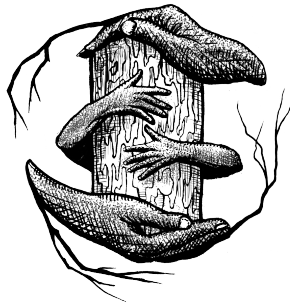


CLAUDIA MANCHANDA

From the River to the Trees



Hold on to your dreams, for without them life is a broken winged bird that cannot fly.

Langston Hughes

Existing in an epoch of genocide and despair, hope is essential for resistance and transformation.

Hope is a multi-dimensional dynamic life force, characterised by a confident yet uncertain expectation of achieving a bright, safe future which is realistically possible.

Trees often symbolise hope, vitality and perseverance. Hope can be generated from knowledge of global liberation struggles, successful revolts, non-human beings' co-existence and from plant stories and survival.

When Pangea (most of the continents still joined together 300 million years ago) began to fragment, cycads and ferns emerged. Megalosaurus stomped the ground and the last of the Ginkgoales remain today by the name of *Ginkgo*. In Japanese Kanji (Han characters), it is Gin-kyo; Gin means 'silver' and kyo means 'bearing trees', referring to the fruit. Fossils of Ginkgo, dating back to 200 million years ago, still resemble the Ginkgos of today, hence the name 'fossil tree'. The oldest living Ginkgo is around 3,500 years old.

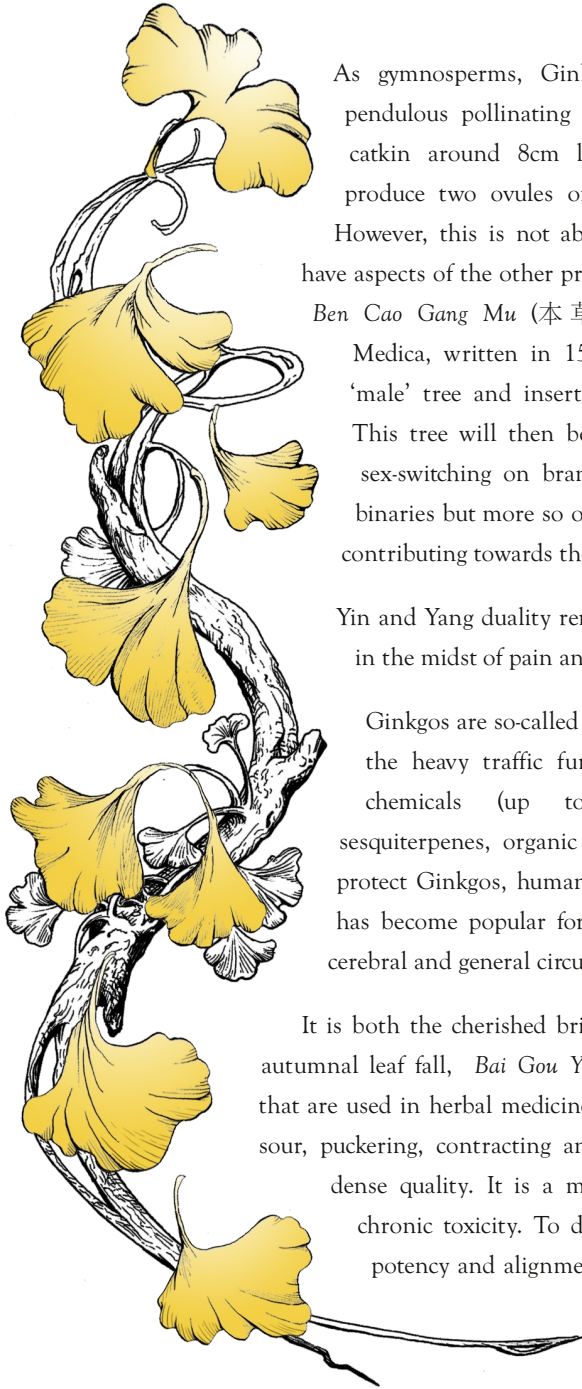
Medical Astrology and the categorising of patterns are tools, like layers, to diagnose and facilitate the safest effective treatment. Medicine systems align people to constitutional types. 'Constitutional types' refers to inherited qualities or dispositions, affected by numerous internal and external factors, including food and medicines. Factors such as a person's character, body frame and sensitivities ascertain which exercises, food, medicine, and practices might make for an easier life. Astrology also considers epochs of time as 'Ages', which denote transformative capability.

Astrologically, Ginkgo can be associated with Mercury, the messenger. Mercurial plants display feathery, splaying characteristics, have affinity to the mind and brain, and support cognition. Wednesday is the day of Mercury where plants under this dominion are prepared in their Earth hour for specific intention. The intention is hope.

Ginkgos grow into tall striking trees with grey furrowed bark. The 'gizz' of a tree (or bird) refers to its identifying silhouette from afar. Ginkgo's gizz is elegantly columnar and pyramidal.

The iconic fan-shaped, striped, bi-lobed leaves represent duality. Yin and Yang. Botanists designate Ginkgos as dioecious. Two houses in Latin binary botany. 'Male' and 'female'. Pollinate and ovulate. Linnaeus, one of the founders of patriarchal hierarchical botany, was obsessed with binary hetero-anthropomorphism. Descriptions of plants were human-centric, ocular-centred and sexualised. Men were seen as people; women as a gender; children irrelevant. Linnaeus compared pollination to European binary marriage:

The flowers' leaves serve as bridal beds which the creator has so gloriously arranged, adorned with such noble bed curtains and perfumed with so many scents the groom might celebrate their nuptials with greater solemnity.¹



As gymnosperms, Ginkgos do not produce flowers but pendulous pollinating cones or ‘sporophylls’ and a yellow catkin around 8cm long. The assigned ‘female’ plants produce two ovules on the end of short green pedicles. However, this is not absolute. Akin to Yin and Yang, each have aspects of the other present and coalesce. Li Shi-zhen in the *Ben Cao Gang Mu* (本草纲目) Compendium of the Materia Medica, written in 1593, describes boring a hole into a ‘male’ tree and inserting a cutting from a ‘female’ tree.² This tree will then bear fruit. Crane and Ngata describe sex-switching on branches of trees of both assigned binaries but more so on the assigned ‘male’ branches, likely contributing towards the survival of Ginkgos until today.³

Yin and Yang duality reminds us we can experience joy, even in the midst of pain and trauma.

Ginkgos are so-called pollution ‘tolerant’ as they withstand the heavy traffic fumes in cities. It is likely the same chemicals (up to 24% flavonoids, terpenoids, sesquiterpenes, organic acids, sterols and carotenoids) that protect Ginkgos, human animals and animals alike. Ginkgo has become popular for its neuroprotection and support of cerebral and general circulation.

It is both the cherished bright green picked leaf and the yellow autumnal leaf fall, *Bai Gou Ye/ Yin Xing Ye* (Mandarin Chinese), that are used in herbal medicine. The taste of both is generally tart, sour, puckering, contracting and Yin. Yin produces a condensing, dense quality. It is a medium strength herb with minimal chronic toxicity. To describe a herb’s ‘strength’ relates to potency and alignment (non-opposing energy) to ensure it causes no unwanted effects.

It is a herb best used as part of traditional formulae. One such formula is *Yin Guo Ye Wan*, which “unblocks the orifices of consciousness”, nourishes the Kidneys and Jing, calms Shen and invigorates the flow of blood and cerebro-spinal fluid.⁴

Chronic use, as required for cardiovascular and neurological conditions, may cause dizziness, headache and digestive changes in some.

Herbs have tropisms or affinities to organ systems, meridians and constitutions. They influence directional qualities. Vomiting and diarrhoea have upwards and outwards energies. Belly bloating is expansive (Yang) and may need inward support (Yin). Herbs affect the energy dynamics in fluids, air spaces and organs. Ginkgo has affinity to the cardiovascular, circulatory, nervous, respiratory and genito-urinary systems and the eyes. In Chinese Herbal Medicine, *Bai Gou Ye* influences the Du meridian, the Heart, Lung and Kidney (n.b. these are not the same as the English terms for these organs).

Energetically, the leaf is classified as sweet (nourishing, tonifying, energising), bitter (calming, cooling, clearing), astringent (tightening, inward, downward, drying) and neutral (not extreme).

Drying herbs may dry up wet coughs, weeping mucous membranes, even involuntary nocturnal emissions/spontaneous ejaculation.

Bai Gou Ye vitalises heart blood, restores coronary and capillary circulation and relieves precordial oppression, which can manifest as angina pain, shortness of breath, or purpley-blue lips and nails.⁵ Therefore, it is incorporated in formulae for diabetic circulatory issues, hyperlipidaemia, for those prone to thrombosis (caution with drug interactions), hypertension, coronary artery disease and angina pectoris. It promotes clear thinking, relieves depression and restores the brain and nerves. On account of these qualities, it may be indicated for absent mindedness, memory loss, tinnitus and low mood.

“It strengthens blood vessels, reduces congestion and stops discharge.”⁶ This is relevant for venous insufficiency (veins that don't send blood back to the heart efficiently and ache), heavy crampy legs, pelvic congestion (congested and engorged vein in the pelvis) and vaginal discharges.

Ginkgo leaf descends *Lung Qi* and opens the chest. It is used for what is called *Lung Qi Constraint*, characterised by a tight chest, wheezing and painful spasmodic coughing. Its downwards action inhibits the upward action of vomiting for someone who can't stop gagging to be sick.

In humoral and Islamic medicine, put simplistically, Ginkgo is for Sanguine (optimistic, balanced state known as Damm) and Choleric (hot and dry state connected to Saffra and Yang energetics) constitutions.

The nuts are rotund and silvery white. They are used in *Lo Han Jai* (Buddha's Delight, a vegetarian bean curd delicacy) for New Year and Bird's Nest soup. In Japan, they are cooked in congees and served roasted with beer. They are toxic in high amounts. The inner seeds smell fishy. When fallen, split and decaying, they can smell like rancid butter due to their butyric acid content. Fruiting trees are avoided in cities for this reason. Medicinally, the fruit/nut is used for coughs with copious mucous, vaginal discharge and turbid urine (white and cloudy, often containing albumin), urinary frequency, incontinence, spermatorrhoea and leucorrhoea. They are aphrodisiac and support fertility.

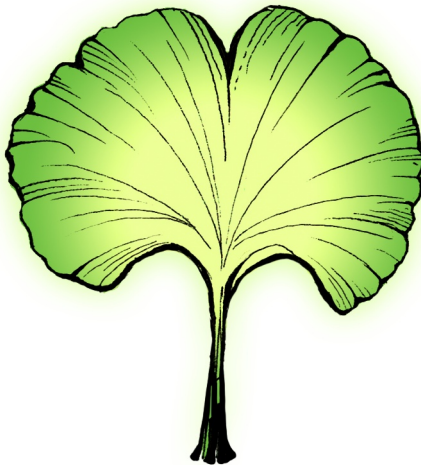
In traditional herbal medicine, Ginkgo is used within a formula and is recognised as a stimulating herb, therefore with the potential to heighten headaches and anxiety (through dopamine stimulation) and increase insomnia and agitation (for those for whom Ginkgo is not appropriate). Conversely, this stimulation can shift brain fog, memory issues and fatigue by promoting the circulation of freshly oxygenated blood. Ginkgo leaf extracts have been studied as an adjunct therapy for attention deficit, hyperactivity and autism particularly in children. Allopathic stimulants prescribed with the aim to produce neurotypical expectations can cause unpleasant side-effects.

Ginkgo is contraindicated (not to be used) two weeks before surgery, with regular GABAergic medications, or with anti-coagulant medication such as apixaban and warfarin, due to an increased risk of bleeding (it is active against thrombin which plays a role in clotting and neutrophil-elastase, secreted by this type of white blood cell during inflammation).

Hibakujumoku are the Ginkgo trees which survived within two kilometres of the genocidal blast at Hiroshima (6th August 1945). They are still alive. Their seedlings have been dispersed across the globe as gestures of hope, resilience and longevity. *Hibakusha* is the name given to humans who survived the atomic bomb. *Nija hibakusha* are those who fled Hiroshima after 6th August to then be exposed to another nuclear war crime in Nagasaki, two days later. Some *Nija hibakusha* lived to their nineties and became campaigners against war and nuclear nakbas (catastrophe). At the time of writing, in Gaza, thousands of people waving white flags are fleeing from aerial bombardment to face further assaults from the sky after days of walking.

*You are only given
One life
So cherish this moment
Cherish this day
Be kind to others
Be kind to yourself*

Hasujiku Tanaka, who survived 3.4 km from the epicentre.



Existence is resistance. The prevention of protecting trees and planting trees is used to subjugate and weaken Palestinian *sumud* (see below).

The Al-Badawi olive tree of Al-Walaja is well over 2000 years old and has been carbon dated up to 5500 years old. It grows on the outskirts of Bethlehem. It is possibly one of the oldest trees recorded. It was once a pilgrimage site for Sufis. Sheik Ahmad al-Badawi, an Egyptian mystic, spent much time in the tree's shade. Salah Abu Ali, a Palestinian tree tender, describes the tree as his fourth child as he spent much of his time pumping water to hydrate the elder (olive tree). Most of the village were forcibly removed in 1948 and the tree represents resistance and a former life.⁷

With the olive tree we live, without it we die.

Salah Abu Ali

Indigenous people's identity is inextricably linked to the land, where their ancestors have lived for millennia. Ancestral knowledge to safely care for the land is often passed on to future generations.

Indigenous people would never brutalise the land.

Shajarat Zaytun, or the Olive tree, is an important traditional symbol of hope, heritage, *sumud* (steadfastness) and *a'wda* (return) for SWANA people. Olive trees can live for thousands of years. Some have been tended by the same family for several generations. The olive harvest in October is usually a time of community cultural celebration of connection to the land and the *shajarat zaytun*. Harvest represents *a'wna* (collaboration). Olives are an indigenous blessing for the health of Palestinian and SWANA people. They impart protection, physically and spiritually. Olives and olive oil are a regional health-promoting food and medicine.

Olive trees are shrubs which rarely exceed 15 metres and often have a distinctive cocktail glass shape in their younger years. They develop gnarled, twisted trunks with silvery-

green oblongate leaves. Their flowers are bisexual. This means that both stamens and carpels are present in the same flower. The pollen is significantly allergenic to humans.

*If the Olive Trees knew the hands that planted them,
their Oil would become Tears.*

Mahmoud Darwish

Isnotreal uses genocide, ecocide, pesticides, bulldozers and chemical weapons to destroy ancient olive groves and impede Palestinian survival.⁸ The erection of the Apartheid Wall caused the murder of more than 3 million olive trees since 2000. One aspect of the Zionist persecution of Palestinians is enacted through the controlling of every aspect of life, including land stewardship, access to water and olive tree tending.



Detail from 'However Beaten Down', BDS poster project
Jamaa Al-Yad Artists' Collective (jamaalyad.org), used with permission under a Creative Commons license.

Olive trees have also been called ‘resistant’ as they survive drought, are frost and fire tolerant and possess incredible regenerative capacity. However, white phosphorus bombardment leaves a damaging legacy for all (remaining in the soil for years, retaining incendiary and toxic properties).⁹

Archaeological sites in Galilee and Haifa dated olive oil production from BC 6,000 and 4,500 respectively. The majority of olives harvested in Palestine are used to press olive oil. Olive oil is extracted by grinding the olives into a paste. Pressure is applied to the paste where an oil and water extraction is separated through centrifugal or other means. Grades and quality of oils vary according to the cultivar of tree, fruity and grassy flavours, pH and polyphenol content. In spite of the occupation, 23,000 tonnes of olive oil were processed in the crop year of 2022/2023.¹⁰

Zaytun and *Zayt Alzatun* (the fruit and oil of olives) are safe - for most people - food and medicine in Islamic and Unani Tibb traditions. Olive oil is used internally and externally for acid reflux, constipation, haemorrhoids, leprosy, pleurisy and TB (tuberculosis). Prophetic guidance recommends olive oil to be consumed with bread and for anointing, as the tree is blessed (*mubarak*). The 17th century herbalist Culpepper, who derided Arab people, mentions the oil makes the body lax and soluble and tempers sharp, choleric humours in the bowel, referring to its soothing properties in the bowel.

Olives and olive oil are Sweet, Sour, Bitter and Neutral.

Extra virgin olive oil (EVOO) is the least refined and highest quality unheated product. It contains the fatty acids oleic (↑ 83%), linoleic (↑ 21%) and palmitic (↑ 20). EVOO is emollient, nutritive, demulcent and laxative. Modern studies demonstrate that EVOO helps with elevated LDL cholesterol and hypertension, and reduces blood sugar and uric acid. The oil is also useful as a regular head massage for hair loss and dandruff.

Gardens are madness, farming is a skill and nothing lasts except for the olive.

Palestinian Proverb

The olive tree is associated with the fire sign Leo, under the dominion of the Sun. Medicines of the Sun affect ego, protect the heart, stimulate primordial life-force and promote longevity.

In Ayurveda, tri-doshas (Vata, Pita, Kapha) are designations where people have any amount of either qualities. Olive oil supports a vata-kapha constitution, where the additional warmth is beneficial, especially during winter. Kapha-dominant people can be susceptible to depression, mucous build-up and slow metabolism, especially if they do not get enough sleep or movement. They tend to be intentional in behaviour. They show they care and emanate hopeful steadfastness.

In Chinese medicine, Olive Leaf is called *Qing Guo*. The leaves are Bitter, Sweet, Astringent and Cooling and will not have side effects at a low dose. They enter the Stomach and Lung meridians and Clear the Lungs, Dispel Heat, Counteract Toxicity and Moisten the Skin. They are used for digestive, respiratory and urinary tract infections, viruses, hay-fever, and to promote saliva production.

Olive leaves are anti-fungal, anti-viral (Epstein-Barr virus, HSV I and II, HepB, HIV), febrifugal (useful for malarial fever), astringent, antiseptic and hypotensive. The optimum time to harvest them is just after they have budded in the morning Sun when the dew has evaporated. Decoctions of dried leaves and fruit are used orally to treat diarrhoea, respiratory and urinary tract infections, stomach and intestinal diseases, and as a mouth cleanser (useful for oral thrush). Two handfuls of olive leaves simmered in a pot is used as a fever remedy.

Olive trees grow slowly, and olive wood is revered as it is beautifully striated, extremely hard, and takes months-to-years to dry out. The wood can be used for utensils and bowls, imparting medicinal qualities. The bark is anti-helminthic and used topically for ringworm (*Tinea versicolor*). Olive wood is susceptible to being eaten by insect larvae.

*I cleared the rubble from Israeli airstrikes, tilled the soil, and planted seeds.
This is our home, our land. Everything will return more beautiful than before.*

Yahya Basheer, Gaza, March 2024.

Let the axes shine, we will stick to the trees.

Vimla Bahuguna

The Chipko (hugging) Movement was a women-organised resistance which began in the Chamoli district in early 1973, when the villagers of Mandal prevented the Allahabad-based sports goods company, Symonds, from felling fourteen ash trees. Women risked their lives by hugging the trees when necessary, day and night, for eight years. They tied Rakhi - a thread of protection - around the trees, chanting “what gifts do the forests bear? Soil, water and fresh air. Soil, water and fresh air is the basis of all life”.¹¹

The Chipko movement and Greenbelt movements can inspire grassroots defiance to the systematic atrocities of capitalism.

In the 1970s in Kenya, in response to hunger, drying up streams, deforestation and ecological neglect, The National Council of Women of Kenya and The Pan-African Green Belt Network with Wangari Maathai developed a grassroots land stewardship. Maathai's desire for The Greenbelt Movement, via the planting of trees, was to empower marginalised communities (including women and people with HIV+), promote conflict resolution, demand accountability from politicians and bring about the community restoration of ancestral land. She linked the disconnect from land to poverty, sexism, conflict and environmental catastrophe. Maathai's work put her and her comrades at risk. She was publicly condemned by her husband for being too strong. She campaigned for African autonomy without Western intervention. Members of The Green Belt Movement planted at least 51 million trees.

Wangari Maathai (1/4/40 - 25/11/11) said “until you dig a hole, you plant a tree, you water it and make it survive, you haven't done a thing”.

Let us be safe to plant trees.

Ginkgo, Olives, Cedars, Sycamores, Oak, Baobabs, Quebracho, Beech and Banyans. Water them, organise and rise.

Hope is knowing that “we are not outnumbered, we are out-organised”.

El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz, Malcolm X.

----- NOTES -----

1. Quoted in ‘Carl Linnaeus (1797-1778)’, *UC Museum of Paleontology*, <ucmp.berkeley.edu/history/linnaeus.html>. For further research see the talk ‘Decolonizing Botany’ with Banu Subramaniam on YouTube: <youtube.com/watch?v=rM6CNB3l7jc>.
2. Li Shi-zhen, Ben Cao Gang Mu (本草纲目) *Compendium of the Materia Medica*, trans. by Luo Xiwen (Beijing : Foreign Languages Press, 2003).
3. Crane and Ngata (2017): this research is described in ‘Ginkgo: A Sexual Curiosity’, November 7, on the *Oak Spring Garden Foundation* website, <osgf.org/blog/2017/11/7/blandy-ginkgo>.
4. See ‘Ginkgo Formula: Yin Guo Ye Wan’ from *Golden Flower Chinese Herbs*, <gfcherbs.com/Images/Ginkgo%20Formula%20Monograph.pdf>.
5. Nigel Wiseman & Feng Ye, *A Practical Dictionary of Chinese Medicine (2nd Edition)* (Massachusetts: Paradigm Publications, 1998), p. 387.
6. Ibid.
7. To read more of the story of Salah Abu Ali and the Al Badawi olive tree see: Heidi Sallam, ‘A Scoop Of Hope: Meet Salah Abu Ali, The Palestinian Man Protecting One Of The World’s Oldest Olive Trees’, *Scoop Empire*, Jan 13, 2021, <scoopempire.com/a-scoop-of-hope-a-palestinian-protecting-one-of-the-worlds-oldest-trees>.
8. When writing this piece, there was discussion with the editor regarding the use of the word ‘Isnotreal’. I use this term unapologetically to reflect my anti-colonial, anti-zionist stance: that white settler colonialism is abhorrent. It will be dismantled.
No State has a right to exist. Babies do.
Liberation means ensuring safety for all humans and non-human life. Justice does not equate to using the colonisers’/oppressors’ unimaginable violence back at them.
We must imagine a world where the most multiply-marginalised are centred; where healing, regeneration and reparation is standard.
“We are non-violent to those who are non-violent to us.” - El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz, aka Malcolm X (X was used to acknowledge that his African name had been stolen and replaced by the enslavers). He was assassinated in 1965.
9. On the environmental legacy of white phosphorus see: Sally Jaber, ‘South Lebanon on fire: The long-term implications of white phosphorus on the environment’, 21 November 2023, *Raseef22*, <raseef22.net/english/article/1095741>.
10. Wasim Shahzad ‘Cultivating Hope in Palestine’ in *Olive Oil Times* [web], 11 September 2023, <oliveoiltimes.com/production/cultivating-hope-in-palestine/123415>.
12. See the short clip ‘Vimla Bahuguna: Treehugger of the Chipko Movement’, published by Ecowalkthetalk on YouTube, <youtube.com/watch?v=kX3mYHza6og>.

