie? Liver. That ability to multi-task and work unceasingly, that turns into burnout? Your liver doing its job under the whip of your will, and then finally throwing up its hands. That big meal full of fat and meat, drowned in alcohol, that results in you competing with the dog for who is going to drive people out of the living room covering their noses fastest? Your liver and gallbladder looking at each other and saying, Are you kidding me?

Chinese Medicine describes the essential job of the Liver as planning on every level of the person. The Gallbladder is seen as the decision maker, the one who takes the plans that the Liver creates and sorts out which one will do the needed job-physical, emotional, mental, spiritual, life- and then the Heart gets all the other functions to agree to the program. When those functions are given a reasonable pace to operate at, when they are provided with both activity and rest, when they are nurtured with foods and activities that both strengthen and clean them, they will serve you until your time is up. And they will make your final days be smooth and relatively easy.

The Liver and Gall Bladder are about doing, making, heading forward into an anticipated future.

What I want to emphasize here, to hopefully help you see your, and our, situation a bit more fully, is about the helpless anger that is generated when the forward-moving energy that those organs generate is stopped in its tracks; when the plans you've made and the decisions you want to be free to make are taken out of your hands and brought to an abrupt, future-thrown-into-total-doubt stop.

Like now. For you, me, and the whole world.

The temptation in the face of these thoroughly thwarted plans is to try and keep the pace going; to impose the busyness and pace of the no-longer- real plans on our new temporary reality. The scheduling of endless online hours. The cleaning your house (maybe overdue) until you wear the cleaning rags to shreds. To watch TV past the time when its entertaining until it's numbing. And then maybe to pace.

We have lived in a paradigm that associates forward movement with virtue and rest and contemplation with wasted time and a wasted life. The result is, before the virus brought us to our collective knees, our collective Wood Element was seriously out of whack already. The evidence was all around us. Massive consumption of drugs of all kinds. Enormous numbers of illnesses coming from bad nutrition, negative thoughts, repressed emotions, and lost hope (another quality of the liver). Conflict on every level of social interaction.

And of course, because we humans are amazing as well as crazy, in the midst of all that, many people have been praying, visualizing, examining, dreaming, and actualizing new ways of being.

So here we are, being forced into the opportunity to experiment with doing our lives from another impulse; from the impulse to harmony, rather than that of headlong manifestation at all costs and consequences.

Up until now, the Liver and Gallbladder have obeyed your command to make you an unceasing driving force for burned out accomplishment. Now they can institute a plan for harmony and health and a balanced life, if you tell them to.

Here's my suggestion. I'm making it to myself as well as you. Let's take the powers of the Wood Element and apply them to where we are now. Let's each of us make a plan for our days., not be unconscious in trying to hold on to what no longer is real. Let's give into what is. What then are you going to do with your hours? Make a plan and try it out for a few days. You can change it. It's your plan. Make it in conference with your family. But let's start from an underlying premise that we are seeking harmony; harmony of action and rest; harmony of outward and inward time; harmony of fun and serious pursuits. Meditation and being in nature as much as circumstances allow. Distraction and contemplation. Communication and silence. Devices and just being with myself.

And all of that accompanied by breathing consciously, adding to that consciousness the directing of some gentle energy to your poor exhausted liver and gall bladder. Asking them to tell your intuition what they need to recover and serve you in this moment of uncertainty and possibility. And let's embrace the anger, the aspect of it that is the relentless urge to growth, to renewal; the unstoppable reaching for new possibilities, the perpetual hope, the revelation of new visions that the springtime-which is the season associated with the Wood element-represents. But let's see the toxic, tainted frustration for what it is; the over wrought anger that would perpetuate conflict and condemnation even in the midst of common challenge, because it just needs something to spill on. Let's give that to the earth, to the sun, moon, and stars, not to our families and no longer to the thought-sea that has clogged the energetic atmosphere of our planet for too long.

The future is not ended, it's opened.