

Belladonna

– the mystic dimension

by David Lilley

Atropa belladonna, the deadly nightshade, is a member of the solanaceae family, which includes other very poisonous plants, such as Datura stramonium, the thorn apple or devil's trumpet, and Hyoscyamus niger, the black henbane, but also such friendly plants as the tomato, the potato, green and red peppers and the eggplant, as well as the protective mandrake and the seductive, but not so harmless, tobacco plant.

Nature is the great mother of symbols. She reveals much of her inner mysteries in the external characteristics of her creations. The appearance, growth pattern and habitat of a plant form a symbolic expression or signature of the hidden, therapeutic genius lying latent within. So it is with Belladonna.

The deadly nightshade is widely distributed over Central and Southern Europe and is almost confined to chalky or calcareous soils. Early homeopaths soon discovered that a close relationship exists between Belladonna and Calcarea carbonica, which is derived from the chalky, middle layer of the oyster shell. People of the Calc carb constitutional type often develop acute conditions that require treatment with Belladonna.

The nightshades have been described as the “gypsies of

the roadside and abandoned places”. Many thrive best where there is human garbage and refuse, on rubbish dumps and compost heaps. Belladonna loves waste areas, old quarries and ruins – places forsaken by man.

The plant shows a curious responsiveness to light and shade. In shady places, on wooded hills and especially if on limestone, it grows vigorously and luxuriantly, even to the height of a tall man, but specimens exposed to the sun are, by comparison, weak and dwarfed.

Paradoxically, however, the more sun and light a plant is exposed to the more poisonous it becomes, due to the increased concentration of the toxins (alkaloids) it contains. Belladonna is one of the most frequently indicated remedies for sunstroke.

The extreme vitality of the plant is witnessed each year in the rapid and vigorous growth that erupts from the thick, fleshy, whitish perennial root – older plants attaining a height of five to six feet in one season. Ailments that yield to Belladonna therapy come on suddenly, even explosively, and most often in vigorous, robust children and adults. Pains are intense and come on suddenly and disappear suddenly. The mental and physical symptoms it

produces and cures are generally of a violent nature. Inflammatory states are characterised by extremely high fever and locally by severe throbbing pains, a bright redness, which quickly changes to bluish-red or purple, marked tenderness, swelling and heat. It is remarkable how swiftly a Belladonna condition can move to suppuration. Typical examples of this are tonsillitis and whitlow.

Despite being highly poisonous, the only sinister aspect the plant presents is the flower, which appears in June and July in the axils of the leaves and continues blooming until September. These are pendent, bell-shaped and are a dark, congested, purplish colour, tinged with green and possess five lobes. The calyx, which embraces the base of the inflorescence, has five clefts.

Even the number of petals of a flower has significance. In the ancient lore of numerology the number five possesses certain analogies – freedom, independence, changeability, rebelliousness, volatility, youth and adolescence, the five faculties and the sense pleasures. Five is also connected with fire and the colour red, which emotionally indicate passion and physically suggest inflammation. Fire is also symbolic of initiation, cleansing and regeneration.

Red is the colour of the first or root chakra, which reflects consciousness at a survival level – aggression and animal sexuality. The shadow aspect of the number five reveals insatiable desire for sense gratification, luxury, promiscuity, the abuse of recreational drugs and alcohol, and the destructive emotions – jealousy, hatred, pride, aggression, viciousness and malice. As a red, fire number, five has an affinity for anything hidden, occult, esoteric or mysterious. This may focus on meditation, rituals, witchcraft, Satanism, tantra, sexual and drug “magick”, and interests, which may prove either enlightening or detrimental to the individual. A study of the history, folklore, uses and remedy pictures of the poisonous solanaceae and comparison with the above, reveal powerful evidence of their correspondence to the number five – a correspondence which begins with Belladonna and becomes more pronounced in Stramonium and Hyoscyamus.

The berry that follows the blossom, far from being repulsive, is as big as a small cherry and acquires an intense, shining black colour, which enticingly catches the eye and beckons to the unwary. Like a rare jewel it attracts the fingers, whilst the mouth already anticipates the intensely sweet taste of the dark, inky juice it contains – an attraction that has often proved fatal to children. The berries’ lethal seductiveness, the frenzied, demoniacal mania they induce and their homicidal reputation gave them the name “Devil’s Cherries” or “Naughty Man’s Cherries”. As we might anticipate the symptoms of

poisoning develop rapidly and violently and soon threaten life.

The species name belladonna “beautiful lady”, alludes to the custom, of fashionable Italian ladies of the Renaissance, of dilating their pupils by instilling a drop of the berry juice into their eyes, rendering them darker and more brilliant, to enhance their beauty and allure. The Latin scientific generic name of the plant, atropa, derives from Atropos “the inevitable”, one of the three Fates of Greek mythology – she who, at the bidding of Lachesis, cuts the thread of life woven by Clotho. The common name

these mother goddesses abides a nurturing, infinite love for mankind working with seeming ruthlessness towards the destruction of the false-ego and the transcendence of the human psyche from the shadows towards the light.

It would seem that nature intentionally fashioned the herb for a special role in the treatment of the human psyche, particularly when beguiled and entranced by the seductive ways of the world into a state of forgetfulness and detachment from its divine origin and spiritual nature. Its toxic alkaloids become more aggressive to animal life in direct



“nightshade” most likely refers to Nah-Skado, alluding to the Celto-Teutonic goddess Skadi – “the destroyer” – “Queen of the Shades” or “Mother Death” – active in the darkness of the night (nah) – (Prisma). As such Skadi is the equivalent of the Hindu, Kali, “the black goddess” – “she who creates that she may destroy and destroys that she may create”. She is akin to the black Madonna of Christianity.

Behind the sternness of

proportion to brain development, being least active in lower animals, such as rabbits and goats, more intense in carnivorous animals and highly toxic and even lethal in homo sapiens. In humans furthermore, this gradation of toxic intensity is evidenced in proportion to intellectual development – being most dangerous in those of high intelligence and those who show left cerebral dominance, characterised by a sharp intellect, a logical, analytical approach to life ➤

Blooming from June until September the belladonna plant becomes more poisonous, the more sun and light it is exposed to

and a masculine energy (regardless of gender). Hufeland asserted that the mentally retarded are unusually resistant to the poison. Since the left cerebral hemisphere governs the functions of the right side of the body, the physical symptoms of Belladonna are more frequently right-sided.

The disproportionate development and dominance of the intellect and the masculine principle is often at the expense of both instinct and intuition. The stage upon which life is enacted is then too much in the head and too little in the heart, too much in the mind and too little in the feelings. The false-ego becomes inflated and worships at the altar of intellect and materialism. The sense of oneness with the creation and with Mother Nature is lost, the divine aspects of the true-self become disconnected and are lost in the Shadow-self, unrealised, unfulfilled and most often not even aspired to. Belladonna like its solanaceae cousins is most active in the treatment of those whose eternal qualities and awareness have been forgotten and whose true-self has been replaced by a false-self filled with fear and anger.

The Shadow, or personal abyss, grows apace with the development of the false-self and is filled with all the characteristics we are ashamed of and therefore repress, all our unresolved emotions, dating back to our conception, and our unrealised, divine aspects. This is particularly true of those who fail to feel and live out their emotions. In the Shadow lurks also the personal devil or "beast" structure, a proud, selfish, destructive, hateful, dark

energy, which resides in varying degrees within us all, easily recognised in a Hitler but difficult to own and face in ourselves. The Devil has many symbols and some loom large in the collective, human unconscious, such as the wolf, the cockroach, with its long horns (antennae) and gleaming armour, the rat and the snake. The devil wolf is black, snarling, threatening, with glowing, baleful eyes and bared, slavering fangs, a malevolent and terrifying image – or it is the mad dog, the rabid, mutant wolf, black, fiendish, savage and unpredictable, a "Hound of the Baskervilles" – a carrier of death and destruction. These images are imprinted not only in the Shadow of humanity but also in Belladonna, Stramonium and Hyoscyamus, remedies of inestimable value in the treatment of rabies and hence for the treatment of the Shadow. Fear of water (hydrophobia) is a characteristic of rabies and also of these three remedies. In analytical psychology water is understood to symbolise the unconscious, hence fear of water symbolises fear of what lies in the unconscious – an innate fear of the Shadow.

Materia medica

In the materia medica of Belladonna appear the following significant symptoms derived from proving trials of the remedy and from cured cases:

She attempted to bite and strike her attendants, broke into fits of laughter and gnashed her teeth. The head was hot, the face red, the look wild and fierce. He was possessed by an inclination to bite those about him and to tear everything about him to

pieces. Raging, violent fury; such fury that she had to be held constantly, lest she should attack someone; and when thus held, so that she could not move, she spat continually at those about her. Visions of wolves, dogs, giants and fire; cockroaches swarming about the room; rats; snakes; worms; unclean beasts, black creatures. Sees black dogs; snakes in and around her. Everything he looks at seems red; everywhere she sees fire and conflagration.

Such ghastly visions and violent anger indicate some awful abuse in the past, experiences so horrible that they have been consigned to the Shadow, out of memory. The Shadow is our own, hidden, waste area, our rubbish dump, our forsaken realm. Yet within its confines lie riches beyond measure. Like the deadly nightshade, it is in the realising of the Shadow that we can grow spiritually with vigour and luxuriance and advance beyond the toxic, spiritually dwarfing, light of the false ego and the intellect. Even in the acute Belladonna state, with its high fever and violent symptoms, a more subtle process is at work, the releasing of repressed energy from the Shadow realm, an evolution that is further developed and fulfilled in the states of Stramonium and Hyoscyamus.

The solanaceae, when indicated, expedite the individuation of the soul, the advancement towards spiritual maturity. They embody the intense, all embracing love of the "Black Goddess", the "Queen of the Shades", whose sustaining power overshadows us when we finally face our Shadow in the "Dark Night of the Soul".

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