

LACHESIS

DR. EDWARD C. WHITMONT, M.D.

An attempt will be made in this essay to study a drug picture as the manifestation of an overall *Gestalt*, or formative archetypal pattern, analogous to the modern "field" concept in physics and to the *Gestalt* and archetype concepts in psychology. A "field of force" is defined as formative energy unobservable as such, but demonstrable through the arrangement and behaviour of the material particles which it influences. In *Gestalt* psychology, the *Gestalt* (shape, pattern) is conceived of as the expression and the result of intrinsic organization.¹ As such, it is a basic principle and not further definable.² "Meaning", Katz says, "is intrinsic patterned (*gestaltliche*) order."³ In depth psychology the archetypes are defined as invisible ordering systems within the psyche, comparable to the axial systems of a crystal which, themselves devoid of material existence, nevertheless predetermine the shape and pattern of the crystal.⁴ The realization of such ordering systems must, of necessity, be symbolic. For the symbol (*Sinnbild* in German, that is, "image of meaning") provides in the form of an analogous image the best possible expression of a content that *per se* is unknown or unknowable. Through the descriptive imagery of the symbolic concept a meaning graspable to consciousness can be mediated where a direct and logically abstract concept would be inadequate. Jung illustrates this as follows:⁵

"The organism confronts light with a new formation, the eye, and the psyche meets the process of nature with a symbolical image, which apprehends the nature process just as the eye catches the light. And in the same way as the eye bears witness to the peculiar and independent creative activity of living matter, the primordial image expresses the unique and unconditioned creative power of the mind. The primordial image therefore is a recapitulatory expression of the living process."

By considering man's experience with the snake we may be

enabled to gain this kind of symbolic access to the "meaning" of its "field of force".

In its behaviour, the living snake, first killing, then devouring its prey *in toto*, represents an image of the totally destructive power of nature. Similarly, snake venom in itself constitutes, as nearly as can be imagined, an example of a total poison. Composed of hæmotoxic complexes, its effects are not limited to the central regulatory mechanism but include general peripheral paralysis, hæmolysis, and interference with cellular end-oxydation;⁶ it destroys the basic life processes throughout. Yet in the staff of Aesculapius the snake is represented as serving the divine healer; the total poisoner restores life and health. Periodically shedding its skin it symbolizes rebirth and immortality.

In mythological symbolism, moreover, the serpent is a paradoxical symbol of the forces bent upon total destruction as well as those striving towards creative renewal, of death and rebirth, of the danger and temptation of instinctual drives and of the wisdom of the unconscious that enhances and widens consciousness.

Thus, according to gnostic doctrine, the son of God, Christ himself, initiated in the form of the serpent the work of redemption by teaching discrimination to the primal parents.⁷ The Ophites worshipped the snake as symbolic of the knowledge and wisdom that creates the world and vouchsafes redemption;⁸ to them it stood for the mystery of life and eternity, the origin of all life and all things.⁹

In Kundalini Yoga the Serpent Power symbolizes the "... Kundalini Shakti or supreme Power in the human body by the arousing of which the Yoga is achieved", together with "the purification of the elements of the body which takes place upon that event". This power "is the Goddess (Devi) Kundalini or that which is coiled; for her form is that of a coiled and sleeping serpent in the lowest bodily centre... until by the means described she is aroused in that Yoga which is named after her. Kundalini is the Divine Cosmic energy in bodies".¹⁰

In the practice of depth psychology the snake symbol, when

met in dreams or phantasies, is taken as referring to the collective unconscious *per se*¹¹ and, more especially, to the autonomous power of the world of instinct.⁸ Thus it represents a reaction arising from the source and origin of consciousness, from natural life prior to awareness and individual existence, the integration of which brings psychological redemption and completion.

Within this general context variations are to be found in the way that the serpent symbol is experienced, which are interestingly characteristic of the differences between Eastern and Western psychology.

One aspect of the snake in Indian mythology is represented by Ananta. This great serpent is thought of as the "remainder", that which after the creation of heaven and earth still remains in a state of non-differentiation. Therefore when the gods and heroes fight the snake they do not destroy it but merely put it in its place. It is not enemy, or the absolute evil, but represents a stratum of being which, unformed and resisting formation, challenges the forces of evolution and awareness, while at the same time constituting a matrix from which further development may result. Thus the snake is the Devi, the earth goddess and the spouse of supreme and absolute Siva, Lord of the Wisdom encompassing Creation and Destruction.¹² The polar tension which occurs here is between differentiation and undifferentiated consciousness or awareness.

In Western symbolism, on the other hand, the snake is the "Evil One", the adversary, the enemy of God who tempts Adam and Eve to sin. (And in American Indian folklore¹³ the snake, Atosis, also tempts the woman.) For the snake is the fear-inspiring earth-soul, the power of the instinctual under-world,^{8, 11} the dragon, and the evil, all devouring Midgard Serpent that must be slain for redemption's sake. In the West, even the redeemer himself must suffer mortification and death of the body to compensate "for the sin of man", that is, for the earthy, human stratum of instinctuality which he partakes of through his incarnation as man—or as "naas" or "ophis" in the gnostic Ophite myth.⁸ This was also the negative aspect of the snake which the Aztecs worshipped in the cruelly bloody and orgiastic rites of Tezealipoca, the Creator, and Huitziopochtli, the Lord of War and Destruc-

tion; Quetzalcoatl, the Feathered Serpent, the redeeming symbol, was in exile, they said—and his day has not yet come.

The polar tension in the Western experience of the snake is between ego-control and the world of drives and passions; it comes less from the conflict between spirit and flesh, consciousness and the drives of blood and passion.

An impressive instance of correspondence to these Eastern and Western attitudes is to be found when the pathogenesis of *Naja*, a member of the largely Eastern family of Elapidae snakes (including cobras, etc.) is compared with that of *Lachesis* or *Crotalus*, representing the Western Crotalidae (the first representing both Bushmasters and Fer-de-lances, the second Rattlesnakes).

The venom of *Naja* acts primarily upon the structures controlling consciousness and awareness, that is, the nervous system. Its toxic effects induce nervous insensitivity, stupor, and depression. The hæmotoxic effect is secondary. *Lachesis*, on the other hand, attacks the blood primarily; while the nervous system is at first aroused and excited. Thus a picture of instinctual imbalance and turbulence is presented by *Lachesis*, which brings to mind the polar tension between controlling ego-discipline and "evil" instincts characteristic of Western experience with the snake; whereas, with *Naja*, the power of awareness is what seems to vanish, and this recalls the axis of tension that characterizes Eastern experience.

Summing up, we may say that when a snake venom is indicated as *similimum*—when the serpent "field of force" is pathologically constellated—then a disintegration has apparently occurred between the consciously willing and controlling personality and the natural wisdom of the instincts which demands greater non-intellectual awareness and more existential experience of the passions and the instinctual drives.

The keynote of the mental picture corresponding to *Lachesis* may be called the threat of un-lived life. In this condition there is a state of anxiety, restlessness, and hypersensitivity due to the threat of an eruption of repressed emotionality and sexuality. The primary phase of anxious excitation is followed by a secondary depression. The often mentioned keynote of jealousy seems to this writer relatively overrated. It is merely a partial aspect of a

more basic symptom; the anxious suspicion resulting from the individual's projected experience in the outside world of the pressure that threatens him from the instinctual level within. At its extreme this may reach a paranoic state: Hence we find symptoms of paranoid nature—*suspicion** and *jealousy*, along with *apprehension about the future, fear of being poisoned, persecuted, etc., fear of death; thinking of oneself as under superhuman control, compelled by spirits and voices; feeling of wickedness, that one has committed an unpardonable sin; indecision; loquacity with raving excitement, increased feeling of one's own capacities, states of ecstasy and exaltation, happiness, cheerfulness with loss of self control; amateness and lasciviousness; raving delirium; loss of memory and compulsion to hurry, disturbance of sense of identity, and of time, etc.*

By comparison the Naja mental picture shows loss of concentration and increasing depression, leading to coma.

The physiologic equivalents are found in the keynote-symptoms—*results of suppressions* and of *suppressed discharges, amelioration from appearance of discharges*. The predominance here of life and blood processes not integrated into the formative elements of individual human functioning expresses itself in the independent vegetative activity of bacterial life as well as in irregularities of blood and liquid distribution; that is, in *inflammations, septic processes, stasis, congestive states, blood decomposition, and purpura*. The physical expression corresponding to the mental anxiety are *spasticity* and *rigor*. Thus we may find *spastic conditions* in any part of the body, *hypersensitivity*, and *hyperthyroidism* (the hyperthyroid individual offers the perfect picture of an anxiety driven organism) with *waves of heat*. Lastly, with the exhaustion of the anxiety defence, there results the paralysis of the vital nerve centres, which in the Naja picture stands in the foreground from the very beginning.

The most peculiar individual characteristics of a remedy—"constitution" are expressed in the "modalities".

The Lachesis modalities fall into line with our overall picture. There is a general, although temporary, improvement and pallia-

* The italicized symptoms are quoted directly from *Materia Medica*.

tion through those factors which increase the ability of the ego structure and consciousness to hold its own for a time against the uprush of the opposing and decomposing unconscious powers; conversely, there is an aggravation from those elements that weaken the conscious resistance further.

Thus *coldness, open air, and motion*, which are generally stimulating and stasis-decreasing, are usually *ameliorative*. Also eating (but not to fullness, as this increases congestion) improves awareness on the sensation level and makes one more "earth conscious" (whereas fasting induces an ecstatic condition). Thus *eating ameliorates*.

Rest, relaxation, sleep, and warmth, all of which reduce conscious awareness, bring about an *aggravation*. So, obviously, does *alcohol* with its depressive effect upon cortical consciousness; and the same is true of the spring and summer seasons which, as every poet knows, tend to enhance emotionality and "arouse the blood".

Where in the remedy picture of the snakes a particular side is emphasized, it is the *left side, or from left to right*. (The supposed right-sidedness of the rattlesnake, *Crotalus*, has repeatedly been questioned.) For the average righthanded person the right side is the side of deliberate, consciously controlled, outgoing action; it is the "sword side". The left, or the "shield side", is inward directed, passively receptive, and rather unconscious.

Thus the snake picture emphasizes the origination of pathology in the unconscious left area which invades the right conscious side of controlling functioning.

Still unexplained and puzzling remains the specific affinity to heart and throat. Our accustomed physiologic understanding seems to give us little insight into any possible association between these areas and our general picture.

However, in India in the Kundalini Yoga, the serpent Kundalini (representing the vital force) is depicted first as being awakened; then as rising to increased consciousness through a sequence of centres of awareness, called *chakras*, which are localized in definite anatomical areas. A relationship between organic structures and states of consciousness is thus hypostasized which is to us quite foreign. The accomplishment of the goal

towards which the Kundalini serpent strives is initiated when the fourth and fifth of these centres are encountered. They are *Anahata* in the heart area and *Vishuddha* in the throat area. The conscious orientation which results when these phases are successfully reached has for its point of reference an inner reality of an entirely new and non-egotistic character unlike anything experienced in the three lower centres where the orientation is determined by merely egotistic and external values and adaptations.¹⁴

This dynamic change of orientation, when it occurs on the heart level (in the *Anahata chakra*) has been likened to the change that alchemical symbolism refers to as *putrefactio*. There the word expresses the decomposition of an existing structure to permit the coming of something new. Old values, conventional and external adaptations collapse; a profound psychological re-orientation is called for, and an upheaval threatens, which also may involve physiologic balances and adaptations.¹⁵

In *Vishuddha*, the throat centre, the upheaval is caused by what the Yogi experiences as "ultimate purification", a phenomenon which has been compared to the "inflowing of the Holy Spirit", the power of the "Logos", the cosmic "Word".¹⁶

Perhaps we shall have to consider the possibility that these old insights of Yoga may have actually realized psychosomatic inter-relationships, localized in the areas represented by the *chakras*, which have so far escaped the attention of our very differently orientated scientific method.

At any rate, these symbolic conceptualizations do seem to fit into the pattern of meaning of our drug picture.

A fundamental change-over, a *metanoia*, may be required when, due to the unconscious evolution of instinct, these centres become spontaneously activated. But if the conscious personality is not adequately prepared to respond to the new necessities of a wider awareness, if it is not ready for a change of existential orientation—for the inflowing of a will and power, not its own—then the *putrefactio* cannot be realized psychologically or lived in terms of consciously new values. Instead it must become a physiological fact, enforcing itself on the deepest unconscious levels of vegetative functioning as tissue breakdown, hæmolytic

or septic illness, cardiac, throat, or thyroid pathology, and even psychotic, schizophrenic dissociation.

We may also note that the snake venoms frequently are required in periods of physiologic transition, particularly in the menopause when the life cycle turns inward. Indeed, the psychological turning inward which happens to all alike in the "afternoon of life" demands of everyone a re-orientation toward inner reality.

Eventually, however, our ability to "shed our skins" like the snake must meet a natural limitation and then the *putrefactio* exceeds the capacities of our organism to endure. When renewal thus becomes a physiologic impossibility Lachesis may assist the ultimate transformation: it is one of the most valuable remedies to ease the suffering of the dying.

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