

masterclass

MAJOR ARCHETYPES OF THE MATERIA MEDICA

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Photo: Paul Parsons



This pullout and keep series includes:

Sulphur

Calc carb

Lycopodium

Pulsatilla

Silicea

Nat mur

Sepia

Lachesis

In the second article of this series we considered *Calcarea carbonica*, which is prepared from the oyster, *Ostrea edulis*, a primitive mollusc and bivalve, which produces a shell to protect its soft, defenceless and highly vulnerable body from the many dangers lurking in its environment. In this study we considered the correspondences that exist between the natural history of this creature and the body type, emotional makeup and life experience of the individual who will benefit from it as a remedy. Nature is the great creator of symbol and metaphor and gives these objective shape in the appearance, structure, functions and behaviour of the life forms she evolves. Within these visible aspects of the archetype, inscribed in cryptic code, are clues to the peculiarities of human nature, emotions and behaviour, and also therapeutic guidelines for the selection of the most similar remedy. These become apparent when we explore the evolution of the mollusc from the immobile, cloistered oyster to the extroverted, active cuttlefish.

The mantle, which in the majority of molluscs has a passive role and merely contains the internal organs (viscera) and secretes the shell, has become powerfully muscular and involved in locomotion. Its contraction and expansion draws water into the mantle cavity and can then expel it as a powerful jet through a narrow tube-like funnel. On being alarmed or attacked the animal can dart violently backwards by using its jet propulsion.

The cuttlefish of the homeopathic materia medica is the common European cuttlefish, *Sepia officinalis*, a mollusc of the class Cephalopoda, hence, a close relative of the squid and the octopus. Our remedy is prepared by trituration from the dried liquid contained in the ink sac.

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Sepia officinalis

Like an owl, the cuttlefish is a most endearing animal, with huge eyes in relationship to its body size, and a wonderful ability to hover as if weightless in the water, its balance maintained by a frill-like extension of its mantle, which undulates continuously, supporting it as if on a magic carpet. Gone is the restricting, confining shell of the Bivalves and the Gastropods (snails), gone is the soft, flaccid, toneless tissues of the oyster, gone is the passive, wait-and-see attitude of a creature anchored to its environment; all replaced by a highly active, muscular body, ideally fashioned for its role as an ocean predator, equipped with five pairs of arms which encircle a mouth furnished with powerful mandibles, a parrot-like beak and a rasp-like tongue, and strengthened by the now-internalised shell, which has become the cuttlebone, a light, flexible structure which provides the cuttlefish with neutral buoyancy. One pair of arms, or tentacles, are specialised for capturing prey – mainly crustaceans and small fish. These are longer than the rest, and when within striking distance of a prawn, which Sepia will have carefully stalked, they shoot out with lightning speed and accuracy, like a pair of tongs, and then drag the captured prey within the circle of shorter arms, by which it is held as it is dismembered.

A remarkable and significant, physical characteristic of most of the Cephalopods is the possession of an “ink” sac. The ink can be forcibly discharged when the animal is threatened, the dark cloud which forms in the water serving as a means of escape from enemies. It acts as a “dummy” to engage the attention of the enemy, while the cuttlefish changes its colour so that it is almost transparent, and darts off in another direction.

In addition to this means of evading danger, the cuttlefish is the master of colour camouflage. No other creature can match its virtuosity. Besides the permanent colour of the skin, which shows blackish-brown zebra stripes, ideal for hiding against a background of kelp, chameleon-like, they are able to camouflage themselves by choosing appropriate colour shades to mimic those of their surroundings. This phenomenon also serves as an expression of certain emotions. They can change colour as fluidly as a neon sign, showing reactions like aggression, fear or sexual excitement.

Like other members of the Cephalopods, cuttlefish have the most highly developed brains of the invertebrate world and are capable of remarkably complex behaviour. The brain contains a large number of neurones, concentrated in one centralised, integrated organ of which the uppermost lobes function like the human cerebral cortex, permitting learned behaviour. Contributing to their relative intelligence are their large, complex, so-called camera eyes, which, like a vertebrate's eye, have high resolving power. To focus, it changes the shape of the entire eyeball, moving the lens closer or farther away from the retina.

They are largely nocturnal, shy, independent and solitary, but inquisitively attracted by bright colours. During the breeding season the female swims at the surface at night, emitting a bright luminescence. The males dart after her like luminous arrows. At that time of the year, fisherman may profit from this instinct by



The female cuttlefish lays her eggs on fragments of coral, the tubes of marine worms and the stems of plants

towing a female Sepia behind their boats in order to catch the males, which invariably pursue her. The eggs, which are pear-shaped, are deposited in clusters on fragments of coral, the tubes of marine worms and the stems of plants. Unlike octopuses, female cuttlefish do not guard their clutch of eggs. On emerging from the egg the first instinct of a newborn is to hide – under rocks, in kelp beds or under the sand. The predation rate is extreme, hence vast numbers of eggs are laid, but the survivors grow into one of the ocean's most fascinating creatures.

asterclass...

the sepia woman

When we study Sepia we can have no doubt that we are in the presence of a major archetype. The symbol is pre-eminently, though not exclusively, feminine. It has emerged from the essentially female image of the oyster in seeming rebellion against the confined, protected and largely passive femininity, which Calc carb represents. The oyster is tethered to its rock and lives a restricted life; the cuttlefish is a free-swimming creature with no boundaries. Calc carb is comfortable in a patriarchal society, in which the role of the woman remains the stereotyped one of diligent, committed housekeeper, caring, nurturing mother, and dutiful, self-effacing wife. Sepia needs to liberate herself from this traditional mould and express herself in her own unique way, unrestricted by male chauvinism, customs and taboos. Housekeeping, raising children, and always playing second fiddle to the men in her life are not sufficiently fulfilling for her, and leave her feeling frustrated and resentful.

In circumstances where her freedom is restricted or suppressed, Sepia's health will suffer. Ailments develop in situations of long continued domination, often at the hands of dictatorial parents who attempt to mould the young Sepia into the image that they and society expect of a typical girl. Often the relationship with the father is critical. A rigid, dominating father or husband who does not give her the opportunity to develop her initiative, independence and identity will be instrumental in imprinting the Sepia image upon a vulnerable constitution. Domination and restricted freedom represents for Sepia the experience of being forced back into her shell. So many marriages involve this kind of emotional abuse, marriages in which the wife has little say, few rights, and the husband is king of his castle. If we consider the immense energy which evolution has invested in the cuttlefish's escape from the shell, we can understand the damaging effect this forced regression has upon such an archetype. However, as more and more women move out of the home and assume active and leading roles in previously male-dominated spheres of life, the extroverted Sepia archetype is becoming far more common, and powerful.

Our classic picture of Sepia describes the cuttlefish still trapped in her shell. In her extreme form she is the broken down, worn out, overworked, unappreciated, frustrated and resentful housewife, who has changed, through life's wear and tear, from a once lovely girl into a drudge and a drab. The beautiful countenance, shapely figure and erect posture have long since faded. Everywhere the power of gravity is in evidence, exaggerated by the effects of prolonged breast-feeding, childbearing, increased weight, lack of exercise, a sluggish metabolism, and a depressed, sour spirit. She is

now a plump, rounded, flabby woman with ample breasts, buttocks and thighs and a protruding belly. Here there is a surfeit of female form. Everything drags and sags, both within and without. Her organs, especially her uterus, yield to their weight and lack of support. Even her lids appear heavy, veiling eyes that were once her most striking attribute. Her features have become blurred, soft, unrefined and slack, with down-turned mouth and hanging jowls. The expression upon this downcast face is one of apathy, indifference, suffering and sadness. She looks care-worn, dispirited and "browned off".

They are pre-occupied with their perceived misery and dismal lot in life, and resent consolation, which angers them and causes them to weep. What they want is not consolation, but sympathy. Tears are never far below the surface. They cannot talk about their problems without crying. The ink of the cuttlefish is black and Sepia, true to type, is prone to black moods. Everything is seen in a negative, pessimistic light. They always feel unfortunate and neglected. Although they are generally very closed and private, like the cuttlefish they are unable to hide their feelings, which play freely across their countenance, or settle into glowering gloominess. They cannot dissimulate even for the sake of appearances.

The ink contains a high percentage of calcium, and the cuttlefish has evolved from the closed, bivalvular form of the mollusc, therefore, like Calc carb, we can expect that certain Sepia types, when in distress and faced with the tribulations of life, regress towards an introverted state. Even their means of propulsion is backwards and the ink is used as a pretence or decoy to confuse the enemy whilst Sepia escapes. Retiring, masking and hiding are the emotional reactions of an introverted personality. In Sepia, more than in others, this is a transgression against nature. This type is shut into their own hidden emotions, their fears, suspicions, jealousies, envy, resentment and hatred, removed even from those they love best, their husband, children and friends, not caring for their appearance, their environment or their occupation and responsibilities. They become indifferent to those things that previously brought them their greatest pride and joy. Such is their estrangement and withdrawal from themselves and others that they can no longer access and feel the love they know they have for their family. Their sexual drive and responses are lost. Despite a suppressed need for company, they prefer to be alone and shun society. Yet, such is the evolutionary imprinting, that if they can be induced, often against their will, to come out of their shell, to socialise and indulge in exercise or activity, they experience huge benefit.

Sepia is a creature whose vitality and response to life are witnessed through colour. Just like birds long in captivity lose the full magnificence of their plumage, so the unhappy, hormonally perturbed Sepia loses her healthy colour, becoming pallid and sallow with dark circles about her eyes. Across the bridge of her nose and

on her cheeks, or on her brow or upper lip, brownish stains may develop, often prompted by excess exposure to the sun, pregnancy or taking the contraceptive pill. In sad parody of her ocean cousin, she unconsciously expresses her discouragement, depression and despair, by donning subdued autumn colours, often browns or even black. Their emotional state, especially their irritability and depression, are worse before and during their menstruation, during pregnancy, after childbirth and during the menopause.

The rebellious challenge of the Sepia archetype is against the quiet, passive, submissive and dependent qualities, which are the hallmark of traditional woman. This revolt requires the overthrow of deeply imprinted, primordial, cultural and gender-related, unconscious patterns of behaviour, which can only be achieved by repression of the feminine and projection of the masculine. Known as the animus, this male energy form exists within all women, just as its counterpart, the anima, exists within all men. Biologically the repression of the feminine image distorts the physiology of the body and expresses itself in physical changes. The effect impacts most powerfully upon the endocrine or hormone producing glands, especially the adrenal glands and the ovaries.

Thus another Sepia type emerges. She is a tall, slim woman with small, flat breasts and narrow hips. The voluptuous curves of ripe womanhood fail to develop. Like young boys, they remain straight up and down. She is not well built for a woman, or for childbearing. The face of these thin types is usually lean, angular and hard. The lips are also thin, especially the upper lip, which gives an impression of hardness or even meanness. They are often troubled by fine, dark hair above the upper lip, which may appear as a distinct moustache. They may have excess hair on other parts of the body, showing a general tendency to hirsutism. Here there is a surfeit of male form.

These women often dislike men, even despise them, and seem to invite arguments and confrontation. They are conscious of male vulnerabilities and delight in mocking or goading the men they come in contact with. They can be spiteful and shrewish, and have a way with words, which can be as sharp and destructive as the razor beak and tongue of their namesake. They pride themselves on their forthrightness, which can be brutal, untempered by sensitivity. Often they are feminists, conscious and defensive of their gender rights and insistent upon political correctness. Irritable and sensitive they are angered by the least contradiction and are intolerant of criticism. The most innocent remark may offend them and will neither be forgiven

nor forgotten, for they are inclined to bear grievance and brood over old hurts. Despite being so sensitive to criticism, they are forever scolding, finding fault, being reproachful, and subjecting others, especially men and ineffectual females, to criticism and withering sarcasm. They lack the gentleness of female energy.



There is another Sepia woman who is magnificent: lithe, well muscled, supple, poised, graceful and dynamic

The cuttlefish is a beautiful creature, highly intelligent, possessing remarkable eyes, a supple muscular body, a grace of movement and an unparalleled feeling for colour and its use. The respiratory pigment of its blood, haemocyanin, contains, as its central atom, copper. The alchemists intuitively perceived copper as possessing the attributes of Aphrodite, the goddess of feminine beauty and love. Thus there exists yet another Sepia, and she is magnificent. She is the dancer, the athlete, and the aerobic instructress, lithe, well muscled, supple, poised, graceful and dynamic. She is the actress, the artist and the musician; she is the college graduate, the executive and the barrister; she is free, independent and assured, a denizen of the modern world, her male and female energies in wonderful balance. She is luminescent, irresistible, her beauty and intelligence set off by unforgettable eyes. Tonight she may dance with wild abandon and make passionate love, tomorrow she walks the passages of power, elegant in her pencil-slim skirt and high heels and holding her leather brief case.

Next issue: David Lilley looks at Lachesis

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