

Richard Grossinger

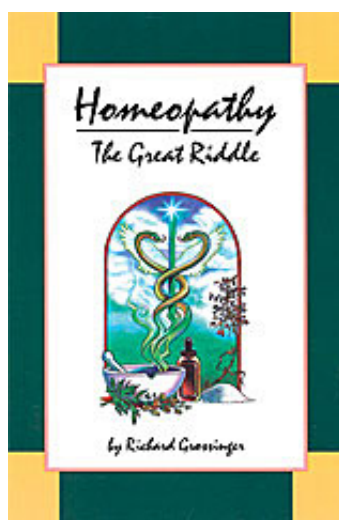
Homeopathy: The Great Riddle

Reading excerpt

[Homeopathy: The Great Riddle](#)

of [Richard Grossinger](#)

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Chapter Two

The Origins of *Homeopathic Medicine*

There are few systems that break so sharply with their predecessors that they seem the invention of a single individual. In recent times we consider Sigmund Freud's model of the unconscious mind and Albert Einstein's theory of relativity both radical departures from anything which came before them. Charles Darwin and Karl Marx also changed human reality to such a degree that a gap formed between the landscape brought into being by their visions and the world they inherited. What sparked the collective alteration of perception was not *primarily* novel information (like the magnified image of a chromosome or quasar), for in each instance we can trace the roots of the paradigm far back into history. It was a rearrangement of familiar ideas in a manner that revealed an undisclosed side of all of them at once.

Intuition of the unconscious mind is as old as the paintings on the cave walls at Lascaux—in fact, tens of thousands of years older ... as old as language—but Freud reified the unconscious process when he fused it with models from anatomy, animal behavior, and social theory. Such a notion could not have existed before the West learned of the indigenous peoples of Africa and America; before theories of jurisprudence reconsidered the disposition of madness; and likely not before the true scale of the night sky and the cell began to seep into philosophy. Suddenly one neurologist realized

that our thought processes represent but a minute portion of our mental activity and that the nervous system binds an enormous nonconscious portion by the same phenomenology that shapes personalities and society.

Coming a century earlier and likewise the grand synthesis of one man, homeopathy foreshadowed psychiatry—not in its overall organization of meaning but in its concern for the interdynamics of mental and physical symptoms and its attempt to establish a code for the psychosomatic expression of the whole organism. Samuel Hahnemann took the sum of medical theory up to his time, reconceived it, and provided an alternative interpretation and synthesis. While his goals were modest, he invented a science not only of medicine but of psychology and physics. Whether this was an authentic set of laws or a bizarre metaphysical fantasy is not the sole issue: its sheer persistence is an indication that homeopathic inquiry is an unintegrated aspect of our understanding of nature in general and disease and healing in particular.

The divergence of cultural acceptability between homeopathy and psychiatry is also notable. Whereas psychiatry was able to become a well-bred and educated statesman and translate its primitive cryptography into a workable academic theory, homeopathy has remained a whirling dervish on the outskirts of science. Psychiatry works as logical materialism; homeopathy is disjunctive and parapsychical.

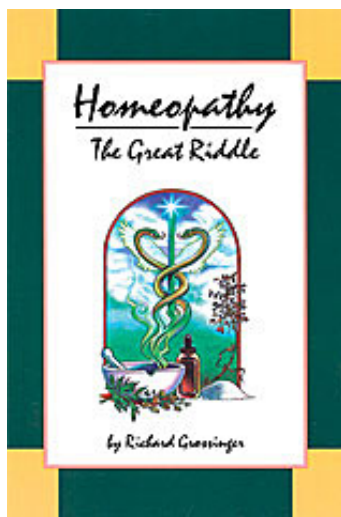
In order to understand Hahnemann's medical legacy, we must disinter an ancient rivalry between two informal lineages of doctors. On one side, beginning no doubt in Palaeolithic times with massage therapists, anatomical craftspeople, and herbalists, are the guilds of bonesetters, surgeons, and pharmacists. Their tools passed naturally from clan to clan and generation to generation over tens of thousands of years, then into the first civilizations in the form of accumulated knowledge and customs. In ancient and mediaeval epochs, these practical healers allied with barbers and smiths, but as university training and formal philosophy became prerequisites for medical practice, they isolated themselves from the more menial crafts as well as from the lay practice of energy healing. By the

twentieth century, they had become the medical profession. They achieved that status primarily as an academic cult and a trade union, not in the lineage of their empirical forerunners.

The rivals of these professional doctors, friendly or aloof, collaborating or uninvolved, were shamans, street healers, and charismatic magicians. As shamans, they blended spiritual potions and called upon transcendental forces. As doctor-priests, they drew on a legacy of witchcraft and herbalism. As lay physicians, they treated their patients by a variety of means, always setting the goal of cure above explanations and theories (though many of them had theories—religious, proto-scientific, animistic, Vitalistic, etc.). Early in recorded history, they were indistinguishable from doctors; in fact, they often *were* the doctors and combined both modalities of medicine. A shaman could be a spiritual healer and a surgeon, a Vitalist and a pharmaceutical herbalist, without being aware that there was even a distinction or opposition between the two. The personae were practiced almost like alternating totem masks; even where they were not joined in the personality of one "medicine man," they were in essential balance and alliance. It was only very gradually, as objectified science protruded, that these healers, as a class, took leave of the credentialed medicine guild. From Chinese, Ayurvedic, and Druid medical visionaries and apothecaries to Greek and Roman philosophers, there is a gap in epistemology.

Homeopathy is one possible outcome, centuries later, of the dialectic between these two traditions. A "scientific," laboratory medicine, it is still based on intuitive, holistic diagnoses, spiritualized herbs and minerals, and the Law of Similars rather than on academic anatomy and pharmacy.

In his four-volume history of medicine, *Divided Legacy*, Harris Coulter defines an "Empirical tradition" of healing: diagnosing patients from careful observation, interpreting symptoms as signs of deeper holistic changes, and developing a practical compendium of wisdom from the actual treatment of the sick. This was opposed from the time of early Greece by a so-called "Rationalist tradition," which was based on the use of anatomical and pharmacological logic to



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