

The Key Aspects of Arsenicum Album

Avarice

The Arsenicum type becomes greedy not out of selfishness or meanness, but first out of a deeply insecure fear of future lack and the need for preservation. It's not that the patient doesn't want others to have – the problem is he has a greater fear of not having for himself. The patient is unable to give over or share material things, because he or she “might need it someday.” There is a great “What if...” kind of fear. The patient may gather up the oddest collections of things: rubber bands, bits of string, paperclips, pencils, and so forth – and fastidiously organize them, catalog them, and carefully store them away for a rainy day. This patient may have a cellar full of cautiously preserved items because “you just never know what the future will bring.” Ultimately, there is such a need to “have,” that the Arsenicum patient cannot give without expecting in return – always keeping a “balance sheet” of sorts to ensure that there is at least as much coming in as there is going out, whether this is money, material items, affection, does not matter. Such hoarding can bring about the symptoms “ill affects from decayed food and animal matter” and “Injurious affects from fruit” for which Arsenicums are so well known –they will eat rotten food, rather than dispose of it (interestingly, this is poisoning of the self).

Delusion, she is being watched.

The Arsenicum patient can develop a certain paranoia, beginning with great insecurity. There is constant fear that he will be taken advantage of, that someone will take his money, that all around him are thieves and those who would prey on him. Fear, anxiety, and insecurity compound into a suspicion and lack of trust of others – even family members who surely must only be interested in the will (because, of course, the Arsenicum patient is going to die at any

moment). There is greater and greater anxiety for his health, which brings greater and greater anxiety that others are just waiting in the wings for the funeral to be over and the reading of the will to begin. Complicating this is the Arsenicum desire for company and fear of being alone.

Delusion, that he contaminates everything that he touches.

Arsenicum is extremely fastidious, compelled by a need for order, cleanliness, and health. There is such a fear for the health, this patient will eventually become despairing and extremely hopeless, and therefore give up. There may develop an extreme fear of doing harm to others, the patient will get very worked up over any little thing having gone wrong. The patient can experience great moments of sorrow, grief, or guilt, and continually ask to be forgiven for imagined wrongs (“subject to sharp regrets and bitter remorse”). The patient may swing from a great need to doing everything “just so” to a great fear that he has done everything “all wrong.”

Desires to be carried fast.

The Arsenicum patient suffers great internal anxiety and agitation. The constant motion and restlessness is present “in mind as well as in body.” Everything is pressing and of the greatest importance and significance to this patient’s health, and he will constantly seek reassurance in the most urgent ways, phoning the physician, the relatives, the homeopath, insisting that something is dreadfully wrong. This patient cannot accept when he is told he is fine and that nothing is wrong, and will become even more insistent that something be done, checked, retested, or examined again “just to be really certain.” The patients will move fast, talk fast, get straight to the business of telling their symptoms, and cannot be still. This and their strong dependence on others results in the rubric “desires to be carried fast.”

The Arsenicum need for preservation (forever young and forever strong) is countered by the theme of death and decay. The neat, fastidious, properly groomed people, in ill health, literally feel as though they are rotting away. Their discharges smell putrid and decaying, and are described as “cadaveric.” Arsenicum is found in the rubric “Mind, Delusions, That body will putrify.” There are great burning pains, acrid discharges, accompanied by simultaneous vomiting and diarrhea, and other gastric disturbances. There are many aversions to and aggravations from foods...particularly to preserved foods (pickles, sauerkraut, vinegar, olives) and pungent foods – and conversely there may be a desire for these same kinds of foods.

The physical body does not entirely rot in arsenic poisoning, but actually tends towards a sort of preservation, or mummification, at least in the stomach and intestinal tract where the poison has reached, while the remainder of the body may decay after death. It is intriguing that this property is evident also in the themes of “need for preservation” and “fear of death and decay”. Arsenic can be tested for and found present in even the oldest poisoned cadavers (it preserves itself). Chinese testing of the use of arsenic in twelve patients with acute promyelocytic leukemia (PML) has given some evidence of the preservative power of arsenic in that eight of the twelve went into remission for as long as ten months.¹

The patient’s body may be icy cold (as in death), and they may experience sensations of a lump or of coldness in the stomach after drinking cold drinks. They may have either a desire for or aversion to cold drinks, and wish to drink in small sips, but they will feel better for warmth and warm drinks. There may be a feeling of dust or smoke in the air passages, and these patients may experience difficulty with respiration due to dust, smoke, or other airborne substances (white arsenic is a dusty powder).

¹ Vermeulen, Frans. Prisma.

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