

## Sudden Oak Death: What's in It for Us?

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In early August, my family and I had the good fortune to be able to spend a week on the Big Sur coast. It was there that we met Lee Klinger, PhD. Dr. Klinger is an ecologist who is a leading scholar in earth systems science and Gaia theory. He had been in Big Sur for the past few years doing research and work on sudden oak death, a phenomenon that is killing not only oak trees in California and Southern Oregon, but also is a scourge moving into other tree species and spreading geographically. Big Sur is being hit hard by this problem. Dr. Klinger has been a tree expert for many years and has traveled the world studying trees. When he came to California, he noticed some anomalies.

Amongst the very old oaks, 200 years or older, the growth pattern of the trees were unusual in that amongst the old trees, there was a major branching low to the ground. Younger trees had a single trunk that followed a normal pattern of oak growth. There also were flecks of white on the bark of the old oaks that were not on the younger ones, and under and around the older trees were deposits of crushed shells. What Klinger discovered was that the native peoples, for thousands of years, had systematically practiced silviculture - the cultivation of trees - for purposes of food, worship and ecological sustainability.

The oaks had been trimmed so that the acorns would be more accessible and plentiful, hence the peculiar branching. The trees that were taken care of by the humans were able to live longer and remain healthier than trees in the wild. In the case of the oaks, cultivated trees could live to be 600 to 700 years or more instead of a few hundred years. The native people would perform prescribed burns on a regular basis to keep the underbrush under control and to re-mineralize the soils by alkalizing it with ash. The indigenous peoples also would add crushed shells, bone and pottery shards to the base of the trees and paint the trunks with a lime-based wash to accomplish the same thing, to alkalize and mineralize the soil.

The tree painting had other benefits as well. Bugs would stand out against the white background and be picked off by birds. This practice is done all over the world. Anthropologists, when forced to explain huge middens, or piles of shells, bones and shards, would say that these were garbage piles. This is a mistaken concept. These mounds were carefully collected resource stores. These age-old practices were abandoned with white settlement and the displacement and genocide of the native population. The past 150 years has seen fire suppression and with it the concomitant acidification of the soil, which causes mineral loss.

Now back to sudden oak death. The mainstream scientists are focused on a pathogen, *P. ramorum*, and finding a pesticide to kill it. Sound familiar? Here comes the juicy part. Dr. Klinger has been painting the trees with an alkaline mineral wash and placing a mineral powder, azomite, at the base of the trees that are sick. In just a couple of years he has noticed new growth and healing of bark bleeding. He believes that by re-mineralizing the soil, thus giving the trees what they need in terms of nutrition, they are able to heal themselves.

The problem with the trees is not that a particular parasite is killing them, it is that their soils are

acidified and de-mineralized from years of fire suppression. This then led to a weakened tree, which leaves it vulnerable to opportunistic infections. Dr. Klinger has been able to cure the trees naturally without a toxic pesticide. His method is cost effective, safe and beneficial to the environment and applies to other diseases as well, not just sudden oak death.

Might this be a metaphor for human health? The dominant culture is fixated on pathogens and the drugs to kill it. In fact, it is worse than that. Even conditions not clearly related to pathogens are medicated. If you have a health issue, there is a drug for it. We, in the alternative health field, are faced with a dominant paradigm that works against us.

In order for us to make some real changes, we must communicate the fundamental message of our method of healing. This message is that in order for optimal health to be achieved, the body must be able to receive proper nourishment, and that nourishment must be able to reach every cell of the body. We must also avoid and eliminate toxins that interfere with this process. When this happens, our bodies are able to function properly. Proper function enables us to ward off disease from outside and from within. In other words, strengthen righteous *qi*. However, people don't understand what righteous *qi* means. We must understand this and communicate it in a language that our patients understand. If we don't do this, we find patients coming in to be treated only for symptoms and leaving when the symptoms resolve.

People often treat acupuncture and herbs no differently than drugs, expecting a quick resolution to the symptoms without addressing the cause. Natural healing methods are effective, safe and affordable, and they also are healthy for the planet. We do not produce medical waste that pollutes the environment. Let us take a lesson from the trees and take care of our soil.

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