

IS HOMEOPATHY A RELIGION ?

© Prof. (Dr. of Med.) Charles McWilliams 2010

Chancellor WONMP, Dean PanAmerican School of Natural Medicine

In a previous article, [IS ACUPUNCTURE A RELIGION?](#), I made an in depth examination of the roots of acupuncture, showing it clearly conformed to the textbook definition of *religion*. In this article, I will examine further another practice of those of faith.

The dictionary defines *homeopathy* as: "the method of treating disease by drugs, given in minute doses, that would produce in a healthy person symptoms similar to those of the disease (opposed to allopathy)."

Suffice it to say, Homeopathy is a vitalistic philosophy in that it interprets chronic disease as those caused by disturbances in the vital force or life force. It sees these disturbances as manifesting themselves as unique sensations and symptoms. Homeopathy maintains that the vital force has the ability to react and adapt to internal and external causes, which homeopaths refer to as the "law of susceptibility". The law of susceptibility implies that a negative state of mind can attract disease entities called "miasms" to invade the body and produce symptoms. However, Hahnemann rejected the notion of a disease as a separate thing or invading entity and insisted that it was always part of the "living whole".

In Hahnemann's words, "the true natural chronic diseases are those that arise from a chronic miasm, when left to themselves, improper treatment, go on to increase, growing worse and torment the patient to the end of his life." (§ 78 Organon) The miasms are: psora, sychosis, syphillis, and tubercular. Psora, the mother of all diseases goes back the farthest in human history. Psora or "itch" is the monstrous internal chronic miasm, the only real fundamental cause and producer of all the other numerous forms of disease. Suppression of skin eruptions leads to poisoning of the internal organism and susceptibility to the other miasms.

Psora by interpretation of its Hebrew word origin – *tsorat* - conveys clearly the thought Hahnemann was religiously minded. *Tsorat*: A groove, a fault; a pollution; a stigma; or original sin, was often applied to leprous manifestations and to the great plagues. It is the meaning of the original Hebrew word that we must regard as the basis for the term covering this constitutional defect.

From a superficial understanding of homoeopathy, it may be difficult for the laity to understand homeopathy, let alone to see any connection with religion, other than the fact most pioneering homeopaths were devout Christians. Yet the deeper aspects of homoeopathy are, like religion, contrary to the materialistic principles that 'scientists' would have us believe regulates all of medical practice. Although not commonly thought of as a form of religion, the author, having practiced and taught

homeopathy for over thirty years and having written several professional manuals on the subject, contends that its classical and original form *is* religious practice.

If we look at the usual definitions of religion, we see that 'homeopathy' conforms to all standards - religion (Random House Dictionary, 2009):

Definition of Religion: "1. A set of beliefs concerning the cause, nature, and purpose of the universe, esp. when considered as the creation of a superhuman agency or agencies, usually involving devotional and ritual observances, and often containing a moral code governing the conduct of human affairs."

Homeopathy was actually first mentioned by Hippocrates (462-377 B.C., 'Peri topon ton kat' anthropon, 42'), but it was the German physician, Hahnemann (1755-1843), who established homeopathy's basic principles, among which the most important is 'similia similibus curentur'. The founder wrote that "in order to radically heal a certain kind of chronic infections, it is necessary to find remedies which normally cause in the human body a similar disease, as much similar as possible". The accepted origin and foundation of homeopathy was outlined in Samuel Christian Hahnemann's *Organon of Medicine*. A few quotes from this *Bible of Homeopathy* would be in order, in reference to the definition above:

§ 6 Fifth Edition: Is not, then, that which is cognizable by the senses in diseases through the phenomena it displays, the disease itself in the eyes of the physician, since he never can see the *spiritual being* that produces the disease, the vital force?

§ 9: In the healthy condition of man, the spiritual vital force (autocracy), the dynamis that animates the material body (organism), rules with unbounded sway, and retains all the parts of the organism in admirable, harmonious, vital operation, as regards both sensations and functions, so that our indwelling, reason-gifted mind can freely employ this living, healthy instrument for the higher purpose of our existence.

§ 10 Fifth Edition: The material organism, without the vital force, is capable of no sensation, no function, no self-preservation, it derives all sensation and performs all the functions of life solely by means of the immaterial being (the vital force) which animates the material organism in health and in disease.

§ 11 Sixth Edition: When a person falls ill, it is only this spiritual, self acting (automatic) vital force, everywhere present in his organism, that is primarily deranged by the dynamic influence upon it of a morbid agent inimical to life; it is only the vital force, deranged to such an abnormal state, that can furnish the organism with its disagreeable sensations, and incline it to the irregular processes which we call disease; for, as a power invisible in itself, and only cognizable by its effects on the organism, its morbid derangement only makes itself known by the manifestation of disease in the sensations and functions of those parts of the organism exposed to the senses of the observer and physician, that is, by morbid symptoms, and in no other way can it make itself known.

§ 17 Fifth Edition: It is only thus that God the preserver of mankind, could reveal His wisdom and goodness in reference to the cure of the disease to which man is liable here below, by showing to the physician what he had to remove in disease in order to annihilate them and thus re-establish health.

Here we see clearly, how the founder of Homeopathy, attributed health and disease to a *spiritual, vital force*, as an *instrument for the higher purpose* and how God is the preserver of mankind. The entire embodiment of the Organon concerns a set of religious beliefs concerning superhuman agencies with devotional and ritual observances in terms of diagnosis and treatment.

Definition of Religion: “2. A specific fundamental set of beliefs and practices generally agreed upon by a number of persons or sects.”

All forms of homeopathy, practiced to date in all countries, generally agree upon the principles of provings, the analysis of symptoms, dilution of medicaments as a form of potentization, and the vital force, all of which are intangible, and cannot be measured. These principles are believed to be superhuman agencies that guide the destiny (health) of all individuals and nations.

Definition of Religion: “3. The body of persons adhering to a particular set of beliefs and practices”.

Homeopathic Associations and Societies exist all over the world (<http://abchomeopathy.com/l.php/11>) representing the interests and beliefs of homeopaths. Homeopathy is recognized as a *traditional medicine* by the World Health Organization: a mandate of a specialized agency of the United Nations. The WHO has delineated a working definition of traditional medicine as "including diverse health practices, approaches, knowledge and beliefs incorporating plant, animal, and/or mineral based medicines, *spiritual therapies*, manual techniques and exercises applied singularly or in combination to maintain well-being, as well as to treat, diagnose or prevent illness".

And lastly, we find this fourth definition of “religion:”

“4. Something one believes in and follows devotedly; a point or matter of ethics or conscience:” e.g. to make a religion of combating disease.

Homeopathy's Beginnings

Homeopathy began at the time of the Renaissance. At the time of its introduction, homeopathy certainly was a radical breakaway from the way in which medicine had been practiced in Europe for hundreds of years. Forms of medical practice had culminated in an orthodoxy which advocated the use of leeches, frequent blood-letting for many diseases, the use of strong cathartics (purgative medications), emetics (medications to cause vomiting) and other powerful medications of

vegetable and mineral origin, often dispensed in extremely high doses and complex mixtures. Treatments could harm the patient as well as modify the disease process.

At the end of the long medieval period, the Renaissance encouraged scientific study, as well as a renewal of interest in classical learning. Yet, despite a few dissident voices, such as that of Paracelsus, superstition and harmful practices continued to dominate medicine. With the advancing spirit of investigation the ideas of the French philosopher Rene Descartes (1596-1650) and other rationalist thinkers gradually helped to sweep away medieval notions and to advance medical theory but to some extent also introduced new dogma.

The new beginning of today's modern medicine started with the destruction of the vitalistic medical theories of the time. Practically all doctors in Europe at that time were Christian or Jewish in faith. In 1828, Friedrich Wöhler, a German physician and chemist by training, published a paper that describes the formation of urea, known since 1773 to be a major component of urine, by combining cyanic acid and ammonium in vitro. In these experiments the synthesis of an organic compound from two inorganic molecules was achieved for the first time. These results weakened significantly the vitalistic theory on the functioning of living cells. For this reason a sharp boundary started to exist between organic and inorganic compounds. Interestingly, Wöhler's contemporaries, Liebig (the soil chemist) and Pasteur (the microbiologist), never abandoned vitalism and it took until 1845 when Kolbe repeated an inorganic - organic conversion of carbon disulfide to acetic acid before vitalism started to lose supporters in serious numbers.

Suffice to say, the German chemical industry would begin to dominate medicine. Bayer would synthesize aspirin, previously obtained from plants like willow. By 1899, Bayer's trademark Aspirin was registered worldwide for Bayer's brand of acetylsalicylic acid. Inorganic (synthetic) dye-making firms diversified by converting dye intermediates into pharmaceuticals, such as Sandoz's anitipyrin. Dyes were also employed in early biomedical research, particularly by Paul Ehrlich who began work in this field in the 1880's. Ehrlich used the dyes' color loss, or color gain, to explain reduction and oxidation processes in living cells. Sulfonamide drugs (prontosil, 1932) were the first antimicrobial drugs, and paved the way for the antibiotic revolution in medicine. This drug Prontosil, was discovered as a result of experiments with a bright red azo dye originally discovered by Caro in the 1860's.

No less significant on this assault of vitalism were the studies on fermentation conducted just before World War I by the dye chemist Chaim Weizmann. Weizmann developed the *acetone process*, which came to be essential in the manufacturing of munitions for warfare, and coincidentally contributed to the birth of modern biotechnology. These developments led some of the early chemical companies like BASF, Bayer, AGFA, and Hoechst, and also in Switzerland, at the factories of Geigy, CIBA, and Sandoz, along with dye firms to engage in biomedicine, biotechnology, and the "life sciences," fields in which they are now among the world leaders. Except for the continuance of Homeopathy, Herbalism, and Oriental Medicine, belief in vitalism would have all but ended.

The author contends, that any medicine using vitalism as a basis of diagnosis and treatment is a religion, by pure definition. It is amazing to know, how many *doctors of medicine*, fail to know how to actually define the definition of a “doctor;” and how many people, whom call themselves religious, cannot even define the word by its dictionary definition!

Vitalistic theories of medicine have been with us since time immemorial. There is no need to so quickly abandon what some may have no recognition of. Healing miracles occur every day of the week. We credit the major advances in surgery that has saved millions of lives, but physical medicine has plundered along for the last one hundred years and to date, still has no cure for the common cold, obesity and cancer.

Homeopathic Basics

In order to see any such connections between religious practice and homeopathy we must first state concisely what homeopathy is. The basic ideas upon which homeopathy rests may be stated as follows:

- Material and non-material substances can affect the health of organisms including man.
- When material substances are potentized by homeopathic dilution methods, their ability to influence health, their power as medicines, actually increases.
- Such liquid medicines can produce changes in the moods of the mind, sleep, dreams and the sense of well-being as well as the functions and structures of the body.
- Medicines diluted in water beyond the 12th centesimal potency contain none of the original material substance yet may have more profound impact upon the vitality.
- Ultimately all disease sensations (mental and physical) arise from an unknown and invisible source within the organism. External environmental factors, including bacteria and viruses merely excite into activity the vital force or even a disease processes already present, but they are not always considered the ultimate causes of symptoms. Some exceptions here include trauma, poisons and radiation, which directly damage the physical fabric of the body.
- To cure a chronic illness by homeopathy a medicine must be given that is itself capable of producing the same illness, thus the saying *similia similibus curantur* [L. “likes are cured by likes”], the doctrine which lies at the foundation of homeopathy, that a disease is cured by those remedies which produce effects resembling the disease itself.

From the above list we can make certain speculations and conclusions regarding the nature of a living organism.

- The body is a physical organism that contains an invisible entity or *dynamis* upon which diluted and potentized substances act.

- The vital force maintains the functions and structures of the physical body and *is* the subconscious mind with all its attendant memories and power of arousal.
- Without the vital force, the body is just a corpse, with no powers of arousal, assimilation, reproduction, biochemical activity, movement, temperature control, etc.
- Disease originates from errors and memories which are contained within the vital force and which prevent it from having perfect control of the mind and body. These errors come from past failures and past illnesses.
- Remedies imitate so closely the contents of error-memories that they stimulate the vital force, i.e. the subconscious, to review, confront, and discharge the inborn errors. In doing so, this power over such errors reacts with the vital force and to expunge the morbid agent(s) or reduce their power to nil.
- The conscious mind is the immortal spirit, whereas the vital force is the body-soul (subconscious).
- The ancestry of the vital force stretches back to the origins of life on earth and to that of the soul itself.
- Life originated when the vital force began to organize molecules of the egg-sperm complex into distinct structures (cells) with reproductive power and motility. Thus life did not come from matter (as science thinks), but came from life itself - i.e. spiritual beings or entities.
- The homeopathic doctrine of the vital force fits so closely the facets of psychology that it is remarkable that most physicians has never shown much interest in the subject. One reason may be that all Vitalistic theories about life come very close indeed to the spiritual, and science is never prepared to get entangled with subjective truths. This is where religion provides us philosophical foundations.

Conclusions

James Tyler Kent was one of the greatest classical homoeopaths to see the connection between religion and homoeopathy. His homoeopathic writings are full of religious speculations and they are well worth reading. Some quotes I give here serve to illustrate some of his ideas.

Quotes from Kent

"You cannot divorce medicine and theology. Man exists all the way down from his innermost spiritual, to his outermost natural.

"There is an innermost to everything that is, or else the outermost could not be.

"All matter is capable of reduction to its radiant or primitive form.

"The vital force dominates, rules and co-ordinates the human body."

"There is no cell in man that does not have its Will and understanding, its soul-stuff, limbus or simple substance."

"Man cannot be made sick or be cured except by a substance as ethereal in quality as the vital force."

"There are two worlds; the world of thought or immaterial substance and the world of matter or material substance."

"It is the imperfect machine that causes death. The vital force is of the Soul and cannot be destroyed or weakened. It can be disordered but it is all there."

"Radiant substances have degrees within degrees, in series too numerous for the finite mind to grasp."

"Thinking and willing establishes a state in man that identifies the condition he is in. As long as man continued to think that which was true and held that which was good to the neighbour, that which was uprightness and justice, so long man remained free from the susceptibility to disease, because that was the state in which he was created."

"Man today is destroyed as to his interiors so that truth looks as black as smoke, and false philosophy as bright as the sun."

In conclusion, what we can say about homoeopathy and religion is that there are some definite relations between them. They agree very broadly about the nature of man and of life, they support each other logically and they complement one another.

A practitioner may choose to ignore the religious aspect and practice homeopathy on a scientific principle, and that is fine. However, he will not understand those instances when the well selected remedy works like a miracle or fails altogether.

In my view, classical homoeopathy is a spiritual technique and discipline that heals sickness by addressing the vital force (subconscious) and from which the body was created and by which it is maintained. The practice of *taking the case* is not unlike a confession, as a disclosure of one's sins. The giving of the remedy not unlike a form of baptism wherein one is administered water and to become purified. In this sense, therefore, classical homoeopathy is far more than a system of medicine. When practiced thusly it holds out to humanity a means of self-understanding, self-discovery, and self-help as important and as valid as any religion on earth.

The problem that naturally arises that in all belief-systems, there has also arisen in homoeopathy differences of belief, different nuances of emphasis and the gradual evolution of divergent methods and philosophies. These different viewpoints are naturally powered by and derived from both theoreticians and practitioners. This is both healthy and unhealthy. Healthy as it promotes diversity, discussion, dialogue and rich fields for thought and new applications. Unhealthy in that it produces

rivalry, disputes and uncommon dialogue. This is as true of homoeopathy just as much as it has been true of religion. To quote Dr. Ralph Twentyman (1916) in a British Homeopathic Journal editorial many years ago:

"The history of homoeopathy... resembles much too much the history of religion with its conflicts between orthodoxy and heresy. So often the heresy of one age becomes the orthodoxy of the next."

Hopefully, therefore, a study of religions and belief-systems might help modern homoeopaths to more clearly understand the origins of our art of homeopathy and how that knowledge may advance its application for the betterment of mankind.

References

- Hahnemann Samuel. ORGANON OF MEDICINE. 6th Edition translated by Boericke.
- Kent, James Tyler. Lectures on Homeopathic Philosophy. 1900.
- World Health Organization : The mandate of a specialized agency of the United Nations. PART III : A variety of activities. Chapter 3, TRADITIONAL MEDICINE. http://www.gfmer.ch/TMCAM/WHO_Minelli/P3-3.htm
- WHO Traditional Medicine Strategy 2002-2005, Document WHO/EDM/TRM/2002.1, WHO, Geneva, 2002, p. 7
- *Legal status of traditional medicine and complementary/alternative medicine*, Document [WHO/EDM/TRM/2001.2](http://www.who.int/edms/2001.2), WHO, Geneva, 2001

Links

<http://womnp.us/>

<http://schoolofnaturalmedicine.org/>

<http://smokh.org>



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Prof. Charles McWilliams is an integrated physician, living on Nevis Island and Santo Domingo, Ecuador. He routinely travels for giving medical and humanitarian aid as the Grand Master of the Medical Order of the Knights Hospitaller. He practices with his wife Susan, a nurse, and his two daughters are resident medical doctors in the U.S. He has conducted more than 500 seminars and lectures worldwide over the last thirty years. He constantly searches for the simplicity in medicine to assist the ever growing poor and needy.