

Steps to an Ecology of Self: Implications for Homeopathy

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“Daughter: Daddy, are these conversations serious?”

Father: Certainly they are.

D: They are not a sort of game that you play with me?

F: God forbid... but they are a sort of game that we play together.

D: Then they’re not serious!

F: I don’t mind – not much – about winning or losing. When your questions put me in a tight spot, sure, I try a little harder to think straight and to say clearly what I mean. But I don’t bluff and I don’t set traps. There is no temptation to cheat.

D: That’s just it... It’s a game. People who cheat just don’t know how to play. They treat a game as though it were serious.

F: But it is serious.”

- From “Metalogue: About Games and Being Serious” in *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* by Gregory Bateson (New York: Ballantine Books, 1972), p.14

Daughter: What is “self” Dad?

Father: Hmm, good question, I remember that Carl Jung, the famous psychiatrist, once wrote about the “self” being something that is continuously striving for wholeness.

D: That would mean that we all will have wholeness eventually.

F: Well, we all have that potential.

D: What stops us from getting there?

F: I think it could be those barriers that are part of our culture; materialism, egocentric tendencies, judgements etc.

D: How can we avoid those things that stop us from being whole?

F: I have often thought about this very question. It seems that a good place to start is asking another question which would be “how might shifting our focus to our centre be more supportive of our self-development?”

D: What does that mean?

F: In practices like Yoga, Aikido and meditation one is taught to balance oneself, sort of combining one’s mind and body into a kind of a unity. This practice helps create less pain with life’s ever-present conflicts.

D: Can you show me this?

F: Well, let me grab your left shoulder if you don’t mind (holding very assertively). How do you feel?

D: It’s a little scary, like I am being attacked.

F: Well, now step back with your left leg and keep eye contact with me. What happened?

D: I pulled you towards me and you lost your balance.

F: How do you feel now?

D: More in control, less scared.

F: Here is another example. Put your fist out and push against my fist, as I put pressure on your fist; what are you doing?

D: Putting more pressure on your fist.

F: Ok, I reduced my pressure, what did you do then?

D: I reduced my pressure too!

F: Well, force blindly follows force, doesn't it?

D: Yes, but pushing slowly and with less force allows the other person to push less and in a more gentle way.

F: Kind of how nature works.

D: I don't get that one.

F: Well if you look at our problems in this world it is usually the difference between how we humans think things are and how nature functions.

D: Are you saying, don't mess with nature?

F: Well, at least we need to recognize how things are all interconnected.

D: That is not always easy since lots of people don't care about pollution or even what they eat.

F: That takes what is called "wisdom," which is to understand the connections and what will happen if we mess with nature.

D: How does this all relate to being centered and the growing "self", Dad?

SUMMARY

In the framework of a dialogue, patterns and barriers towards self-development are discussed in relation to understanding how communication, perceptions, psychological aspects and temperaments can enhance homeopathic case-taking and remedy selection.

KEYWORDS: Self-confidence, Temperaments, Ecology, Carl Jung, Case-taking, Carbo vegetabilis

F: Yes, thank you. You see, what we are talking about is “conflict”, which is a big barrier in the journey towards wholeness for the self.

D: Yes, I don’t necessarily like conflict.

F: Yes, I can understand that, but in nature conflict is neither bad nor good, it just is, and when we understand that, we can practice centering and blending or pushing in a gentler way as before.

D: I get it, in nature there really aren’t any judgements, or selfishness or what did you call it?

F: Arrogance and egocentric patterns.

D: Wait a minute, not so fast. What about things like fear and anger, they can get in the way to self-growth.

F: Very good point. It follows if we relax, breathe and avoid the statements like “I could have done this,” or “I should have done it this way,” etc., we are ready for these emotions in a positive way.

D: How?

F: Our emotions are like our muscles, we can be tense and heavy or light and relaxed. Fear can be celebrated and embraced and anger can be assertively communicated. In a great book titled *Anger, The Misunderstood Emotion*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989) by Carol Tavis, the author tells the story of how

one day the Buddha could not deliver his sermon because a snake had prevented his congregation from attending. He discussed this with the snake (I suppose he was like Harry Potter in this case). The next week his whole congregation attended his sermon; however, afterwards the Buddha was leaving the temple when he heard a rustling and saw a painfully bruised snake. He asked what had happened. The snake described how he had not bothered the congregation and that they had beaten him. The Buddha reiterated that he had told the snake not to bite, but did not tell him not to hiss.

D: Yikes! That was a lesson well learned.

F: Well by not letting emotions hold you back, it then takes communication skills that are based on win-win ways rather than win-lose encounters.

D: Meaning?

F: Cooperative communication is like a volley on a ping-pong table. If I spike the ball we both lose since the rules are win-win.

D: How does that translate into communication, Dad?

F: I say something, you check to see if you understand it, I agree or disagree, then you say something, I check and you let me know if I got it and so forth.

D: Any other things about communication?

F: Probably many more than we have time for, but I would include being caring, trustworthy and, going back to what we discussed earlier, recognizing our connections and taking the time to be passionate about understanding our connections and differences.

D: You mentioned Carl Jung earlier. How did he come to believe that the self is always trying to reach wholeness?

F: He believed that we live and act each day through our conscious self. Actions like getting to school and work, doing the things that get us through our day. However, he also felt that our unconscious self, where our dreams and inner thoughts come

from, are connected to a “collective unconscious” which to him is like a reservoir of all living experiences.

D: Sort of like a hologram.

F: Yes, and in this holographic reservoir there are symbols that he called “archetypes” that allow us all to be connected.

D: What are these archetypes?

F: They are invisible, but they come to us in universal symbols, things we recognize in our own way that connect us to our legacy, but we never really see them, we use them as reference points. They are like seeds of readiness. We see a tree for instance, but it is constructed and understood through our own unique mental process. It is not the archetype; it is our perspective for a “tree”, that may have been stimulated by past collective images found in art and verse.

D: Where do they exist then?

F: In dreams, stories, poems, fairy tales, and art. You can look up at the sky in the evening and contemplate the constellations and then relate that to your experiences. There is a word that I believe is important in understanding all of this, it is “aesthetic” which loosely means “something of beauty and art”. This word along with one of my other favourite words “context” is the human metaphor or symbol for “nature”. You see, we can never totally see nature, the word itself is not the thing, it is sort of how a map is really not the territory that we encounter with our senses. It is in our “contexts”, our environment, that our self evolves and grows within, using these symbols as reference points like on a map.

D: Wow, you said a lot there. Are you saying that we have the potential to be part of all human experience and use this map to be more whole and content?

F: Yes, and you said content. I agree, you see if we can get over seeing nature as a bunch of fragments, we have a chance to be content. Splitting nature up is an illusion. Another famous thinker, Martin Buber, (*I and Thou*, New York: Charles Scribner, 1972) wrote about our choice of seeing nature as “I-IT” or I-Thou; in other words, we can separate ourselves from, say, a tree and view it as a nuisance

because of its leaves clogging our gutters or we can be connected to it in a spiritual way and recognize our interconnectedness with it; then the leaves can find their place.

D: But what about all those opposites we have to deal with each day, are they connected?

F: Another good question. I call these ever-present opposites “paradoxes”, things that are imposed on us by culture and language, like good and bad. However, another choice is, we can look at these “opposites” as differences or healthy parts of our wholeness. Like conflict they just are; however, we can blend with them as nature does, or, unfortunately, try to keep them separate and suffer the inevitable consequences of injurious patterns such as global warming, war, etc.

D: How does this Relate to Your Work as a Homeopath?

F: Well, you know a lot about homoeopathy, “like cures like”. However, this evolving self we have been discussing plays a deeper part in how the remedies work.

D: In what way?

F: Homeopathy, like the “self”, is an ecological process of interconnected patterns. It has to be recognized as part of nature to be truly effective. With this perspective, we can better understand how each person deals with his or her journey in different ways. Then that favourite word of mine, “context” can allow us to see how factors of gender, class, race, culture, and ethnicity produces learning (and life) styles that influences how we heal and cope with the barriers to our self-fulfillment. These learning styles are what we call temperaments. This, for homeopathy, defines one’s “constitutional” makeup and needs.

D: Is that part of our personality?

F: Yes, most psychologists agree that there are four basic styles: Feeling, Thinking, Intuitive and Sensate. I use a story that I embellished for my students that I believe

is originally based on how Edward Whitmont, who was a homeopath and Jungian therapist, would demonstrate the different temperaments. It starts at this great Art Deco Diner in Paterson, N.J. where I grew up. The cook makes wonderful soup but his long ponytail would inevitably shed a hair into the soup. This first guy walks in, orders a bowl, sees the hair and starts yelling, leaves and doesn't stay to enjoy the soup. This is the angry sensate trait. The next fellow comes in, sees the hair in the soup, calmly calls the waitress over and whispers to her to bring another bowl. In this case, he demonstrates the sanguine intuitive trait. The third person comes in, sees the hair and begins to silently weep and doesn't say anything, pays and leaves, obviously the nervy-thinking person. A fourth person enters the diner, orders soup, sees that hair and guess what? He takes the hair out and enjoys the soup. This represents the laid-back feeling type. Each of us has components of all four, but we tend to be characterized by one or two and each temperament has an outward and inward part.

D: How so?

F: The feeling temperament for instance can be rigid, dogmatic, preoccupied and full of hidden fears, especially if it is in an inward mode. It makes sense if you are subjective and somewhat shy, but if you are more outgoing and still a feeling type you can be externally emotional, possibly judgmental, and more egocentric. Some main remedies that have these traits are Calcarea carbonica, Capsicum, Dulcamara, Hepar Sulphur, Mezereum, Natrum carbonicum, Pulsatilla and Sepia. A thinking person when in an inward state can be speculative and a theorist while their outward style would be factual, precise, rational and dry. Some main remedies that have these traits are Arsenicum, Chamomilla, Hyoscyamus, Magnesia phosphorica, Nuxmoschata and Silica to name a few.

D: What about the other two temperaments?

F: Yes, the first two are very rational; the remaining two are more perceptual and irrational. The Intuitive in their outward manifestation can be impressionable, instinctive and full of hunches while its inner side could have jealous, with negative projections. Remedies that match this are Aconitum, Aurum, Cactus, Ferrum, Phosphorus, Platinum, Sanguinaria and Sulphur among many others. The sensate type is more of a realist, down-to-earth yet fearful, angry and helpless; their introverted side will misjudge, not complete tasks and can be narcissistic. In this case remedies such as Bryonia, Lachesis and Nux vomica would be possible

considerations. Together these traits can be seen to produce patterns that can help point to strengths and/or unique problems. Someone, for instance, can exhibit an outward temperamental trait but their presenting problem will usually be found in an opposing trait or vice versa, calling out for the needed remedy. The remedies, too, like the people they may reflect, can and do exhibit more than one trait.

D: How can you figure this out, the unique problem that needs help?

F: Another good point. In homeopathy, you look for the most unique, striking symptom or problem. Our friend Carl Jung taught us that a person will present in a certain habitual conscious manner – one of the temperaments for instance – he called this the “persona”, but it is with one’s “shadow”, found in one’s unconscious makeup or in an opposing temperament where many answers for wholeness are to be found. This is where we can assess one’s descriptions of symptoms and how they might relate to archetypes and barriers to health and interpersonal relationships.

D: How is this revealed or made known?

F: I have seen this in how people navigate their journey towards wholeness or, as I mentioned earlier, use their “center”. The temperamental styles are tools for the experiences of dealing with conflict, communication and blending. A worldview of being “I-Thou” or “I-It”, or the combination of these choices in everyday contexts contains clues to the difference that will make a difference in the quest for wholeness. Dreams and symbols will also give further meaning and clues to this needed help. All of this plays into the goal of every homeopathic remedy, which is to balance the immune system for this journey. The sensation, location and modalities are the back-drop of the context where strengths and barriers to this process are found and corrected.

D: I can see this relates to the “self”, but how did you learn to connect this to homeopathy?

F: The great homeopath Baron Von Boenninghausen had these insights early on when homeopathy was in its infancy. He understood the connections and energy of the remedies as they related to symptoms and their sensations by observing the characteristics of our species. He avoided the danger of succumbing to cultural and language constraints that separate this energy from nature or into human and non-

human components which is the case with much of the traditional medicine of our day. This produces an unfortunate dichotomy that will most of the time misguide and over-simplify any movement towards self-development. It would be like one focusing on the finger pointing to the moon rather than the luminance that is the moon.

D: Where is this energy you are talking about?

F: It is the collective unconsciousness and archetypes that we previously discussed, and in the hologram that frames the canvas of the whole self in a substantiated and well interconnected manner, which is the aesthetic medium and life force of all living things. However, these articulated sensations of the self will only lead to the energy of the needed remedy if it is thoroughly and rigorously contextualized.

D: Sounds serious.

F: It is a serious and responsible role to help facilitate healing. It should be confirmed by the patterns and attributes of how one travels this journey to self-development. The consequent energy also includes what in homeopathy are called Miasms or profound categories of disease traits that frame the canvas of the person's needs and evolving self. As for myself and, I believe, for other homeopaths, we need to constantly master the profound knowledge and similarities of the homeopathic remedies as they relate to the wisdom of this process that reflects our journey towards self-wholeness and health.

D: So how do you go about this whole process when someone seeks your help?

F: It is very important to "join" with someone seeking any facilitation to a problem. It is like synchronizing since good communication is a sharing of states. I call this the "celebration of interpersonal skills." People need to be comfortable in order to narrate their life, actions and behaviour. I use a framework called a "genogram", which is a three-generational family tree that helps contextualize one's narration. As the lens of the situation is widened and connections or themes appear, I then make note of the location, sensation, quantity, time, circumstances/context, and modalities of all symptoms as is commonly done in classical homeopathy (who, what, where, with what, why, and what mode).

D: Then what?

- F: I focus on the interconnected contexts of their articulated journey and start making note of the person's temperament traits and how they are dealing with conflict and communication. This is the psychological aspect or the gap between where the self is and where it wants to be. After repertorizing some initial unique symptoms (mental, emotional and physical), I do some research and cross-referencing to pick up further insights. As symbols and patterns come to the surface I look at how they relate to presenting symptoms.
- D: I am sorry, Dad, I was dozing and missed this last part, it was meditative but I didn't hear much.
- F: That is fine, you helped me to get this all out into the collective unconscious.
- D: Hmm. No more questions... for now...

Case Example (Summary of Initial Narrative)

Henry, 58 years old and of Italian ethnicity, came to see me two years ago with a presenting problem of being sluggish, which began six months previously when he was assigned a new boss at his textile factory. Henry had worked there for twenty-five years and had a routine where he completed his work in a quality manner. He would often work long hours and prided himself on doing his job in a perfect way. The new boss, however, wanted changes and has been hard on him with disparaging remarks and threats if he did not do things a certain way. Henry initially defended his boss's actions and rationalized this behaviour. It was only later when talking about his growing up that he mentioned his "somewhat timid" and sensitive side. He was married for thirty years with three children. The panic, shock and anxiety that he finally admitted to was a "well-kept" secret from his wife and family because he was embarrassed. His wife was concerned about his restless nights and overall weakness which he dismissed as normal stress. Order in his life was very important and his work situation now created overall anxiety. Other symptoms included indigestion, eructations and flatulence. The panic was anticipatory, felt in his stomach and would happen at night in bed as he thought of work. He has become indifferent and sluggish to everything especially outside of work. Henry began to

describe things as hopeless and even dreamed about work with a lot of dark images, fire and blackness. He went to a homeopath five years ago with similar symptoms when he was working on a special project which was not finished in time. He had some good success on his own with homeopathy for acute symptoms of flu, colds and allergies in the past with Arsenicum, Pulsatilla and Sabadilla. During the episode five years ago, there was criticism from customers which resulted in his increased anxiety. The homeopath gave him Sulphur, but it did not seem to help. It was followed by Nux vomica, with little relief. At that time, he tried an anti-anxiety medication from his internist. When his routine became regular, he slowly felt better.

The framework for the above assessment was my genogram inquiry. Henry disclosed that he was the youngest of three male siblings; his father was hard on him as were his brothers who constantly made fun of him as a child. He always felt small afterwards. There was anticipatory anxiety, fear of heights, always being cold and longing for heat. When asked how he communicated his emotions, Henry described his self-confidence as being hindered by embarrassment. Siblings and friends made fun of his actions and “offended” him which he compensated by being precise, factual and the best at school and eventually at his job. Any conflict was bad and would be avoided at any cost, its existence even denied. His problematic temperament was well within the inward “feeling” trait with hidden fears, being shy, holding emotions in, being dogmatic and rigid. His initial presenting nervous “thinking” traits were outwardly manifested in his factual, precise and rational dependency especially at work. The overall physical and mental symptoms of anxiety and fear fall within the Psoric miasm. Initial rubrics were:

- Anxiety; loc; stomach, in
- Mod; eructations; agg.
- Mod; flatus; agg.
- Mod; mortification, humiliation, cha-grin agg.
- Offended easily
- Embarrassment
- Anxiety; conscience, of
- Mod; weakness; with

- Indifference; with
- Sluggishness of body
- Anxiety; mod; bed; in
- Delusion, imaginations; smaller
- Fear; high places
- Being cold

These brought up the remedies Sulphur, Calcarea Carbonica, Nux vomica, Pulsatilla And Carbo vegetabilis. Differentiation pointed to Carbo vegetabilis with his pattern of timidity and embarrassment (not sharing his reasons for anxiety), the emphasis on proving himself at work, his dependability at his job, the sluggishness and stomach issues, and his passive communication style. Further factors were his shock and resulting panic from anticipatory fears, which were worse before sleep in bed and his consequent restlessness. Past issues with being embarrassed, indifferent and feeling small were also a confirmation. The symbolic emphasis on “black-ness and fire” which is a colour of nervous pessimism and is in relation to burnt wood was also indicative of the make-up of the remedy itself. Carbo vegetabilis is indicated for dual temperament traits of feeling/nervy-thinking, especially the inward “feeling” themes of fears and timidity and in this case of psoric mental and physical issues.

Follow-up

Henry tried Carbo vegetabilis in a 4 oz bottle of Q1 potency, six succussions, one teaspoon diluted into 4 oz of water and one teaspoon taken from the dilution cup, repeated every other day for four doses. During a follow-up in two weeks, he reported being calmer, sleeping better and feeling more secure. He discussed the problems with his wife and confronted his new boss who respected his feelings and apologized. He also told me that “even my nosebleeds stopped.” I asked him why he had not mentioned that to me before and he said that he was embarrassed because it used to happen when he was a youngster during episodes of

being ridiculed. This is a unique symptom of Carbo vegetabilis, “Epistaxis from emotions.” I suggested that he wait and see what happens in the future before repeating the remedy. He had a few minor relapses over the next few months, took the remedy on a weekly basis until he had some symptoms of anxiety that did not seem to reflect how he felt, which was now “secure and happy”. Many times, a slight aggravation with Q potencies indicates no longer needing the remedy at that point. He stopped the remedy and did not report any need for it. At that time, he decided on a few follow-up sessions dealing with assertiveness training and conflict resolution skills which proved fruitful for him in some confrontational situations.

Discussion

This case was repertorized as above from Henry’s articulation as so many classical homeopaths have done over the years. However, this framework for me, regarding the barriers to his self-development and his genogram, allowed for a context to feel and understand the deeper nuances of his narrative. The patterns of temperament, communication skills and the symbolism (i.e. blackness, being small) further confirm the constitutional state and needed supportive resources that eventually assisted him in future encounters. Henry initially presented with a strong outward “thinking” persona; however, upon inquiry about his family legacy and fear of confrontation, the presenting problems were identified with his inward “feeling” traits. He admitted to not sharing these aspects in the past, again out of embarrassment. The previous homeopath was not privy to his ever-present symbolism nor Henry’s articulated shadow temperament. Our job as healers does not stop with the correct remedy. Possible second prescriptions, life-style mentoring and healing layers need ongoing understanding of the interconnections in the self’s continuing journey. I believe that there is a shared state between, in this case, myself and Henry, as there is in different and unique ways between every homeopath and people whom they are working with. The joining, the respect for psychological aspects, an ecological framework and sensitivity to collective issues of symbols all enhance the homeopathic process by expanding the possibilities for a healing relationship, especially with the infinite and profound complex narratives that come our way.

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