

The Beginnings of Homeopathy



The 'father' of homeopathy was a German physician called Samuel Hahnemann. He was born in 1755 in Dresden, a small town in Germany, and from an early age demonstrated remarkable abilities. His father recognised these abilities and taught him discipline from an early age; he used to lock young Samuel up in a room with 'thinking exercises' – problems he was required to solve by himself. Hahnemann had a great talent for languages, and even by the age of twelve his instructor had him teaching Greek to other pupils.

Hahnemann studied medicine at the Universities of Leipzig, Vienna, and Erlangen, qualifying in 1779, and soon became highly respected in professional circles for his papers on both medicine and chemistry.

However, the accepted medical customs of his day, which included excessive purging, blood-letting, leeches and the cavalier use of toxic drugs often caused more suffering than they cured. This gnawed at his conscience, and after a few years he turned to translating rather than doctoring to earn his living.

It was while he was translating a treatise on herbs by Dr Cullen that Hahnemann made a revolutionary discovery. Cullen was a professor of medicine at Edinburgh University and had devoted twenty pages of his *Materia Medica* to the therapeutic indications of quinine, an extract of Peruvian bark. He attributed its success in the treatment of malarial fevers to the fact that it was an astringent (bitter). Why, Hahnemann wondered, should quinine have an effect on malaria when other, more powerful, astringents did not? He was so dissatisfied with Cullen's explanation that he decided to test it upon himself; an act which was completely out of the realm of thinking at the time.

Hahnemann discovered that with each dose, he produced symptoms which are typically characteristic of malaria. The symptoms lasted two or three hours each time, and recurred only if he repeated the dose. Once he discontinued the experiment, he was in good health. From this, Hahnemann came upon the idea that a substance which can produce symptoms in a healthy person can cure them in a sick person. Even more fundamentally, perhaps, he recognised the necessity for human experimentation in order to determine the curative potential of a substance.

Following this, he and some other like-minded physicians began systematically testing substances upon themselves and recording their observations in minute detail. This continued for a period of six years, during which Hahnemann also compiled an exhaustive list of poisonings recorded by different doctors in different countries through centuries of medical history. Hahnemann developed special procedures for conducting these experiments which he called 'provings'. He and his colleagues began to try this 'Law of Similars' on clinical cases and immediately began to see astounding results which far transcended the medical results of the time.

Proving has continued since Hahnemann's time and have become the basis upon which a remedy is chosen for a patient. Today, there are hundreds of remedies which have been proved in this way and which cover the major part of all possible disturbances in a human being.

Unfortunately, many potentially useful substances are highly toxic in their biological action – substances such as arsenic, mercury, belladonna, snake venoms, etc. Some information was available from poisonings with these substances, but the symptomatology was not as refined as Hahnemann needed for homeopathic prescribing and some patients' symptoms got worse, before they got better (an aggravation). It was in the process of struggling with this problem that Hahnemann made another discovery.

At first, he tried to simply dilute the substances. This, of course, succeeded in reducing the toxicity of the agents, but it also proportionally reduced the therapeutic effect. Somehow, Hahnemann then hit upon the technique of adding kinetic energy to the dilutions through shaking, or 'succussion.' This combination of succussion and serial dilution Hahnemann called 'potentization' or 'dynamisation'. The crucial observation was that the more the substance is succussed and diluted, the greater the therapeutic effect while simultaneously nullifying the toxic effect. To Hahnemann's surprise, diluted remedies not only forestalled 'aggravations' but seemed to act much faster and more effectively. They were, paradoxically weaker but more potent.

It is not difficult to imagine the scorn which Hahnemann's contemporaries poured upon his claim that weaker remedies produced stronger effects. This ran, and still runs, completely counter to the principles of clinical pharmacology. Although, at dilutions above the twelfth centesimal potency (12c), not even one molecule of the original substance remains in solution, the cures achieved by homeopathy are real and cannot be dismissed because the mechanism of action is not fully understood.

Being a chemist, Hahnemann knew that whatever active principles his dilute remedies contained, they could only be present in infinitesimal quantities. And yet, the merest trace of them was enough to produce a strong effect. At some level in the body, he reasoned, there must be something which responds to such tiny hints, an extremely subtle something capable of switching the body from sickness to health, and vice versa. He called that something the 'Vital Force'.

It was this force which was responsible for the orderly and therefore healthy running of the body, and for coordinating the body's defences against disease. In fact, Hahnemann thought of the Vital Force as a form of electromagnetic energy or vibration. If this coherent energy became disturbed by stress, poor diet, lack of exercise, inherited constitutional problems, or climatic change, illness would result. The signs and symptoms of the illness were the body's attempts to restore order.

Hahnemann gradually re-established himself as a physician, using his new homeopathic methods. However it was not long before he realised that certain patients, whom he had treated successfully for acute conditions were returning to him complaining of new sets of symptoms. These often seemed to declare themselves after stressful events. As the years passed, it became clear to him that such patients were treading a descending spiral of health, despite intervals of feeling reasonably well. He started to wonder if there was an underlying problem.

Hahnemann realised there were underlying deep seated disease patterns which he called miasms. By diligent research, mainly with sick people, Hahnemann developed remedies which seemed to work at the

deeper miasmatic level. He also gave strict advice on the sort of diet and lifestyle his patients should follow.

The first edition of *An Organon of Rational Healing*, the best-known and most comprehensive of all Hahnemann's writings on the nature of health, disease, and homeopathic healing, was published in 1810. He revised the book five times before his death in 1843, each time searching for greater understanding of the potency of homeopathic remedies and the nature of the Vital Force. It is still in use today.

During the nineteenth century, Hahnemann's ideas spread quickly from Germany, across Europe and then to the Americas, and also eastwards to Asia. Today homeopathy is well respected in many countries, including India where it is recognized and supported by the state.

Homeopathy 'arrived' in Britain in 1832 when a Dr Hervey Quin began to minister to fashionable society from premises at 19 King Street in London's West End. Quin had travelled to Germany to consult Hahnemann on his own account and had learned homeopathy from Leipzig homeopaths. Later Quin became the first President of the British Homeopathic Society, founded in 1844. Therefore, despite opposition from orthodox physicians, homeopathy grew in popularity. Quin set up the first homeopathic hospital in London in 1850.

The first royal patron of homeopathy was Queen Adelaide, consort of William IV, who from 1835 until her death in 1849 was the patient of Dr Ernst Stapf, one of Samuel Hahnemann's closest colleagues. A number of distinguished homeopaths have served the present Queen in the past and the position is currently held by Dr David Fischer.



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Information taken from:

“The Science of Homeopathy” by George Vithoukas

“The Family Guide to Homeopathy” by Dr. Andrew Lockie