



The touch of peat – inherent healing power of nature

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There is no doubt that the philosophical substantiation of naturopathy ('natural medicine') is based on the premise that nature is given an inherent healing power by which it is enabled to start a healing process in every sick individual if stimulated. Therefore, we are able to say that the difference between naturopathy and allopathy¹ is demonstrated by comparing the behaviour of a naturopathic doctor to that of an allopathic one. The naturopath only needs to trigger a mechanism that is found in the natural power itself in a way; one can say that a naturopath uses a homespun pattern for healing processes. In contrast, the allopath has first to look for these forces of healing, in order to mobilise them as the base of a pattern still to be knitted. Of course, this is only one of the ways to explain this difference. Moreover it must be stated that naturopathy always follows the principle of holism ('Ganzheitslehre'), whereas allopathy – which is characteristically subdivided into many sub-disciplines – uses a kind of collection of tools in which the complicated aids to be used may be applied one after the other or side by side, according to their effectiveness with respect to the physical and chemical processes to be put into appropriate healing action.

On the other hand it is obvious that naturopathy – especially its most prominent sub-discipline peat therapy – as a holistic discipline uses to a high degree, two allies. These are firstly long-term-medication and secondly spa and health resort treatment, called 'kurortology', a term born in Eastern Europe which is very practical so that we may use it in future. These two allies have a high rank in naturopathy. In this context, peat therapy is almost the perfect example of a combination of balneology and balneotherapy, which both go back to the tradition of the classical Graeco-Roman hydrotherapy.

In this context we should use the term 'peloid therapy' because the material used is not only peat but other types of muddy 'pelos'. A combination of peloid therapy and kurortology gives the advantages of this progressive therapy in terms of efficiency, but exactly this combination has been found to have some disadvantages as well, which appeared in the last few years. They were due to non-medical developments, changes in public law and economy including political management of health care questions. In this context it is necessary to concentrate on the situation in Central Europe.

This is reasonable because peat therapy – seen from the statistical and historical viewpoint – is a Central European speciality. This has to do with the development of naturopathy as a whole, which becomes clear if one looks at the list of names of the founders of ancient and modern naturopathy. Antique medicine played an important role in the view of the human body in the light of holistic philosophy right back to the concepts of **Aristotle** (384–322 BC). Here, psychosomatic thinking came into being and the first steps at balneological treatment were taken, which later, in the Roman Empire flowered into the well known

hydrotherapy, based on the recommendations of **Asklepiades of Prusa** (124–60 BC), **Caelius Aurelianus** (end of 2nd century BC) and recommended by the famous collector **Galenos** (131–201 AD). Of course, peloid therapy has roots which were much older, going back to **Anaximander of Milos** who said that all organisms evolve from the earth's mud ('pelos'), which was postulated by **Parmenides of Elea** (540–470 BC) who declared that pelos (= primeval mud) was the cradle of mankind, so now we see that the light-hearted change of the bible text:

EN APXH HN O ΛΟΓΟΣ - 'in the beginning there was the word'
into

EN APXH HN O ΠΗΛΟΣ - 'in the beginning there was mud'

is in a way justified.

Naturopathy itself comes from **Empedocles of Agrigent** (490–430 BC) and **Hippocrates of Kos** (460–377 BC). In those days peloid therapy must have been known already. It seems that it came into use in the form of open-air treatment in pools, like the self-applicative wallowing of some animals (elephant, wild boar, elk and so on). We know of some traces of that from the peatbog of Philippi (Greek Macedonia), and the fluviatile thermal mud of the Pistyan (Slovakia) and Dax (France) types (Karagounis, 1992; Lüttig, 2006). At the same time the tradition of peloid coatings and dressings, reported by Pliny the Younger (23–79 AD) came into use, in a way as a predecessor of the fango technique, which was imported by the Ostrogoths from the Crimea and Balkan into the late Roman Empire (Lüttig, 2006, 2008).

The point is that in those early days of history, the holistic tradition and embodiment is already visible in

¹ The treatment of disease by conventional means.



medicine, therapy and application technique. This characteristic trait was renewed when naturopathy came to its renaissance in the 18th and 19th centuries. It is a strange but indisputable fact that the initiators of this renaissance came solely from Germanic language countries. And Cody (1999) is totally right when he says: 'The physical origins of naturopathy were clearly Germanic', being associated with the following men:

Vincent Priessnitz (1799–1851),

Johann Schroth (1798–1856),

Father Sebastian Kneipp (1821–1897),

Arnold Rickley (1823–1926),

Heinrich Lahmann (1860–1905), and

Adolf Just (1939)

The last-named is responsible for the import of naturopathy to the United States. This geographical predominance is responsible for the obvious fact that there are distributional deficits in modern peat therapy, which is relevant to countries outside Central and Eastern Europe. This is characteristic of anglophone, and romanophone countries, although balneology is of a high standard there. Instead of peat, other peloids, mainly 'boues thermales', 'thermal muds', mostly of fluvial and limnic origin – including fango – have taken over the role of peat there (Lüttig, 2006).

Like other holistic therapeutic treatment, peat therapy shows a strong connection to psychoanalytical treatment, and there is an obvious similarity, which is much in evidence in the respective medications – of which the 'full' peat-pulp bath is the perfect example: a kind of fluidum, a

specific atmosphere which not only affects the body of the patient but the psyche as well. This impact is extremely curative, but not easily explainable or portrayable. There is a peculiar magic in this phenomenon. The author has been able to observe this phenomenon extensively over a period of many years, studying people and their reactions in some resorts, before and after a peat-pulp bath, including self-applications. The great balneo-gynaecologist Dr. Hans Baatz (1979), famous doyen of German spa doctors wrote a delightful report containing similar observations. Thus the author is able to judge this reaction in a reliable way.

Here, it is necessary to insert one remark, and this is necessary because of some condescending criticism coming from certain medical circles. It is almost idle to demonstrate the advantage of peat balneology in a scientific way. This can easily be done by referring to the thermophysical and biochemical observations collected from decades of experience. In other scientific and technical fields one would talk about this situation that the current knowledge and practice are 'the state of the art', as documented by a wealth of data published by many authors (e.g. Goecke and Lüttig, 1987; Göttlich 1990; Gutenbrunner and Hildebrandt, 1998; Beer, Lüttig and Lukanoc, 2000, and many others). There is a wide field of medical conditions that are successfully treatable by peat therapy (Table 1), which underlines this statement. And we should not forget the results from veterinary medicine in this context (Table 2) as well.

Nothing is more striking in this connection and nothing gives a better basis for judgement than one's own observations and experience. Therefore, some personal episodes and

Table 1. Human – medical conditions requiring peat-therapy

Dermatological field: Antiphlogistic, antiinflammatory, antibacterial, antiviral interventions

— mycosis infections (Tinea Pedum) — dermatitis — neurodermatitis — psoriasis — acne — sun – protection.

Gynaecological field: Sterility — ovarian insufficiency — functional ovarian dysregulations

— adhesions — salpingitis — uterus hypoplasia — postoperative infiltrations — abdominal fusions — vaginal scar formations — geriatric atrophy — climacterial syndrome — vesicular irritations — infections of herpes and papilloma virus type — disturbances of the menstrual cycle — dysmenorrhoea — functional disturbances of the libido — inflammatory flour vaginalis and cervicalis — pturitis fulvae — osteoarthropatic backache — postoperative syndromes — conditional postoperative carcinomal distortions.

Locomotion system: Dysregulations in the vertebrae, hip and shoulder system — inflammatory rheumatological diseases (arthritis) — polyarthritis — spondylitis arkylosans (Morbus Bechterew) — degenerative joint diseases (arthrosis) — extraarticular rheuma (muscular atrophy) — sciatica.

Internal medicine: Certain inflammations of the gastro-intestinal tract — gastric and duodenal ulcers — metabolic diseases triggered hormonally — adpositas — anexora — special impairments of hepatic – biliary system — hepatitis B — bronchial, including relapsing br. diseases — irregularities of circulation.

Urology: Certain types of impairment of the renal system — podagra — prostatites.

Habilitative medicine: General reproductive and immunological debility — immunomodulative impairment — damage from contamination (pesticides, nucleids, chemical weapons) — deficiencies in biostimulation — problems after neoplastic and accident operations — aftertreatment of degenerative disorders of the locomotion system.

Ophthalmological field: Eye infections in the tropical system — ulnus corneae (viral) — eye haemorrhage — preventive cataract measures.

Dental field: Prevention and after-care of gingivitis, caries, tartar treatment.



Table 2. Conditions requiring peat therapy in veterinary medicine

Diseases of internal organs:

Adaption problems after weaning of young stock (e. g. diarrhoea) — immunomodulative defects — allergic reactions (insects, skin problems) — hepatoprotection — anti-ulcer measures.

Breeding and nutrition:

Prevention of weaning problems (see above) — enhancement of growth and weight (protein production) — improvement of biological activity — reduction of antibiotica and other drug consumption — improvement of blood count — meat-flavour enhancing in the case of meat-stock — deodorization and modulation of digestion processes and products (meteorism, stench of manure and dung).

In the case of mammals many of the indications in human medicine can be applied in veterinary medicine.

memories may be worth mentioning: The author was lucky when occasionally visiting his fatherly friend Hans Baatz in his surgery at Pymont spa and was allowed to observe his approach. Baatz's striking method of investigation during the patients' first visit was outstanding; I was astonished at his approach to the symptoms. This was done as a kind of encirclement, which looked like a spectacular military operation. This first visit used to last a whole hour. With this thoroughness the relevant lady must have got the impression that the doctor was present for her exclusively. He used to scrutinise things that looked insignificant with respect to the main dys-regulation. The first thing he used to do was to look at the locomotion system, especially the state of the feet. He used to send his patients to an orthopaedic shoemaker first, in order to bring this system into good order. In this way the surroundings of the dys-regulation used to be cleared up in Baatz's holistic approach, and step by step he came to the core of the problem.

There was **one** piece of advice that was particularly amazing. He gave the order to his clients to complete their obligatory recreational rest after the peat-pulp bath not in the rooms of the sanatorium but outside on the so-called 'meadow of silence'. This is a part of the Pymont spa garden, which – not only in my opinion – is one of the most beautiful spa parks in Europe. The patients were asked to rest there for two hours, in good weather on the meadow and in bad weather under a shelter, wrapped in blankets. There it was strictly forbidden to talk but to close one's little chatterbox; even the rustling of newspapers was forbidden. The ladies should lie comfortably, dream or sleep in this charming environment, and relax – a real re-creation! Just with this order Baatz has shown himself to be an artist amongst connoisseurs of ladies' souls, because there is hardly any other means to achieve an adequate relaxation and recreation effect!

And then the peat-pulp bath itself! Owing to the inherent thermo-physical disposition and secondly the biochemical stimulation and the processes going on in this type of bath, it is of unsurpassable efficiency. The patient gently slides into the primeval mud, as a kind of surrender, so that the mud can cover and surround the body, coming into close contact with the skin, which is the largest organ of a human being, in an unobtrusive but consequent manner. There is not any problem with the high temperature (+ 38 to 44 degrees centigrade, depending on the basic individual temperature, to be tested beforehand).

It is easily accepted, because scalding is impossible (Kleinschmidt, 1994). Heat is transported by conduction, not convection, into the core of the body, and the famous superheating effect is triggered (Dietrich, 1987). The buoyancy effect begins to relieve joints and bones in a pleasant manner. Some of the substances in the peat start to penetrate the skin, which they make smooth and tight, and trigger processes of regulative metabolism. The blood volume will be circulated; antiseptic, antiphlogistic, antiviral and antibacterial processes start to act, while the characteristic smell of peat acts as a catalytic agent to the senses to relax. Transpiration, which starts to act first in the forehead, creates a feeling of well-being of body and soul, emanating from the prenatal darkness of the primeval mud, where – according to **Parmenides** – man comes from. This allows total surrender to the black, diabolic element of **Hephaistos**, in turn permitting interaction between the good and the evil (which is the reason for the illness), so that this famous *complexio oppositorum* (in the sense of **Paracelsus**: see C. Jung, 1967; Lüttig, 1989) can be brought into action, in order to release the golden radiation of the stars and the sun – as complementary colour to black of the Devil's – which can then come into action. For this is salvation from the evil, here lies dormant energy, here is the healing effect. In the words of psychoanalysis this means: a kind of cosy stupor in the peat-pulp bath, meditative relaxation, passing into the mystic netherworld are only steps in a transitional course of events which – at the same time – merge ultimately into revival, and reappear in a new epoch of sparkling gold and relief, an epoch of healing. In this way one should understand the peat-bath as a chain of events: from black to gold, evil to good, sickness to health. And there is nothing more impressive and beautiful than the appeasement one can feel coming back to present day after the bath by waking up in a spa park meadow to the smell of fresh-cut grass and – as in Bad Pymont – to the fragrance of blossoms of the famous azalea park. The author cannot understand at all why they don't use this curative factor cure-park more extensively: it supports the success of a cure to a high degree, mainly if combined with other psychological methods e.g. music therapy (in the sense of Bernatzky *et al.*, 2000, and others).

It is obvious that he who is giving a report on curative measures in such a bucolic way will be subject to an allegation not to have an eye for the many problems in



which peat therapy is entangled these days. Because the present-day situation does in fact, not look so idyllic.

Peloid therapy is, speaking about Central Europe and its home countries at least, in a phase of dire straits. This has the following reasons:

- As a part of curative therapy it is subject – as articulated by representatives of allopathy, health insurance, and health politics – to the reproach that it is partly responsible for the rising cost of health promotion. This is obviously incorrect, but it is true that counterpropaganda is swept constantly aside. In Germany expenditure on kurortology was in the last few years constantly at a level of 1,9 % of the total health bill (Lüttig, 2003). The main cause of the expenses is the hospitals.
- The relevant distortion of the facts has brought some spas, health resorts and its installations into economic trouble. In many places this has caused a fall in the number of clients, the dismissal of staff, the closing of medical, gastronomic and tourist installations and the abandonment of applicative structures. There are health resorts which now no longer offer peat baths; there are physicians who flinch from prescribing cures because they argue that these would not be reimbursed by the relevant insurance company – which is not true at all.
- In some circles the efficiency of balneological cures is called into question without evidence. For some applications and preparations licences have been withdrawn by the health authorities (for example so called peat drinking cures). Some authorities have stopped giving concessions for peat excavations for curative purposes.
- There is now a general tendency for cures to have a shorter duration than before; the standard was four weeks duration. The reason was that due to snobbish ideas of the tourist trade people, a new type of cure, the so called 'kururlaub' has been introduced, which means that there should be a combination of cure and vacation ('urlaub'). In this way the number of clients should become higher. The relevant plan, however, showed up to be a disastrous boomerang, because public opinion said that he who used to pay for his holidays out of his own pocket would certainly also be able to pay for a 'kururlaub' without any help from a health insurance company. The new form of cure, called 'compact cure', which meant three weeks, brought unforeseen consequences, in other words, there was a fall in the number of clients. In these days there is a strong movement towards even shorter-duration stays, a repetition of weekend stays, weekend stays in wellness hotels; and this has to do with the apprehension of the respective clients that they might be fired from their jobs if they showed too much interest in curative and leisure 'holidays' at a time when industry is increasingly showing strict employment discipline. At the same time this has to do with a change of recreation and health care philosophy by the introduction of a 'wellness' and 'fun-bath' culture. This is disastrous for kurortology and national health care;

there is an urgent need for the medical authorities to face up to this nonsense more consistently.

- At a time of increasing use of electronic communication irresponsible businesses have taken their chance to attract customers by pulling the wool over their eyes by propagating an illusory world of mail-order or internet-order medicine. In these days it is possible to purchase an increasing number of drugs and pharmaceutical preparations – even some products from the field of curative peat as well – by electronic order, to apply them without any medical advice. Under these relevant articles you may find a long list of sham merchandise. The door is wide open to any kind of charlatanism. This is true of some overseas countries. In the author's country countermeasures exist but they are rather weak. The same is true of false declaration of drugs and preparations, e.g. in the field of healing earths (Lüttig, 2007) where there is no legal protection. The same is happening with respect to control of the curative peat used in spas and health resorts, where quality control, if any, follows local rules that are inconsistent, fortuitous and uncritical. Any assistance from national peat experts of international bodies (like the IPS) is not welcome. Any hope that the EC would act in this direction is idle, because it does not feel any responsibility, and the interest of this organisation seems to lie in the production of regulations on paper more or less divorced from any interest in norms or standardisation.

In spite of all this discouragement in the field of curative peat utilisation we, meaning the relevant IPS Commission VI and its experts, are confronted again and again by an increasing interest in naturopathic issues, which is actually not surprising at a time of public awareness of 'Man's Dependence on the Earth' (Archer, Lüttig and Snezhko, 1987). Thus, we find ourselves on the top of a wave of environmental sciences, and the IPS with its programme 'Wise Use of Peat' is not the only international non-governmental organisation acting in this field. But the small rowing boat in which we are rowing in an ocean of therapeutic problems has one or two leaks in some places, and sometimes it looks as if we don't have either a compass or a sextant. Whenever we, the old hands of peat therapy, get requests for advice from many people interested in health questions, e.g. from Anglo-Saxon countries outside Central Europe, some every week, they are often perplexingly naive. Most of the inquires do not have any idea about the peloid material which could be useful, nor do they have any notion about technical requirements, and there is, of course, a lack of knowledge of the many tricks with which this crazy material called peat, needs to be handled for the various types of application, especially medical application. Knowledge of the literature is very poor in some cases; this is understandable due to language problems, but nothing is really insurmountable. But more danger comes from opposition from medical circles, those white gods who refer to modern medicine and its remarkable technical advances (like computer tomography, heart surgery and so on) and



pharmacy, who dazzle those poor naturopaths and try to damp their optimism.

We should – notwithstanding this damper – never forget to support this group of beneficent and willing people of ethical excellence who are full of enthusiasm to help those fellow-men who are damaged by the stress of civilization or living under humiliating circumstances. In this case naturopathy is the right method and the ‘old hands’ should be at their disposal with advice. On the other hand it is imperative that newcomers do accept that advice which cannot be obtained from computer data storage. Additionally in the group of newcomers there should be some basic expertise in at least one of the medical disciplines favourable to peloid therapy (gynaecology, rheumatology, dermatology etc.), combined with an intension to approach this in a holistic way. Then the right type of therapist can develop. In this way there are thousands of chances of finding an opening in the market that can provide a chance of building up a successful practice or consulting; there are enough favourable examples. In this context it is advantageous to take veterinary medicine into consideration because we know examples where special treatment (e.g. of joint diseases of racehorses treated with peat packages, indisposition of domestic animals, problems in animal breeding, nutrition difficulties, immunomodulative measures etc.) has led to sensational success.

But not only courage is required but basic balneotherapeutical knowledge combined with the famous gentle touch, both in the spirit of the fundamental philosophy of ganzheits medicine as practised by the fathers of naturopathy. These are the necessary prerequisites of modern peloid therapy.

And so you see, that, the last word has certainly not been spoken.

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