William LeSassier 1948-2003: A Tribute to the Man and His Work

by Matthew Wood, RH (AHG)

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The task before me, as a writer, is not a simple one. William LeSassier was about as complex and many-faceted a person as one is ever likely to meet. He had enough experiences to fill the biographies of ten people. He was a person for whom the spiritual, non-material world was ordinary reality. The title "psychic intuitive transmedium" would fit him exactly — he was someone who could pick up other's feelings effortlessly. William saw into peoples' souls and felt deeply the injuries and sadnesses to which the human race is prone. His perceptive depth made him an outsider and his sensitivities made him a private person. Over this he tried to maintain a rugged facade. Every once in awhile his students and friends were treated to an autobiographical nugget, but he never attempted to fill in the blanks.

William was, in the end, a mystery, even to his closest friends and family, and perhaps even to himself.

The Man

William LeSassier was born in Houston, Texas, in 1948, the son of educated parents. His grandfather was a noted geologist, his father an oil engineer. The family was Cajun. They moved to Midland when he was two years old, and this would always be his "hometown." He graduated from high school and gravitated to Southern California. "Some of the older theosophists in Ojai took me under their wing," he said. He studied palmistry, astrology, color therapy, and herbalism. In order to get a medical education he attended the first two years of medical school at

UCLA as a nonpaying observer. By age twenty he was already an active healer. If William wished to know something he would set aside everything to seek out that knowledge. In 1970 it was not easy to learn Chinese medicine. Most of the available teachers did not speak English or were not willing to talk to English-speakers about their craft. William found a Chinese physician with whom he wished to study. "I camped on his doorstep until he took me on as a student." William did not just learn the facts, but internalized the subject so thoroughly that it gained a new life in his mind and generated thoughts and expressions that were original, therapeutic, and educational. He was a master of his trade: diagnostician, herbalist, body worker, healer.







Taraxacum officinale

Dioscorea villosa

In the early seventies William moved to Taos, New Mexico, opened an herb store, ran a school of healing, married, and had a daughter—Ona. Here he worked with many Native Americans and Spanish and exchanged information. "I soaked up information like a sponge." He was also an itinerant herbalist, traveling the country as well as in Mexico and the Amazon. William was a contributor to Well Being, one of the first alternative medical renaissance magazines in 1975-6.

While in Taos, a pivotal event occurred in William' s life. He had a vision of a system of herbal practice which he called "Pythagorean" or "Triune system." This event, which occurred at the same time as the breakup of his marriage, will be described below. In 1983 William moved to New York City. "Nowhere else could I find so many conscious people to work with," he said. He set up a store in the East Village called Chiron's Magic Minerals, where he sold gemstones and saw clients. He married a second time and a son Alexander was born in 1985. In 1987 he met his life companion, Daniela Noe. Together they shared an abiding love of the simple beauties of domestic life, but as Daniela said, "There were always things about William I never understood. I just had to accept him the way he was." They spent time at a vacation home and herbal garden in the Blue Ridge country of southern Virginia. For several years William practiced in the office of a lifelong friend, chiropractor Steve Schram. He graduated from

acupuncture school in 1998 and saw patients in his apartment in Little Italy until his death in 2003. Lest rumors spread: William died of arterial hemorrhages ("heat agitating the blood"), a complication of cirrhosis of the liver associated with hepatitis C and chronic alcohol consumption. Ironically, he had given up alcohol five years previously.

Herbalism

William practiced a complete system of herbalism which he developed himself based upon a comprehensive knowledge of herbal simples, compounding, and energetic diagnosis. He understood the energetics of herbs and organ systems. Here are some examples of herbs William loved, used, and described, taken directly from my notes.

Catnip

This is one of William's favorite herbs; he used it himself when he had a hiatal hernia due to some accident in a martial arts class. It is the mint nervine to give when in doubt, i.e., when there is a nervous problem that can't be differentiated enough to indicate a more specific medicine. The action of catnip centers on the stomach, with anxiety, energy and pain rising upwards, rather than downwards. It is suited to "visceral overstimulation from the mind"—people who tend to internalize stress to the stomach. The stomach is bothered. There is congestion in the stomach and pain running up to the vagus nerve.





Painful, nerve involvement. Anxiety rising upwards. Sensation of extreme pressure up against the diaphragm. Pains simulating a heart attack. Colicky gas pains. Anxiety and attacks in the stomach rising upwards into the chest instead of downwards. Not for sinking, diarrheal anxiety (see Camomile). Catnip is a good remedy for colic in babies at the breast. It sweetens the milk. It is also indicated in mild infantile fever. Catnip is a general first aide remedy for children. Catnip is an antidote to bad reactions to onions and garlic. It is useful for motion sickness in mild not serious cases i.e., for people who are too nervous to be on an airplane. William had an exact method for preparing and administering catnip: "Make a nice, strong, green tincture from the fresh plant in flower in a high proof alcohol. Dilute a few drops in water, enough to tint it light green. It will take 2-3 doses to work so persist. There will be a big belch and the symptoms will be relieved."

Feverfew

Here is a good example of a Western herb used on fairly vague indications by most people, but for which William had developed an in-depth portrait by adopting concepts from traditional Chinese herbalism. He undoubtedly borrowed from the Chinese description of chrysanthemum, a cousin of feverfew, for the "stagnant gi" profile, but he added the "stagnant blood" symptoms from experience. Feverfew is valuable for migraines before the period due to "stuck blood" in the womb and head. Use when there is a really full forehead, a "yang rising," pounding headache, usually on the left temple and left eye. The temple is sometimes hot to the touch. This could be called a "stagnant liver headache." Symptoms include clayish stools, constipation, fullness in the abdomen, and stasis. There is a tendency to varicose veins and other evidences of blood stasis. The complexion is pale, with prominent blue veins, then turning red and hot during the headache. Feverfew is somewhat abortifacient. It expels clots. Use it for a thick endometrium. Use small quantities over a long period of time.

The Triune System

"You've heard about people having visions on mountain tops and things," said William. "Well, visions don't always happen at the most convenient times." His wife had just left him with the baby and had gone to stay in an ashram. William got home to find her gone and had to go up to the ashram to find out what was going on. She was velling at him. "Then I fell back on the bed. All of a sudden, I was glued to the bed and I saw a golden light, like the sun, but it was shaped like a golden triangle and it came down. Out stepped a clothed figure dressed in every shade of green. Said he was Pythagorus and hands me this book. It was full of diagrams and formulas, ninefold formulations. My wife kept on going but I grabbed a pencil and paper and just wrote it down. "Are you listening?" she screamed at me. "Oh yes, oh yes," I agreed. "I'm writing it all down." "Up to that time I was really stumped by compounding. The vision allowed me to make formulas. I wasn't even on drugs. Since then I've never had any doubt about compounding.

The "Pythagorean System" emphasizes triune thinking instead of oppositional, dual thinking. The complete ninefold system is based on a triangle inside a triangle which I can only outline in the simplest terms. William treated by organ system, supporting the weak or sick organ that was the source of the problem. The inner triangle refers to the organ, the outer triangle to the adjacent, i.e., supportive or interactive organs and systems. According to the triangle model, herbs have three basic qualities: positive or building, neutral or stabilizing/harmonizing and negative or eliminating. The inner triangle has a

spot for each of these properties. We select an herb that is building, one that is stabilizing and another that is eliminating for that organ. (Herbs can act differently on different organs). The more intense the herb, the less the amount given. The weaker, the more is given to bring it up to the level of the others. Sometimes an herb has one kind of property in one organ system and a different one in another. The outer triangle supports the inner by adding herbs which support the adjacent organ systems that help the sick organ.

Herbs may be classified as follows:

- Building, positive herbs: demulcents, sweet tonics, eleuthero, comfrey, marshmallow, slippery elm, blood builders (nettle, rehmannia), which are also building to the liver, sassafras, dandelion (blood-builder, but eliminator), Oregon grape root, watercress, beets and (in general) food.
- Stabilizing, harmonizing or neutral herbs: A lot of these were astringents. "William was big on plugging up leaks," said his student Matthew Becker. "Where's the leak? Plug it, or everything else you do is worthless."
- He also included herbs that were both building and eliminating in this category sometimes. His favorite neutral herb was raspberry leaf. Burdock was neutral because it is a builder and an eliminator, and yellow dock because it is a blood-builder and laxative and astringent.
- Eliminators or negative herbs: Practically speaking, these were usually dispersives, stimulants, laxatives, alteratives or diuretics anything that moved things. Prickly ash, sassafras (for its diffusives side, buckthorn, dandelion, cayenne and ginger. Based on these guidelines William developed a group of basic triangles.
- Building on catnip for gas, spasm, and irritable bowel he would suggest the following combination: catnip, wild yam and fennel.
- Building on feverfew for headaches he added wild yam, because it cleared bile stagnation and feverfew cleared liver qi and blood stagnation. They help each other out.
- For the interface of the liver and the nervous

system he shifted to formulas based on wild yam and camomile, which he viewed as a deep acting nerve tonic, nutritious and healing. However, like many herbalists he used a basic alterative formula for the liver: burdock, dandelion, yellow dock, Oregon grape, or variations thereon.

- A basic triangle for the nervous system and for neurosis was sage, rosemary, and skullcap. William used rosemary for getting rid of bad memories. For depression he used St. John's wort augmented with rosemary (depression with bad memories), lavender (depression with headache), and lemon balm (depression with digestive component). He taught that adding any of these herbs makes St. John's wort more effective as an antidepressant. He used camomile and milky oats to rebuild the nervous system on a deep level, for replenishment for the starved nervous system, sometimes adding slippery elm. William learned from an old naturopath that slippery elm was healing for the nervous system, similar to milky oats and camomile: quieting, supplementing, and balancing to the emotional body.
- Other herbs which figured prominently in his pharmacopoeia for mental health were Chinese polygala (the main remedy to strengthen the will power to accomplish things, gives women grit) and blessed thistle (serious psychological disturbances, memory loss and depression). Combine polygala with calamus for memory, or blessed thistle and gota kola for memory. These are only the most simple formulas, -dyads, and triads yet they have a certain internal elegance and rationale. That was the mark of William's knowledge of herbal medicine. He did not just throw combinations together, but understood how the herbs got along together and synergized to support an organ or system.

N.B.

The author was assisted by Daniela Noe in preparing this short biography, and by Matthew Becker, in the discussion of the triune formulation system.

The William LeSassier Archive

is soliciting contributions in the form of tapes, notes, anecdotes, money or editorial services to develop William's legacy. Tax deductible status has not yet been achieved, but will hopefully in the future.

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