

# The Exuberance of Spring: Wood Phase

By Amy Snow and Nancy Zidonis



*The energy of spring - foals are up and ready to run in a matter of minutes after birth.*

The foal is tucked in the snug confinement of the dam's womb. The magic moment comes when this gift of life is pushed through the narrow walls of the birth canal out into the expanse of the new world. The foal unfolds and extends his gangly legs and is immediately urged by instinct and his mother to stand on his own four feet. The propelling force that is needed for the foal to go from womb to standing to be ready to move with the herd is the energy of spring.

There is exuberance, a sense of bursting forth that occurs in no other time in the cycle of seasons. Spring is a time of birth, new green leaves, budding flowers, fresh hope and a replenishing of life on earth. Human and horse alike look forward to this natural dawning of increasing light after the dark, cold, dormancy of winter.

## Five-Phases of Transition

Each of the five constituents of nature identified in the ancient Chinese construct of the Five Phases of Transition, also called the Five-Element Theory, is associated with a season. The season of spring is associated with Wood Phase of Transition. Wood is simply a metaphor related to types of energy and a grouping of characteristics that provide us with a deeper understanding of living a balanced, healthy life. In relation to the Wood phase, we can see that the tree stands between heaven and earth just like humans and horses. Spring is the new beginning of life's rich flow of energy for trees and all living things.

Foals are born in early spring and their relatively long limbs must be strong and flexible just like the young growing limbs of the tree. When the spring winds blow, the old, dry,

dead limbs break since they can no longer bend. This is how the earth cleanses itself of dead wood to make way for new life to take hold. The young horse must be strong and able to adapt immediately to the whims of weather and the movement of the herd if he is to fulfill the promise of his life.

## Wood Correspondences

In Chinese Medicine, the Wood Phase is not only associated with spring and the powerful energy needed to promote birth and new life, it also identifies particular organ systems, body fluids, emotions, a sensory organ, and a host of other specific manifestations that are reflective of the energetics of Wood.

The organ systems that are associated with Wood are the Liver and Gall Bladder. Though the horse does not have a physical



*The season of spring is associated with Wood Phase of Transition.*

gall bladder the function of the gall bladder exists. The ancient Chinese were most interested in how the body functioned. They were not overly concerned with anatomical accuracy; they were more interested in energetic function. The Gall Bladder system, in relation to a horse, has the same functions as if it were anatomically present.

The liver performs many essential functions in the body according to Traditional Chinese Medicine. The liver controls the tendons and ligaments which hold the body together and make it possible for the body to move. Like the branches on a tree that need to be flexible to bend in the wind, the horse's tendons and ligaments need to be supple and flexible to move freely.

When you think of liver, think "Harmonious flow of *Chi*." *Chi* is the Chinese word for life-promoting energy that flows throughout the body. When all of the body systems are working smoothly, we know that the liver is functioning properly. The liver is considered the "Strategic Planner" of the body and is responsible for distributing *Chi* and blood to the right organ system at the right time. Another important role the liver plays is to

replenish blood when the animal is resting so that it is ready to nourish the body when moving.

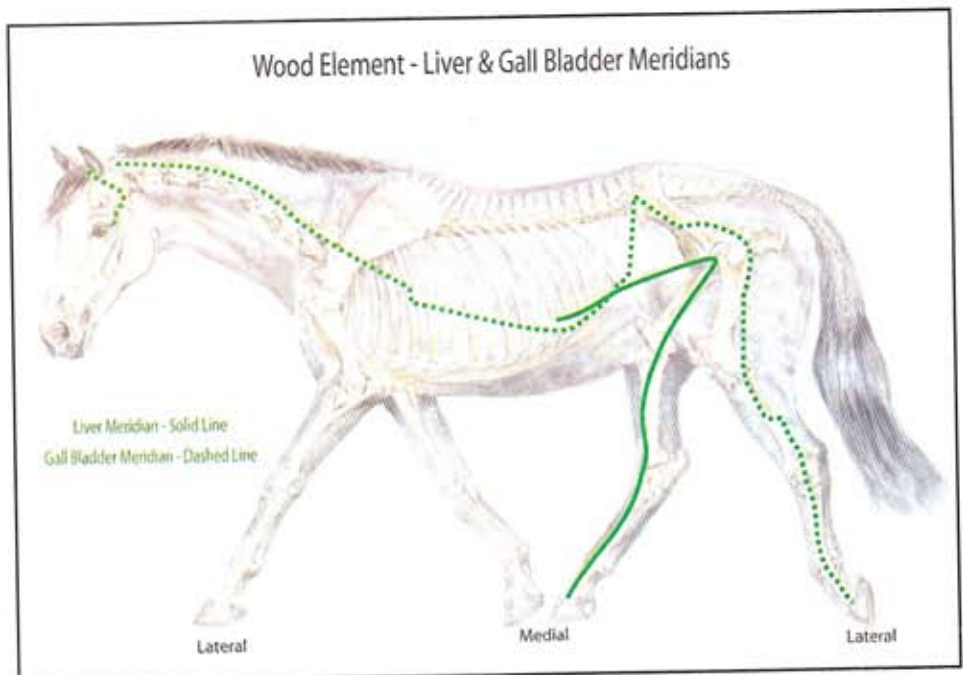
The emotion associated with Wood is anger. Anger is a very necessary self-protective mechanism that helps to set personal boundaries. It flares upward and is known as "Liver Heat Rising." This emotion feels like an up-surge of force in the body similar to the driving force needed for a seed to germinate and break through soil in the spring. The body fluid that corresponds to the liver is bile and is a part of the process of digestion. Anger and bile are associated with each other.

The sensory organ that corresponds with Wood is the eyes. The health of the eye along with the keenness of vision is highly dependent on liver function - just think of jaundice. Additionally, as the body's Strategic Planner, the liver requires great vision to carry out the task of supplying blood and *Chi* at the moment they are needed most.

The Liver is the Yin organ system and it is paired with the Gall Bladder, the Yang organ system. Though the horse does not have a gall bladder, we can work with the energy of the Gall Bladder none the less. The Gall Bladder is seen as the organ system that provides good judgment and the impetus to make a decision. Gall Bladder provides the trigger for action and movement. Many of the acupoints along the Gall Bladder meridian are used to enhance the flexibility of joints, tendons, and ligaments.

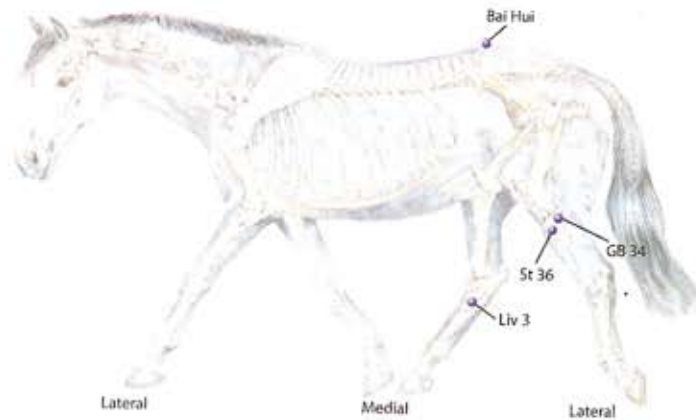
### Imbalances in Wood

Liver *Chi* is integrally involved in the function of the entire body, so there are many indicators of imbalances in Wood. When a foal does not have the strength to stand by his mother's side and nurse, look to Liver to help him support himself. When the horse stumbles frequently or appears stiff, awkward, or robotic in movement especially in the hindquarters, the balance of Liver and Gall Bladder needs to be addressed. A horse that consistently makes poor judgment-calls or is indecisive, this could indicate that Gall Bladder is not functioning optimally.



*Liver meridian = solid line; Gall Bladder meridian = dashed line*

### Spring Tune-Up



Point	Location
Bai Hui	Located on the dorsal midline at the lumbosacral space.
St 36	One finger width from the head of the fibula, on the lateral side of the tibia.
Liv 3	On the craniomedial aspect of the cannon bone, at the level of the head of the medial splint bone.
GB 34	Located on the lateral aspect of the hind leg, at the space between the tibia and fibula.

horse for any Liver imbalance during early spring because this is when a Liver problem will be most apparent. The Spring Tune-Up Chart offers four acupressure Points that can help bring the energy horses need to be part of the exuberance of spring time. Wood is renewed, fresh energy that flows throughout the horse's magnificent body, mind, and spirit. ☯

#### About the authors:

Amy Snow and Nancy Zidonis are the authors of: *Equine Acupressure: A Working Manual*, *The Well-Connected Dog: A Guide To Canine Acupressure*, and *Acu-Cat: A Guide to Feline Acupressure*. They own Tallgrass Publishers, which offers: Meridian Charts for horses, dogs, and cats; Equine and Canine Landmark Anatomy & Acupoint Energetics Manuals and DVDs, plus a new Introduction to Equine Acupressure training DVD. They are also the founders of Tallgrass Animal Acupressure Institute which offers hands-on and online training courses worldwide including a Practitioner Certification Program. To contact them: phone: 888-841-7211; web: [www.animalacupressure.com](http://www.animalacupressure.com); email: [info@animalacupressure.com](mailto:info@animalacupressure.com).

Check the horse's hooves to see if they are dry, chipped, shell-like or too damp and crumbling. Hooves are seen as an extension of tendons and thus are a manifestation of Liver health. An imbalance in Wood can be seen in the health of the hoof.

Is the horse's eye clear and keen? Is the horse unusually angry frequently, or not angry at all when he should be? Is his behavior chaotic? Are his emotions volatile? Does he seem restless? Has the horse lost his lust for life, especially in spring time? Is the mare excessively moody and contending with estrous cycle issues? Is the animal bruising too easily? When cut, does the blood clot readily? How long does it take for an injury to heal? These are all potentially related to imbalances in Wood.

#### Harmonious Flow of Chi

Wood is the harmonious flow of Chi that supports the horse's ability to love life and move spontaneously with fluidity and grace. To support your horses' health in any season do your best to provide your horse with a lifestyle that simulates his ancestral needs for natural foods, exercise, pasture, play, mental challenges, and socialization during the Wood Phase of Transition. The Liver can become overburdened by environmental toxins, vaccinations and other chemicals to which horses are exposed; observe your

# IT'S YOUR CALL.

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