

HIDING IN MY SAFE HOUSE

A case of *Testudo hermanni* for menstrual problems and anxiety

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SUMMARY: A woman with a history of sexual abuse in early childhood and rejection by her parents seeks safety in the refuge of her house, outside of which she feels unsafe and vulnerable. *Testudo hermanni*, the tortoise, relieves her of her excessive vaginal bleeding and fibromyalgia, as well as her constant anxiety.

KEYWORDS: Early sexual abuse, vulnerability, hiding at home, irregular menstrual bleeding and clotting, fibromyalgia, reptiles, *Testudo hermanni*

Hermann's tortoise (*Testudo hermanni*) is one of three species of tortoise of the genus *Testudo* native to the European part of the Mediterranean and is found as two subspecies: *Testudo hermanni hermanni* and *Testudo hermanni boettgeri*. Hermann's tortoises are overwhelmingly herbivorous, diurnal reptiles which can reach an old age comparable to that of humans. The destruction of their traditional habitats and their popularity as pets have severely impacted the numbers found in the wild so that conservation measures are now necessary to ensure their long-term survival.

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A 42-year-old mother of three comes seeking help with irregular menses and excessive bleeding. She tells me straightaway in the waiting room, "I take only herbs. I don't trust white coats; I don't want to be vulnerable and dependent on their system. I have never tried homeopathy but I'm curious to see if it will work."

Even before the case-taking has started, I have noticed these themes: Curiosity, lack of trust and vulnerability.

She is short and overweight, with thick fingers and a great deal of abdominal fat. She walks in to the consulting room in a clumsy manner; before she sits down I catch her eyes wandering around the room. She explains, "Just making sure you are qualified to help me. Do homeopathic medicines cause addiction or side effects? I know they can cause aggravation, I read that on the Internet."

ANAMNESE

"Remedies are not known to cause any dependence. Please tell me, what is your problem?"

"My menses always came in like clockwork, every 28th day. Three years ago, I had just discovered that my current boyfriend was secretly planning on dumping me. I grew suspicious and asked him, then we broke up. I have never been without a boyfriend. I soon found a new guy. We were out having dinner and suddenly I felt the beginnings of a warm vaginal discharge. This turned into extended bleeding with large dark clots, lasting for over two weeks. Then it stopped just as suddenly as it began. There was a one-week gap and then the discharge started again. This is going on – two weeks bleeding, one week off – for the past three years. Herbs did nothing. My new boyfriend lost patience and we broke up, but that is the least of my problems."

Themes: Sexuality, suddenness of complaints. While she describes her complaints and breakups, she does not show any emotions at all. Sensitivity to secrecy and suspicion.

"How does this bleeding affect you?"

"I become lethargic, slower than usual. I don't want to get out of my house, I just want to pull myself together, be in the bed, pull the comforter over my head and become invisible to the world. But I can't. I have to work. People ask me, what is wrong? I get angry and want to snap their heads off for intruding in my personal matter. Why can't they just leave me alone?"

Themes: Hiding, anger, work is important, wants to be alone and invisible, me vs you.

"Describe your feeling of being in the house."

"I am snug, warm and safe. I sit tight and don't move, don't lose energy. Nobody gets me. I don't answer phones, I just stay put until the bleeding stops."

"Describe 'house'."

"It is tough, strong, my safe place, my house, I cannot be without it; if I have nothing else in the world, at least I have my house. It protects me."

"Can you tell me about any other time in the past when you felt like not leaving the house?" (*I want to learn if hiding in the house is a constant theme in her life.*)

"I was molested when I was eight years old. I refused to go to school but Mom dragged me out. In the school, I hid under the desk. I did not want to be seen. If I am in my house or under the desk no one can see me. If people see me, it is dangerous. They want something, they take it. I cannot defend myself. When I am in my house, I am safe, protected and unapproachable. An earthworm buries itself in a hole, it does not get squished. It comes out and gets squished. I do not want to get squished. If I am not in my house, I can be molested, squished, torn apart, eaten up."

Themes: Hiding in the house is a recurrent theme. House is her safe place. She gives an imagery of an earthworm that gets squished when it comes out of the earth, but there is no energy attached to this imagery. She has not used any words that point toward worms. Sexual molestation in early childhood.

"So, if you leave your house, you do not feel protected?"

"Yes. My house is my fort. I pull myself in; bunch myself into a snug ball. The lights are off and the drapes are drawn. No one can see me. I am inside." (she makes a whole-body gesture of hunching over, pulling in her limbs and tucking her head)

"No one can break in, it is my castle. In fact, on my property, I chose a house site deep in the woods. The driveway is gravelly and full of ruts – on purpose – which makes it hard for people to just drive up to my house and find me. The trails, paths and the driveway are totally unmarked. Intruders get lost before they find the house and me in it." Now she is laughing loudly, "Think about it, hiding in my house and dodging intruders. Very clever idea!"

Theme: House is her fort, pulling limbs in and bunching into a ball (makes an energetic whole-body gesture) and has a clever plan for deceiving intruders by hiding.

"My kids asked for a piece of land to build a hunting lodge. I refused. My parents threw me out when I was 13. After bad things happened to me when I was eight, my parents blamed me and beat me as often as they could. I had to struggle to find food and stay alive. I have been staying with nasty relatives and working at odd jobs since I was thrown out. I put myself through college. My parents didn't care for me or support me, why should I care for my kids? They can fend for themselves," she says, again, without any emotions. "I have saved money all my life so I could buy land and build my house."

Theme: Lack of parental nurturing, competition for resources – land.

"How do you experience feeling unsafe?"

"My boss is a vulture. I am diligent and hardworking. He exploits me; he throws huge piles of work on me and he knows I will not refuse. Every time he does that it feels like I fall hard on a rock. I go crunch. I fall apart and feel totally at his mercy. I hate this feeling because it is the same feeling as when I am away from my house; I am exposed, unsafe, an easy target for



My home is my castle: the "stone house" in the mountains of Fafe, Portugal, is one of the few houses around the world that have been built into stone boulders. The inhabitants may justifiably feel secure in this stone-fortified stronghold.

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people like my boss. He knows that my life depends on my job. I cannot quit."

Theme: Feels like a victim, a prey rather than a predator. Job, income and house are very important for her safety.

"If you had the freedom to quit this job, what would you like to do?"

"I would stay in my house. The world is a dangerous place, people are mean. They know your weakness and exploit you. You can't always take revenge and hit back. Sometimes, the best you can do is dig a deep hole in the ground and hide, let the layers of dirt and rock protect you."

Theme: This is an expression of a prey animal that experiences threat from the world / predators, and its only form of protection is hiding in its house. Reptilian issue: dark view of humanity. Since being in her house equals safety and she has a negative view of the outside world and people.

I ask her to describe how she feels when outside of her house.

"I am fat and ugly, very slow and clumsy. I feel vulnerable. Anyone could grab and abuse me. It feels like I am naked, I have no cover, no shelter. It is miserable; I don't want to feel this way. I would rather hide in my house and stay put until it is safe enough to come out. Well, I do go to work, I shop.... but all the while I feel unsafe and exposed. It takes a lot of energy to be out and about. With this heavy bleeding, I don't have energy to spare."

Theme: She connects her main presenting complaint to her ongoing theme of feeling safe in the house and unsafe outside.

"How do you experience a lack of energy?"

"I see everyone else being so energetic, bouncing off the walls, and wonder what steroid they are on. I envy them. For the past three years, my energy is low. I have been lethargic, slow. I just want to bunch up into a tight ball and slip into my house (repeats her whole body gesture). I don't even show my head to the outside world. People do mean things to others."

Theme: She is back again on the theme of feeling safe in her house and the world is a dangerous place. The issue of envy is emerging.

"Do you have any fears?"

"God forbid something should happen to my house, where will I go? When one boyfriend goes I get a new one without any commitments and vows, but my house is my refuge. With my health concerns, I feel exposed when I am outside and that level of vulnerability frightens me. I am independent, not afraid of losing people. But I would like my horrible boss to go away. He knows I need work to keep my house. He exploits me because he knows my weak point. That makes me afraid."

Theme: High sexuality, fear of damage to her house. Victim language.

"Are you usually chilly or hot?"

"Don't be fooled by my fat. I am always chilly. I would like to stay in a warm, dry place so I do not spend so much energy just keeping myself warm. About fears, it is not a fear but pure hatred. I hate potato chips, for that matter, anything that is crunchy. The sound of food crunching in my mouth freaks me out, gives me goosebumps."

"Any other complaints?"

"No."

SUMMARY AND THE SALIENT FEATURES OF THE CASE:

Animal themes 1: Curiosity, me versus you, competition for resources (land), vulnerability, hiding, anger, envy, victim and aggressor.

Reptilian themes 2¹: Lack of trust, high sexuality, independent and alone, early sexual abuse, deceiving intruders, dark view of humanity, the world is a dangerous place, lack of parental care (not received and not giving). Suddenness of complaint.

Danger comes up suddenly. People are mean and exploit her weakness. Suspicion.

Row 4 language²: Safety and security from house, job, income, hard-working, main concern is self-protection.

Prey animal language^{3, 4}: With the main theme of self-protection, the focus is not on the attack and the attacker, but on the capacity to defend oneself from the attack. To achieve this, they work hard, are conscientious and task oriented. They focus on safety, security and building a strong house. Fear that suddenly bad things can happen.

ANALYSE

Patient feels unsafe, vulnerable, unprotected, exposed, exploited by boss who knows her weakness; her defence mechanism is pulling herself in and hiding in her house (*whole body gesture with high energy*). Since row four themes are strong in this case, this indicates a row four prey animal (see below), one that depends on hiding in its house for self-protection.

The Joshis⁵ have placed several animals in row four of the periodic table, corresponding to the Iron series – arthropods, spiders, fish, reptiles, many different mammals, egg-laying mammals as well as marsupials (rows 3, 4). The issues presented by this patient point to reptiles and the reptiles in row four are those of the testudines, namely turtles, tortoises and terrapins.

Testudine themes:¹ House is a castle, a safe place where she can hide from danger. Shows a highly energetic whole body gesture "pulling myself together, tucking my head, bunching in to a ball and hiding in my house till danger passes." Fear of something happening to her house. Strong hatred of crunching sounds. During casetaking, I have given the patient complete freedom to speak about what matters to her the most. Recurrent emergence of key themes can be observed simply by listening to the life narrative. From understanding these themes, it is possible to discover which row of the periodic table she belongs to. The Joshis have used Jan Scholten's work⁶ on the periodic table of elements to explain the level of development in the human beings. They have further expanded the concept of the periodic table to place animals in various rows. This placement is based on the animal's prey/predator instincts and the central theme of their lifestyle in nature³.

Since this patient has shown the theme of hiding in her safe house for security, has indicated that she works very hard at her job to keep her house and that when she is out of it she feels vulnerable, insecure and fearful, she has been placed in row four of the periodic table (3). She has expressed reptilian themes.

REMEDY SELECTION

I use information from Rajan Sankaran's work² to rule out various reptiles and differentiate between those that depend on their house for safety and survival. Turtles and tortoises emerge as top choices and I study the difference between these two animals and base my prescription on this information.

Prescription: *Testudo hermanni 30C*, dissolved in water, one teaspoon per day for three days.

Follow up 1, two months after the remedy.

Blood clots have become much smaller and very infrequent. Flow is much lighter. Duration of flow has been reduced from two weeks to less than a week. In the past, the flow returned after a gap of one week. This gap has increased to three weeks. She is feeling overall much better.

Follow up 2, four months after the remedy.

She reports feeling better. No change in the description of flow.

Prescription: Sac lac.

Follow up 3, six months after the remedy.

She sees an occasional small clot and wonders if the symptoms are returning, but says she is not bothered by it. Very energetic. Not complaining about her boss.

Reappearance of clots and the patient's suspicion about the symptoms returning indicate that it is time for a repeat of the remedy.

Prescription: *Testudo hermanni 30C*, one dose.

Follow up 4, twelve months after the initial remedy.

"I had forgotten to mention about my fibromyalgia that I had diagnosed using the Internet. I always had aches and pains, enough to make me apply for a sick-day leave and stay home. I thought it was due to my obesity. I have not changed my diet, I have not done any fancy exercises, but I am feeling much less achy. I feel so good on some days that I wonder if I ever had fibromyalgia. I wonder if the remedy you gave had anything to do with making fibromyalgia go away besides making my menses normal?" With her health concerns resolved, she reports feeling cheerful and is more confident about going out of her house. I wish her well, ask her to contact me as needed and thank her for using homeopathy for her wellness.

COMMENT

I feel that we homeopaths are very fortunate to have so many great teachers who share with us their wealth of knowledge and experience. I fondly recall my teacher, Misha Norland, who encouraged me to learn from all sources and use any technique and system that works for my patients, which is exactly what I have done here, combining the teachings of various master homeopaths. This case shows that we can be relaxed, peaceful and stress-free during case taking. Our peaceful energy affects our patients. They feel relaxed during casetaking and share their narrative more readily. They also tend to connect better with us and become more receptive to the healing potential of the remedy.

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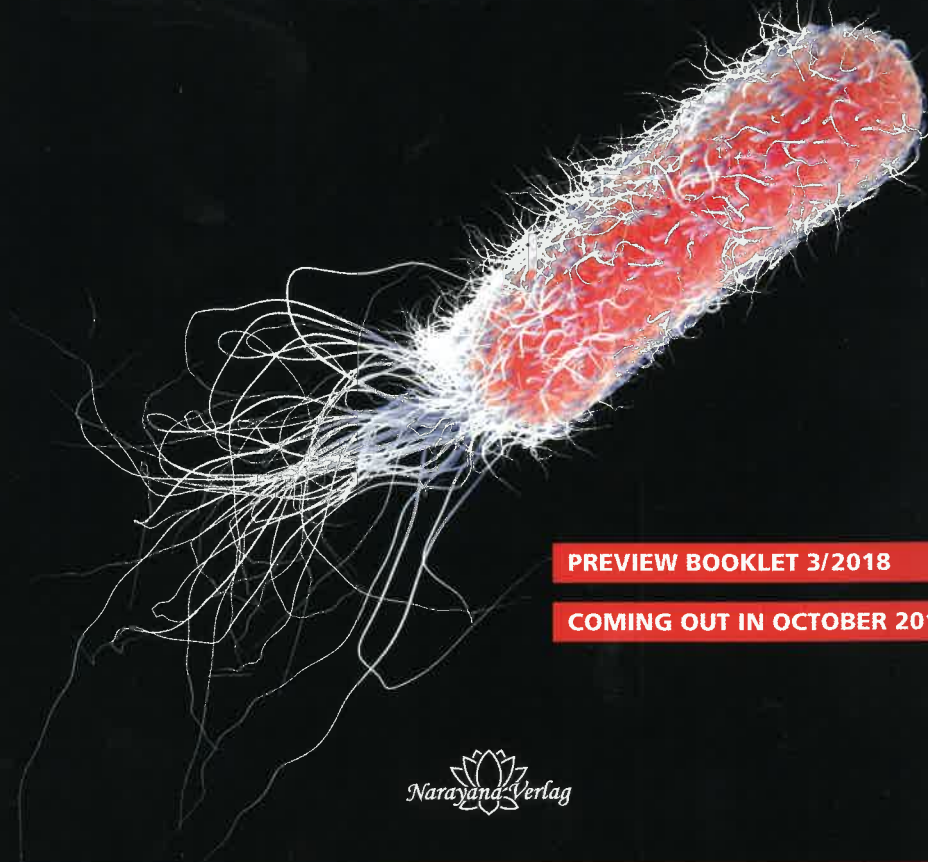
MS, PhD, PDHom, CCH, RSHom (NA), was the Chief of Clinical Microbiology services at a children's hospital in Chennai, India, where she conducted research with the World Health Organization and published extensively. On moving to the USA to start a family, Vatsala pursued an education in homeopathy at Misha Norland's School of Homeopathy. An author of nine books (www.InnerTraditions.com) and many essays and articles on homeopathy, health and spirituality, Vatsala continues to study with several teachers. She practices classical homeopathy in Vermont, currently volunteers on the case review committee of the CHC and has served on the board of directors of NASH. Vatsala can be reached via her website, [Contact: www.rochesterhomeopathy.com](http://www.rochesterhomeopathy.com).

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