

On The Fire Phase – Sensei Sylph Dominic Hawkins - Jan 2019

Fire! It evokes feelings of excitement, outward motion, uplifting, power and renewal.

The qualities of the “Fire Phase” are outward moving by their very nature. They are progressing towards the most pointed expression of the “Expanding Nature”, opposing the “Contracting Nature”.

Fire qualities can express themselves in both Positive and Negatively applied attributes, just like all the phases can and we can summarise some of these in keywords such as;

Positively: Forward moving, eternal, expanding, growing, dedicated, determined, driven, eager.

Negatively: Unemotional, aggressive, blind-sighted, narrow minded, heart-less, violent, fatal.

Being such a powerful representation of the “Expansion” side of the duality (and of that, it represents “Greater Expansion”, as differentiated to degrees of “Lesser Expansion” of phases and qualities such as Metal or Wind) this is the sense that we have when we are being called towards something, driven forward in our passions or striving to arrive at some point or another, for better or worse.

The Chinese Medicine practitioners talk about “The Liver Fire attacking the head” as an expression of the somewhat “irrational” expression of un-tempered fire. We have comments about this quality in western culture as well. We speak about the determined and single-minded envy in the green eyes of a scorned lover or the fiery and aggressive hot-shot (notice the words?) manager at work moving through the ranks in a single-minded orientation.

But what of the more revered expressions of the Fire Phase Qualities?, Countless stories across cultures tell of the seed of the plant, buried under the dark soil, bursting forth and pressing upwards with a “single focused desire” to sprout up out from the Earth and into the light of the Sun.

When I was a young teenager, about 15 years old, one of my older male teachers said to me *“Use your aggressive fiery nature to temper a blade that can harvest the fields and defend the people, otherwise, unchecked, you will simply burn the village to the ground in a moment of fury”.*

I took this to heart, as I was finding that my anger about “the way things were” had started to turn into pushing and fighting against the world and the society from all angles, rather than channelled as creative passion into developing something of value and substance.

It is the same energy though, creative outward moving passion. It needs to be directed and utilised or else it simply burns itself out.

The qualities of the Fire Phase, in a martial art context, are very useful in those situations that demand quick and immediate responses, potentially fatal and used in the “me or them” scenarios.

It doesn't make friends though, and it forgets that many people acting out of "self defence" still go to prison for their actions towards the aggressor. Fire Phase qualities do not become emotionally interested or entangled with the other or with its' object and focus. Its' decisions are made from a rather uncaring and consuming place, and it consumes whatever can be used to propel itself onwards.

Students are asked to remember in the class meditations and philosophy discussions on Fire Phase that these qualities are (and in fact, this is true of any of the Phases taken independently) not a lifestyle choice and they need to be given their proper place in life to be expressed powerfully and usefully, but to be kept in check and utilised as "one of" the many tools available to deal with life situations.

Fire, in a martial art context, tends to attack the triangle relationship of the shoulders-to-neck or the shoulders-to-sternum. Uke's receiving Fire Phase techniques from the attacker tend to have their legs taken out from underneath them and their heads and necks taken off balance from their spine quickly and aggressively.

A caveat though. Fire Phase qualities lack substance. Fire consumes and exists on the edges of things of matter and substance, it itself doesn't have a centre of substance that it can return to and consolidate to.

Unlike Metal Phase qualities which are forward moving and penetrative, Fire Phase qualities lack the substance to drive through people, objects or events directly, and so instead they are interested in consuming the surrounding opportunities. This might play out as taking out both the head and legs of an opponent, leaving the torso (the centre) to simply fall to the ground without being "directly" attacked, or perhaps we see it in the manipulation by a friend or colleague who disregards the actual relationship in order to play out some goal that they have or are wanting to bring about.

This is easily tested though because of the lack of substance.

When you poke and push back at things of only Fire Phase qualities, they collapse away to attack from other angles, since they never had a solid foundation to begin with, only the fuel which it burns upon.

From this understanding, the martial art applications of Fire Phase qualities of movement need to be backed up by a good grounding in the study of Earth Phase qualities. A strong triangle of the base (the feet, the legs and the core) helps to add some stability to an inherently risky outward moving technique.