

Aurum

Argentum

Ferrum

Cuprum

Magnesium
carbonate

Phosphorus

Thuja

Lac caninum

In this series of masterclasses, I will be considering eight major remedies from a symbolic, mythological and homeopathic perspective to better penetrate the unique genius of each substance and reveal its emotional, psychological and spiritual healing power. Studying homeopathic remedies in this way opens the mind and heart to the mysteries of life and the cosmos and imprints the healing images at the deepest level. The use of the words he or she in these articles refers to the male or female principles present in all of us and is not related to gender. Certain remedies are more conveniently spoken of as male, for example Aurum, and others as female, for example Cuprum, however, when their characteristics match the picture of the patient, they are suitable for the treatment of either gender.

by David Lilley

Thuja

THUJA OCCIDENTALIS – THE TREE OF LIFE



The Cosmic Tree

Ever since the human imagination began to evolve images and myths to explain the enigma of physical existence, the tree has provided an essential and supreme, primordial symbol of ascent, regeneration, immortality and salvation. The concept of a mighty tree, the Tree of Life, penetrating and uniting the three levels of the invisible and visible cosmos, took symbolic shape: a vast pillar or central axis, its roots immersed in the soil and waters of the underworld (the unconscious), its trunk and lower branches passing through Earth (the conscious) and its topmost boughs reaching up to the light of the heavens (the super-conscious). In this imagery, the Tree of Life, Cosmic Tree, was perceived as a conduit

for celestial energy flowing from a divine source and permeating the creation. Hence, the symbol often appears inverted, with its foliage on Earth and its roots in heaven, drawing down spiritual nourishment from above. Particularly majestic trees and those that bear valued fruit were held to be sacred by some cultures.

The immortal, incorruptible conifer

Deciduous trees “die” and shed their golden-brown leaves in autumn and are “reborn” in their fresh-green raiment of spring, suggesting in this cycle the eternal, cosmic processes of germination, growth, proliferation, death and regeneration. But even more sublime is the image of the ceaseless, inexhaustible life-process encompassed by the Cosmic Tree, synon-



Photo: iStockphoto.com/Smokid

ymous with incorruptibility, immortality and the concept of “life without death”, which represents “absolute reality”. This higher symbolism belongs to the evergreens: the conifers (the pine, fir, spruce, cedar, cypress, juniper etc) and their relatives. Their primacy is also inherent in their antiquity, dating back to the close of the Palaeozoic era. Indeed, the most majestic trees of all, the giant sequoia and its cousin the coastal redwood, are both conifers. Yet, it is a seemingly humbler member of the order that has had the exalted designation, Tree of Life, bestowed upon it: *Thuja occidentalis*, the northern white-cedar, and homeopathic provings and cures have substantiated this entitlement. Like Lachesis, which of all snakes has proved the very embodiment of the snake archetype, among trees, *Thuja* is the supreme healer, even the lordly oak having to yield precedence.

The sycotic archetype

Synchronicity and the intuitive, inquiring mind of Hahnemann provided us with this remarkable remedy very early in the development of the homeopathic *materia medica*. A young clergyman sought Hahnemann’s advice regarding an irritating, greenish, urethral discharge with inflammation and swelling of the genitals. On questioning, he stoutly denied any sexual contact that could have accounted for his affliction. Respecting his honesty, Hahnemann refrained from prescribing and asked him to report again in three days. On his return, all symptoms had passed away

and he confessed to an unusual feeling of wellbeing. He then recalled that whilst sauntering through a garden he had broken off and chewed a sprig of *Arbor vitae* (Tree of Life); the discharge had commenced shortly afterwards. This episode led to provings, which confirmed that *Thuja* was capable of producing phenomena identical to gonorrhoea, including its chronic consequences, and was the pre-eminent remedy for the gonorrhoea-related sycotic constitution (sycosis). In his introduction to the symptom picture of the remedy, Hahnemann wrote: “... *the pure effects of this uncommonly powerful medicinal substance will be regarded by the homoeopathic practitioner as a great addition to his medicinal treasury, and he will not fail to make a useful application of it in some of the most serious diseases of mankind, for which hitherto there has been no remedy*”. He did not exaggerate!

Sexual abuse

Thuja is one of our greatest remedies for the ills caused by humanity’s efforts to escape the stress of a troubled world through wine, women and song. It has proved invaluable in the treatment of addiction to alcohol, tobacco, recreational drugs (especially cannabis) and even the excess consumption of tea, coffee, sweets and salt. It is often called for in sexually transmitted diseases and to assist the victims of sexual abuse. Both predator and prey may need it. When a person feels deep self-contempt, *Thuja* should be considered. Sufferers from gonorrhoea, like the victims of rape,

experience shame and a sense of being soiled or stained. This creates self-loathing and feelings of worthlessness. It is a sense of being a pariah, an object for contempt, different and inferior to others. They feel they have something reprehensible and unwholesome to hide. *Thuja* may indulge in compulsive hand washing in an unconscious attempt to cleanse or absolve themselves. It has the delusion: “thinks his blood is dirty or poisoned”. *Thuja* will often compensate for this perceived inferiority by cultivating an image of excellence and immaculate perfection.

The Tree of Life and Death

From the beginning a duality was discerned in the mythology of the Tree of Life. Genesis reveals the presence of two sacred trees in Eden: the Tree of Life paralleled by a Tree of Death. Through the Tree of Life, humanity ascends from its lower nature to spiritual realisation, salvation and release from the cycle of birth, death and rebirth; through the Tree of Knowledge, comes the “fall”, the descent into materialism and bondage to intellect and the flesh. However, though they stand in contention, the two trees are one, being representations of the same idea of spiritual struggle and transformation, since it is only by death of the mortal (the ego-personality) that the immortal (the soul) can truly live. This is the terrain of *Thuja*.

Resonating duality

A homeopathic remedy being in dynamic form, touches the collective unconscious, which is the realm of myth, and in a sensitive subject will give vent to often deeply repressed images through dreams and imagination. Remedy, archetype, myth, universal consciousness, the personal psyche and disease dance together in timeless patterns choreographed in eternity. *Thuja* elicits a sense of being double, split in two, on waking of being unable to tell which part he has possession of, that mind and body are separated and, most significantly, that the soul is separated from the body or that the body is too small for the soul. In step with the cosmic dance, the pathogen, *Neisseria gonorrhoea*, is a diplococcus, comprising two kidney-shaped cocci within a single membrane: a symbol of duality and the collision and conflict of the sacred and the profane. This “war” is also the terrain of *Thuja*.

The serpent and the tree

Long before Genesis was written, the serpent or dragon had become inextric-

cably entwined in the metaphor of the Tree of Life. It was synonymous with the animating force that coursed through the tree and also the guardian of its fruit or treasure. In images of the Great Goddess in every culture, the serpent is never far away, standing behind her, eating from her hand, wreathed round her tree, or even presenting in the shape of the goddess herself. In the Neolithic period the serpent was the Lord of Rebirth, inspiring and presiding over the shedding of the lower self, but in Judaeo-Christian tradition, the serpent in Eden has transformed into his evil shadow, a tempter towards the “fall”, the instigator of (spiritual) death, with whom Eve, the fallen goddess, is in league. In this patriarchal allegory we are persuaded that human nature, especially when feminine, is inherently inclined to corrupt and betray all that is sacred within it. This falling from grace (although not gender-related) is often the plight of both Thuja and Lachesis. Thuja even dreams of falling and of being overwhelmingly heavy. There is much of the snake in the picture of Thuja: ailments are predominantly left-sided (the feminine side) and often worse on waking; a sense of being double; jealousy, suspicion, secretiveness, deceit; rapid talkativeness; but most significantly the war between the higher and lower selves leading to religious despair. Two powerful elements in both archetypes are mysticism and sensuality.



Photo: iStockphoto.com/dise55

Sexual fantasy and feelings clash with religious aspiration and tear them apart.

The etymology of Thuja

The derivation of the word Thuja comes from the Greek word *thyra* meaning to sacrifice or *thusia* a burnt offering for the gods. *Thuias* (plural: *thuiades*) means raving woman, a generic name for a maenad (bacchante) who worshipped the orgiastic god, Dionysos (Bacchus), god of wine, who was also the lord of trees. *Thrysus* was a wand or staff consisting originally of a fennel stalk, but later, a vine- or ivy-twined fir-branch tipped with a pine-cone: the emblem of Dionysos, frequently brandished by his votaries in their wild processions and sensual dances. The cone itself is a phallic symbol of masculine, generative power. The mythical counterparts of the maenads were the satyrs (sileni), part-human and part-animal. They loved to sing and dance, drink wine and chase maenads whilst in a state of perpetual sexual arousal. The religious congregation of the fanatical and frequently frenzied followers of Dionysos was known as the holy *thiasus*. All these correspondences pertain to Thuja.

Resistance to incarnation

The Dionysian religion was characterised by ecstatic, spiritual release through music and dance, the possession of the devotees by the god, the rending apart of sacrificial animals and the eating of their raw flesh in an act of ritual communion. Festivals of Dionysos were often characterised by ritual licence and drunken revelry, transvestism, obscene and wanton behaviour. These religious orgies were an attempt to escape, or at least temporarily annihilate, the human state, fraught with pain and suffering and limited by time and moral convention, and to enter a divine dimension – timeless, blessed, boundless and free. Some of the sileni were older and wiser, but none the less lascivious and addicted to wine. One, in a state of inebriation, gave voice to typical Greek pessimism by philosophising that the best fate for human beings was not to be born at all and the next best was to die as soon as possible after birth. This is the unconscious conviction of the Thuja archetype, which creates a reality that may well have to be lived out. It commences with infertility, early abortion, foetal abnormalities, failure of the placenta, premature birth or post-maturity uterine inertia, mal-presentation, prolonged labour, birth trauma (cord strangulation and head injury),

incubation, cot death, autism and mental retardation. In those who survive, there is a deep anger, manifested in terrible tantrums, an aversion to touch and being spoken to or even approached, fear of strangers, social phobia, fear of misfortune and evil and a fear as if they were in a strange, alien place. They develop a loathing of life and a desire for death (Aurum). For the Thuja (sycotic) child, birth is a descent into Hades and the blame for this is laid at the feet of the mother, harboured as an unconscious resentment and hatred, and expressed as disruptive, oppositional, defiant, manipulative and revengeful behaviour. Thuja is the only remedy in the rubric: “aversion to mother”.

Dionysos: the god of wine and revelry

As detailed in Aurum, in ancient times, the hallowed shrine at Delphi was both the oracle of Apollo and Dionysos. During the winter months, Apollo departed to the mystical land of the Hyperboreans, leaving his half-brother to rule as presiding divinity. Dionysos had affinities that were the very antithesis of those of Apollo, who always stood for order, balance, restraint, rectitude, moderation in all things and idealised masculinity. Dionysos, in contrast, was the god of ecstasy and intoxication, a beautiful, radiant, androgynous being, perceived as elusively ambivalent: both divine and mortal, human and animal, male and effeminate, young and mature, powerful yet vulnerable, mysterious, unfathomable yet flamboyant and revelatory – a compendium of opposites. He was the most manifest god of all, seen riding great felines (Thuja: dreams of cats), sailing the sea and even bearing wings (Thuja: her body is borne on wings), yet he remained enigmatic, composed and distant: a figure of power and majesty (the light side of Thuja). Although he represented intoxication, sensuality, passion, excess, frenzy, madness and destruction, his iconography never depicts him in a state of lust, nor is he ever seen imbibing his own gift. Unlike that of his divine uncles and brothers, his mythology is devoid of male dominance and rape. He is revealed as the rescuer of the victim of abuse and tragedy (the healing power of Thuja). Ariadne, the forsaken companion of Theseus, became his eternal love, whom he raised to heaven that she might always be by his side. His dark side, close to that of Thuja, emerges in his myths and rituals and is concerned with murder and mutilation, madness and violence, persecution and flight and gender hostility.

The risen god

The myth of the birth and infancy of Dionysos is complex and replete with psychological, philosophical and religious metaphor. Zeus (the perverted, incestuous father) violated his young daughter Kore (later Persephone). She bore him a son, Dionysos. The child was in great jeopardy from the moment Hera, the alert and ever suspicious wife of Zeus, discovered the betrayal. She roused the Titans to attack the child. These monstrous beings set upon him as he was gazing at his reflection in a mirror (Argentum). They cut him to pieces with knives and after the murder devoured the dismembered corpse. But the heart (Aurum) of the infant god was saved and brought to Zeus. Acting swiftly, Zeus swallowed the heart, which contained the godling's essence. Soon after, Zeus, disguised as a mortal, seduced Semele, the daughter of King Cadmus of Thebes and Dionysos was again conceived. Unfortunately, nothing escaped the eagle eye of Hera. Her jealousy and hatred were implacable (sycosis). When Semele was six months with child, Hera, assuming the guise of a trusted maidservant, prompted her to insist that Zeus reveal himself to her in his true form. Having previously promised to grant her any request, he reluctantly complied, and she was consumed by his fiery radiance. Semele, like so many Thuja lovers, was the sacrificial victim of her own passion. Zeus saved the unborn baby by cutting open his thigh and implanting the foetus there. When the time for Dionysos's second birth came, Hermes (Mercury) acted as surgeon and midwife (caesarian section). Thus, Dionysos was called: "twice born" or the "risen-god". Foster parents appointed by Persephone reared him. Fearing the continued wrath of Hera, Persephone advised them to keep him in the women's quarters disguised as a girl; this probably contributed to his androgynous nature. Thuja is often indicated for effeminate males and masculine females, men who are not confident of their masculinity and become homophobic and men who fear emasculation by the women in their lives.

The androgynous god

When Dionysos reached maturity, he descended into the realm of the dead in search of his mortal mother's shade. He gave Persephone, his divine mother,

now queen of the dead, a myrtle as a gift for the release of Semele. Together, they ascended to Olympus where he introduced her as Thyone (a name with the same etymology as Thuja). The resurrected Semele became immortal and identified with the moon-goddess, Selene, confirming the feminine and lunar predominance of Thuja and the remedy's close relationship to Argentum. Significantly, the emotional problems of Thuja are worse during the increasing moon. Thuja's closeness to Aurum is just as profound: it was Dionysos who blessed and cursed King Midas with the gift that all he touched should turn to gold. Dionysos is the shadow, feminine aspect of Apollo, just as Thuja is often the shadow, feminine aspect of Aurum. Another connection is between Thuja and Ferrum. When Dionysos reached manhood, Hera, despite his effeminacy, recognised him, and cursed him with madness. Accompanied by a wild army of satyrs and maenads he set off towards the east on a mission of warfare and conquest. His campaign was marked by the savage tearing to pieces of those who opposed his divinity and failed to pay him due honour. Dionysos is the energy that shatters inhibitions, repressions and regressions. In the evolution of the Thuja archetype, a gradual unfolding is rarely seen, usually a shock is required. To this day, Thuja, a tree shaped like a spear, dreams of war, battles and contest, of great danger, of death, dying, murder and dead bodies. The dreams are worse when lying on the left (feminine) side. They also have a sense of being fragile and brittle, made of glass, and of being fragmented and scattered about ("body parts in danger of coming in pieces" and "the continuity of body parts will be dissolved").

The perfect imperfect

Further insights into the nature of this remarkable remedy may be gleaned from a study of the tree. Thuja is an elegant, tall, erect, evergreen. Its natural habitat is swampy ground and waterlogged areas along the banks of rivers, where it often forms "cedar swamps". This affinity for water confirms Thuja's relationship to the sycotic constitution, which is characteristically worse from exposure to cold, wet weather and damp conditions. Its regular spear-shaped conical form, and precise lines, as if groomed or clipped, has made it popular as an orna-

mental tree in many formal gardens and cemeteries. The archetype is fastidiously immaculate, a perfectionist in every aspect of their lives: their appearance, hygiene, dress, environment, diction, handwriting, manners and the work they produce (Arsenicum). This does not extend to their morality. Their true feelings are often concealed beneath a charming, polished veneer. Planted close together and cropped, the trees produce a dense, impenetrable, high hedge. They branch from the very base and the foliage, a profusion of flat, fleshy fronds or sprays, is thick and dark green, denying all approach. Similarly, the archetype's perfectionism and politeness provide a mask concealing the real person. This extends to their use of words, their command of language providing a barrier with which to keep others at bay. They are deep, closed, bottled-up, private and secretive. Their twisted, Dionysian energy lies hidden behind a sophisticated and cultured façade. Belying their piety, self-righteousness and fanatical religiosity is a prurient fascination with the perverse and the deviant, which they may secretly indulge. Beneath the tree's neat, clean appearance, an untidy profusion of dry, fallen bark, twigs and leaves thickly litter the ground: the botanical counterpart of dry, lifeless, falling hair and the shedding of dry skin in dandruff and scales, or possibly the detritus of moral decay.

The Tree of Resurrection

Thuja is one of homeopathy's greatest gifts to mankind and to medicine. It is a remedy for all seasons, but especially when, often through suffering and tragedy, the personal gulf between human and divine widen and trust and joy in the life-experience weaken or are lost, replaced by addiction to materialism; by futile attempts to saturate the senses with pleasure and distraction; by trying to bring sterile order, control and inhibition into a life perceived to be random and out of control; and by repressing or abusing the feminine. Such escapist and oppositional behaviour increases duality and fails to honour the lord of the trees; symbolically the offender will be emotionally torn to pieces. Thuja, being one with the Cosmic Tree, bridges dimensions and, like Dionysos, can descend into the personal underworld, resurrect the repressed energies of generations and bring homeopathic salvation.

David Lilley MBChB FFHom is an internationally renowned teacher of the materia medica who has developed his practice in South Africa over the last 40 years after training at the Royal London Homeopathic Hospital.