

Tending the Wind – Chapter 3  
Homeopathy – Part 1  
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Homeopathy is a method of treatment using minute doses of a substance that in larger doses produces symptoms in healthy individuals similar to those suffered by the patient. In other words, symptoms that a substance can cause using large doses in the healthy, it can also cure using small doses in the sick – summarized by the phrase *like cures like*. (*Homeo* means like, or similar. *Pathy* means feeling, suffering, perception, or system of treatment.) As a formalized medical system, it began with the work of a German physician, Samuel Hahnemann (1755-1843 A.D.) but the concept of treating like with like dates back to Hippocrates (c. 460-370 B.C.), the great Greek physician considered the father of Western medicine. Hahnemann expanded on this concept with his methods of discovering the symptom portraits of substances by testing them on healthy individuals, and with his research into the optimum dosage form to treat the sick.

Hahnemann sought a gentler, more humane and longer acting means of treatment than what was offered in his day (mustard baths, harsh emetics, violent laxatives, hot irons, and massive blood-letting). He studied Hippocrates' ideas of treating the whole individual rather than just certain parts or symptoms, supporting the body's self-healing capacity with proper diet and rest, understanding what traits predispose one to disease, and using like to treat like.

In his first experiment, Hahnemann took large doses of Cinchona (Peruvian Bark), which was known as a treatment for malaria. He experienced symptoms very similar to those of malaria patients, and surmised that a substance which is able to cause a certain constellation of symptoms in a healthy person will heal similar symptoms in an ill person. Experiments with other substances supported this concept. (Self-experimentation is a great teacher.) Over time, he and other volunteers amassed symptom pictures for a wide variety of mineral, plant, and animal substances; they recorded their symptoms in great detail, including physical, emotional and mental changes. This method of discovering the symptom picture of a substance became known as a *proving*, from the German word *prüfung*, meaning a test, trial, examination, or investigation. From these symptom portraits, he could then choose the matching remedy, or *simillimum*, for his patients.

The question then became, how small should the treatment dosage be to heal the sick without causing side effects? Dosage trials with patients resulted in the practice of *potentization* – serial dilution and succussion (vigorous and methodical shaking) of a dissolved substance – to create homeopathic remedies. In many cases, the potentizations used by homeopaths are so dilute as to theoretically contain none of the original substance. Hahnemann believed that potentization releases the dynamic subtle energies of a substance, which then interact with the patient's *vital force*\* – a non-physical, instinctive force within the body that animates and regulates the physical form for use by one's conscious spirit. His theory was that disease is the result of a "mistunement" of the vital force by a "morbific agent" (pathogen) or other outside influence. Symptoms are only a sign of the diseased state of the vital force, which must be treated at its own level with the dynamized remedy. Like many of his time Hahnemann was interested in magnetism, and compared the action of the dynamized remedy on the vital force to the power of a magnet to magnetize iron...a resonant influence on a susceptible material. He was aware that blood contains iron, and believed the vital force to be both present in blood and transmitted by the nervous system.

Despite a growing body of evidence supporting the clinical efficacy of homeopathy, it has historically been rejected by the scientific community because of these two seemingly ethereal concepts: the vital force and the highly potentized remedy, neither of which has so far presented a reducible quantity that can be isolated for laboratory testing. (The next grand revolution in modern medical science will likely require a paradigm shift away from reductionist tactics.) With the advent of modern physics, many homeopaths have

equated the vital force to the body's electromagnetic field, which research suggests may be responsible for the synchronistic coordination of form and function. Theories regarding the active component of remedies range from quantum waveforms to charged clusters of water molecules. Although there have been some intriguing studies on the physical properties of remedies, much more needs to be done. There is certainly ample precedent for using medicines whose mechanisms of action are as yet unknown.

Several explanations for how homeopathic remedies effect healing have emerged over the last two centuries, the most prevalent of which are:

1. The remedy, having dynamic properties similar to the disease state but made stronger through potentization, replaces the natural disease with its own artificial disease (based on the assumption that two similar diseases can't coexist). The vital force is then able to counteract the artificial disease because of the latter's relatively short duration of action.
2. The remedy presents a clear image of the natural disease (magnified through potentization) to the vital force. Once the confused vital force recognizes the disease state, it can then direct its energies effectively. Cure in this case need only rely on recognition rather than on replacement, action, and counter-action.
3. The remedy acts by a principle called *hormesis*, which states that very small doses of potentially toxic substances activate healing mechanisms. Toxicologists theorize that this is due to an adaptive response to low intensity stress.
4. Symptoms, rather than being signs of the electromagnetic field's mistunement, are signs of its best efforts at recovery. Therefore, the similar symptom pattern of the remedy means that it will match, and thereby augment via resonance, the waveform characteristics of these efforts. (This assumes that these efforts are also the most appropriate for healing.)

Hahnemann himself was not convinced that people would ever achieve a complete understanding of the vital force. He relied on clinical observations to instruct his methods. Over the years, he experimented with many different potencies and dosage methods up to his last days. Many of his later methods differed greatly from his earlier ones, but only in dosage tactics; the most effective choice of remedy always proved to be the simillimum.

My own observation, particularly in the case of behavioral issues, has been that the remedy is somehow able to alter patients' habitual reactions to a given stress event (whether it be exposure to a virus or a ride in the car). For example, the dog who would automatically bark and lunge at an approaching stranger seems able to now "take a step back" and think about the situation before acting. He is able to respond, rather than simply react. The old habits, patterns, and predispositions are loosened, so that exposure to a stress trigger on any level (physical, emotional, or mental) need not be such a hardship.

Everyone responds to stress differently. Those who suffer most usually react to stress based on restrictive patterns, habits, and preconceptions. Those folks who have an easy-going attitude unhindered by such restrictions are able to manifest themselves openly and securely in any situation. It's what practitioners of Chinese medicine refer to when they talk about the "free and easy wanderer." Perhaps the similar remedy is able to reflect our reaction patterns back to us in a manner that helps us transcend them, opening the door to a response better suited to our unique selves. Rather than putting emphasis on the pathology caused by a moribific foe, it focuses on our own worst enemy. (The reader is encouraged to reconsider this possibility when learning about the Governing Vessel, one of the extraordinary vessels of Chinese medicine described in chapter 15. This acupuncture meridian runs the entire length of the spinal cord and brain, structures closely associated in classical homeopathy with the vital force. The Governing Vessel plays an important role in self-reflection and response, and although the "crude and senseless" vital force was not believed capable of self-reflection, it is possible from a Chinese medicine perspective that homeopathic remedies may act primarily through this meridian to harmonize the entire body-mind.)

Though we don't yet know how homeopathy works, the results I see in my patients are too significant to ignore or pass off as placebo (particularly when different effects are observed in the same patient depending on the remedy chosen). There are more things in heaven and earth...and a lot of things that our current technologies are ill equipped to measure.

\*Vitalism and Mechanism are the two competing doctrines which emerged during the early development of Western medicine. Vitalism states that a non-physical "vital force" exists in living organisms, animating and regulating their basic functions, distinguishing them from inanimate matter. Mechanism states that all natural phenomena including living systems can be explained using the laws of physics and chemistry alone. Hahnemann followed the vitalist doctrine developed by a French physician, Paul Barthez (1734-1806) of Montpellier. In this doctrine, the vital force is separate from the conscious mind and free will, being limited to the subconscious autonomic and instinctive functions that maintain the body. Many authors equate the vital force to qi, the "stuff of being" in Chinese medicine; there are crucial differences, however, between these two concepts. In Chinese medical philosophy there is no separation between energy and matter, animate and inanimate, mind and body, function and structure. All phenomena in the universe are composed of and maintained by qi. Thoughts and actions are simply different manifestations of qi along the same continuum as organs and tissues – a continuum which extends to our relations with each other and the natural environment. The closest equivalent to the vital force in Chinese medicine would be a rarified form of qi called pò, an instinctive type of awareness related to the Metal phase and its associated organs (chapter 13).