

Agaricus

Marysia Kratimenos describes one of the lesser-known but important remedies

The Fly Agaric fungus is the toadstool of fairy tales, a symbol of good fortune and Christmas, as familiar as Santa Claus and his reindeer. It is described as “the quintessential mushroom”, a potent hallucinogen of deep shamanic and religious importance. It is a common sight in the woods of temperate regions of the northern hemisphere. It probably originated in Siberia before spreading throughout Europe, Asia, North and Central America. Unfortunately in recent years it has been hailed as the new “legal high”. Its psychoactive constituents have led to its misuse and the dried mushroom is readily available on “magic mushroom” market stalls.

Botanical facts

Amanita muscaria, as the *Agaricus* has been renamed by botanists, is a large mushroom, up to eight inches in diameter, and it frequently grows in “fairy rings”, due to its method of spore dispersal. In ancient times these rings of mushrooms were considered a sign of fertility and supernatural powers. The fungi grow on rotting leaves beneath beech and pine trees, in the damp of autumn. Unlike parasitic fungi which destroy plants, the *Amanita* benefits its host tree by enriching the soil.

The fungal mycelia grow deep in the earth and the fruiting bodies, the young fungi, emerge enclosed in a warty veil reminiscent of a foetal cowl. In bygone times babies born in the membrane that lined the womb were considered witches. The remnants of the veil are seen on the



stem of the mature fungus. As the mushroom grows the characteristic red colour develops, punctuated by the white warts.

Fungi are devoid of chlorophyll, the green pigment of plants, which allows them to manufacture their food from air and sunlight. They belong to a separate kingdom from plants as they depend on organic material created by other organisms for their energy; they obtain their nutrients by secreting digestive enzymes into the food. Their cell wall is made of chitin, a tough polysaccharide which insects and crustaceans use in their external skeleton. In essence the fungi span the space between plants and animals.

The common name Fly Agaric denotes its ancient use as an insecticide (the dried mushroom was sprinkled into milk to stun flies) and also its hallucinogenic properties. In medieval times insanity was believed to be caused by

flies entering the mind. The term “fly” probably also refers to the shamanic journey between the physical world and the other worlds.

Although regarded as poisonous, the *Amanita* is far less toxic than many other fungi such as the death cap (*Amanita phalloides*). It is rarely mistaken for another species except as an immature button, which can look like a puffball. Most fatalities occur in young children and those eating the fungus for its hallucinogenic properties. Approximately 1g of *muscaria* or 50 to 100mg of ibotenic acid would constitute a fatal dose, equivalent to ingesting 15 mushroom caps. The potency of the fungus varies greatly according to season, habitat and weather. Muscimol and ibotenic acid are the psychoactive chemicals found in Fly Agaric. They are close chemically to one another and the brain chemicals, which explains

the ability of the mushroom to alter consciousness and cause “trips”.

Following ingestion of the Fly Agaric, usually within 30 to 90 minutes, there is often slight nausea and vomiting. Then the effects on the brain become apparent: an initial euphoria, giggling and inebriation which can resemble drunkenness. Indeed Fly Agaric was added to bootleg liquor to disguise the low alcohol content.

The second phase of Amanita ingestion is narcotic when one is deeply moved by the wonder of the universe and visions may occur. The effects can last for several days. Perception is deeply altered, colours intensify and the senses merge together, a condition known as synesthesia. Colours have smells or sounds; one can taste words or musical notes. Many artists have the gift of synesthesia: Van Gogh, Kandinsky, Mondrian and Baudelaire to mention but a few. Mozart reputedly described his music in colours or flavours.

Synesthesia occurs when the temporal lobe of the brain is stimulated, either in the context of temporal epilepsy, with hallucinogenic drugs or in deep religious or spiritual experiences.

Aldous Huxley describes the wondrous state of shifting consciousness in *The Doors of Perception*. Although Huxley was actually experimenting with Anhalonium Lewinii, the peyote mushroom sacred to Native Americans, his descriptions of that altered state of consciousness hold true for Amanita intoxication. “I was seeing what Adam saw on the morning of his creation – the miracle, moment by moment, of naked existence ... The Beatific Vision, *Sat Chit Ananda*, Being – awareness – Bliss – for the first time I understood, not by inchoate hints or at a distance, but precisely and completely what those prodigious syllables referred to.” He was equally fascinated by the great mystics. He wanted to experience their world and believed that mescaline was his passport there. “Or, short of being born again as a visionary, a medium, or a musical genius, how can we ever visit the worlds which to Blake, to Swedenborg, to Johann Sebastian Bach, were home?”

Siberian shamans revered the Fly Agaric. The word shaman means “he or she who knows”. Shamans underwent spiritual journeys for the benefit of the tribe; to traverse the axis mundi in order to enter the spirit world and receive guidance. Drumming was often deployed to achieve the trance state. The shaman would eat of the Fly Agaric and his devo-

tees would drink his urine. The hallucinogenic substances are reported to be active after seven passages through the kidneys. Reindeer eat Fly Agaric and sometimes the tribesmen would drink their urine to obtain the desired state. This is undoubtedly the origin of the flying reindeer myths.

Amanita combined with cannabis is believed by many to be the Soma of the Vedas, the Ancient Greeks’ ambrosia and the manna of the Bible. Lewis Carroll described the effects of the combined hallucinogen. “In a minute or two the Caterpillar took the hookah out of its mouth and yawned once or twice, and shook itself. Then it got off the mushroom, and crawled away into the grass, merely remarking as it went, ‘One side will make you grow taller, and the other side will make you grow shorter’.”

Lewis Carroll suffered from both temporal lobe epilepsy and stammering – two conditions for which Agaricus is commonly prescribed and his works detail a typical Agaricus epileptic state.

Agaricus the remedy

Agaricus, which was proved by Hahnemann, is a lesser-known homeopathic remedy, however it remains an important one. As the fungus is native to Siberia, it grows in conditions of extreme cold. The rubric “ailments from frostbite” can be a vastly important key to finding this remedy.

Other rubrics include:

- Ailments from frost, cold, frostbite, fright, alcoholism
- Aggravation from motion, coitus, pressure touch
- Headaches with sensation head swollen
- Chorea – involuntary muscle spasms that cease in sleep
- Tubercular types
- Hydrogenoid diathesis (Grauvogl)
- Loquacity
- Delirium, confusion
- Fear of cancer
- Chilblains, redness of nose and pinna with extreme itching
- Inco-ordination, muscle spasms



Photo: British Library Images Online

Case one

Christopher was a dreamy seven year-old, brought to the clinic by his mother. His teachers were frustrated by his inattention in class. He was obviously a bright boy, but did not do well at school. He was prone to “daydreaming” and could not focus in lessons. At times he could misbehave badly.

His mother said that his eyelids would twitch and then his eyes would glaze over. He would then be unresponsive for several minutes. On questioning Christopher described synesthesia – he was very artistic and he could taste and smell his paintings. He’d go into a trance whilst painting. Flashing lights and computer games would also “trance” him out. The condition was worse in autumn. He travelled to school by bus and the light shimmering through the trees could precipitate his attacks.

It was obvious to me this was not a simple case of inattention and so I asked for the opinion of a neurologist. He confirmed Christopher was suffering with temporal lobe epilepsy (TLE). His brain scan was normal. His mother was offered anti-epileptic medication but the neurologist said as the condition was mild, he was happy for her to try homeopathic remedies under medical supervision.

Agaricus worked wonders. Christopher’s “trances” stopped completely, his behaviour improved at school and his grades reflected this. He still has the gift of synesthesia, which did bother him greatly. Once he learnt many great artists suffered from it and TLE, he recognised how special he was and frequently reminded his mother of this!

Multiple sclerosis

Agaricus is extremely helpful in reducing the spasms associated with multiple sclerosis and related conditions, for which I have used it successfully on several occasions. The patients frequently have an intense fear of developing cancer. Interestingly, some of the constituents of the mushroom are possibly carcinogenic. Those who respond to the remedy often have deep depression with their neurological disease, and a morbid fascination with their own demise and that of others. Treatment with Agaricus is helpful in lifting the mood as well as reducing the spasms.

Behavioural problems

Some individuals requiring Agaricus show the loquacity and “silliness” seen in intoxication, particularly the children. It is a powerful remedy for behavioural

problems in children. They are mischievous, excitable, often “away with the fairies” and often stammer. In many cases their parents have used large quantities of recreational drugs or alcohol.

Agaricus is a remedy that should be considered for Foetal Alcohol Syndrome and for babies born to drug-addicted mothers.

Visual problems

These are frequent, both in the adults and children. Apart from twitching of the eye muscles, there are visual disturbances, reminiscent of Alice’s fall into the rabbit hole and the distortions of perception and size, characteristic of temporal lobe epilepsy.

The treatment of epilepsy is obviously a task for medical homeopaths who will prescribe alongside standard anti-epileptic medication.



Case two

Jeremy had a severe inflammatory arthritis. All his joints were hot, swollen and exquisitely painful. His hips were so sore that he walked with a staggering gait, indeed people accused him of being drunk. Conventional painkillers and anti-arthritis drugs gave him stomach problems: intense nausea and acid reflux, so he was loathe to use them especially as they had little effect on the pain.

Jeremy had striking muscle spasm, which ceased in his sleep. His body would contort with these spasms, and he had a bad tic in his left eye. The right shoulder and left leg gave him the most pain. This diagonal distribution of symptoms is characteristic of Agaricus. He described the pain as if he were pierced by hundreds of ice-cold needles.

Despite the severity of his condition, Jeremy was cheerful and happy in himself. He could see the silver lining in every cloud. He had a deep spirituality and bore his suffering stoically. His arthritis had come on after he had been camping and the weather changed suddenly. He was “frost bitten”, “frozen to the very marrow”, as he described it. His well-meaning friends warmed him up rapidly in a hot bath and soon after the arthritis developed.

The remedy Agaricus covered every detail of his illness and its causation. Jeremy responded well to it and the spasms vanished. Slowly the arthritis improved with continued treatment.

Other conditions

Agaricus is helpful for many psychiatric conditions, again in conjunction with prescribed medication and only in the hands of experienced medically qualified homeopaths. It may help with alcohol withdrawal and delirium tremens, as well as delusional and psychotic states.

Agaricus is also useful for Bell’s palsy, where a temporary paralysis of the facial muscles occurs after exposure to a cold wind. Aconite is the remedy of choice immediately after the exposure, but Agaricus may be prescribed by your doctor as a follow-on remedy particularly if there is a lot of muscle spasm. This condition does require a medical diagnosis and treatment.

Chilblains

Agaricus is primarily a remedy for use by medical homeopaths because its sphere of influence is primarily on the nervous system. However, in self-prescribing, it is helpful for the treatment of chilblains. These are a common problem in the winter months and can cause intense itching and discomfort. Prevention is better than cure but, if chilblains do develop and are alleviated by warmth, Agaricus 6c taken three times a day may just do the trick.

The materia medica of the fungi is constantly being added to by homeopaths. They are a fascinating and very useful group of remedies.

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