

THE HEALTH NUGGET



SEPTEMBER 2007

BY RISE RAFFERTY

Self-Betrayal, Part 2

Last month we examined how self-betrayal often begins with a failure to truly recognize or ‘know’ ourselves. On a physiological level this results in immune cells being directed against self. While individual autoimmune diseases are not common, they do, as a group, afflict millions of Americans, occupying “third or fourth place in the list of prevalent diseases in our country.”¹ While autoimmunity attacks various parts of the body, there are common pathways inducing immune dysfunction. For this reason, many researchers believe autoimmune diseases should be considered as a group.

Various factors have been considered as to their involvement in initiating the confusion of autoimmunity. Most authorities acknowledge that there is usually a genetic susceptibility. But the disease process must be triggered by something. This may include environmental factors such as exposure to heavy metals—mercury, arsenic, cadmium, lead, and aluminum. According to Noel R. Rose, MD, PhD, chairperson of the American Autoimmune Related Diseases Association’s Scientific Advisory Board and director of the Johns Hopkins Autoimmune Research Center, “overexposure to mercury, gold, cadmium, and other heavy metals, coming from dental fillings, water supply, occupational exposures, and other sources, has been shown to induce autoantibodies and has been linked to the development of autoimmune diseases.”²

Autoimmune diseases are more common in northern geographic latitudes where the countries are industrialized, have colder climates, and experience

less constant sunshine. “MS, for example, is over a hundred times more prevalent in the far north than at the equator.”³ Some believe the increasingly sterile environment of these nations with their overuse of antibiotics and anti-bacterials prevents normal exposure to germs. This graduated exposure may help regulate the immune system, making it less likely to overreact. Others, like Dr. T. Colin Campbell, Cornell University scientist and author of *The China Study*, believe this geographic correlation is related to vitamin D deficiency as a result of decreased sun exposure along with regional dietary differences.

In experimental trials with animals, vitamin D was found to prevent the development of several autoimmune diseases. Produced by the skin after exposure to sunlight, vitamin D must then be “activated in the kidney in order to produce a form that helps repress the development of autoimmune diseases.”⁴ The resulting “supercharged” vitamin D has been proven to be a powerful preventive of cancer, osteoporosis, as well as autoimmune diseases. This form of vitamin D cannot be derived from food or drug. Certain immune cells, such as T-cells are highly influenced by this vitamin. “Under experimental conditions, the activated vitamin D operates in two ways: it inhibits the development of certain T-cells and their production of active agents (called cytokines) that initiate the autoimmune response, and/or it encourages the production of other T-cells that oppose this effect.”⁵ There are various types of T-cells. While some T-cells identify specific pathogens and stimulate immune response, others are

crucial at regulating this response and suppressing it when needed. Suppressor T lymphocytes have the ability to stop the autoimmune response before autoantibodies are produced. Apparently vitamin D helps moderate the function of these important immune cells maintaining the checks and balance.

According to Campbell, the critically important step needed to produce the active form of vitamin D can be inhibited by certain foods. “Animal protein that we consume has the tendency to block the production of supercharged D, leaving the body with low levels of this vitamin D in the blood Also, persistently high intakes of calcium create an environment where super-charged D declines, thus adding to the problem.”⁶ This has been found to be a commonality among all autoimmune diseases studied.

Poor digestion is another theory thought to be a potentially responsible agent predisposing one to autoimmunity. The antigens that trick our bodies into attacking our own cells may be in food. “Some proteins slip into our bloodstream from the intestine without being fully broken down into their amino acid parts. The remnants of undigested proteins are treated as foreign invaders by our immune system, which sets about making molds to destroy them and sets into motion the self-destructive autoimmune process.”⁷ Food allergens are also considered by the immune system as an enemy and therefore could be potential triggers of autoimmunity. Reported by Dr. Joel S. Edman of the Center of Integrative Medicine at Thomas Jefferson University Hospital in Philadelphia, research among fibromyalgia patients revealed that in those who eliminated common food allergens “nearly half of the patients reported ‘significant reduction of pain.’ More than 75 percent of patients reported a reduction in other symptoms such as headache, fatigue, bloating, heartburn, and breathing difficulties.”⁸ Avoiding food allergens could help prevent attacks

of inflammation. Identifying food sensitivities and allergies, analyzing ourselves and our physiology, seeking to gain clues as to why the body is reacting against its own tissue is worthy of investigation.

Scripture says, “Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Prove yourselves. Do you not know yourselves?”⁹ This is vital on an emotional, mental, and spiritual level as well as on a physiological one. Without attaining the great knowledge of knowing oneself, we set ourselves up for self-betrayal. We often resist this journey. To be honest, we really don’t like all we see.

While God wants us to see our condition, He simultaneously reminds us of our true identity—the beloved, the object of His love. Claiming or re-claiming this reality is often a battle against an inner voice reinforced by the world slandering forth, “You’re not good enough. If people knew all about you, they wouldn’t like you.” Self-hatred, self-rejection or anger, which stems from our desire to protect self, responds to the consideration that an all-knowing God must also feel hatred, anger, or in some way reject us. But no, you are the beloved. When the Father’s voice was heard saying, “This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased,” He was embracing you.

To you He says, “Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospers.”¹⁰

1 Shomon, Mary J., *Living Well with Autoimmune Disease*, p. 24.

2 *ibid.* p. 43.

3 Campbell, T. Colin, *The China Study*, p. 184.

4 *ibid.* p. 200.

5 *ibid.*

6 *ibid.*, p. 180.

7 *ibid.*, p. 186.

8 Shomon, Mary J., *Living Well with Autoimmune Disease*, p. 244.

9 Colossians 3:12.

10 3 John 2.

