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Using Proving in Homeopathy

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THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF PROVING

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There are many different types of proving that all provide information about a remedy. Each has its strengths and weaknesses. In order to understand how reliable and how useful information is, we need to understand how it was obtained and what limitations apply to it.

TOXICOLOGY

The most basic form of proving is a report of the toxicology of a substance. This was the starting point of homoeopathy and it was only the later development of the potentization of remedies that opened up the possibility of deeper provings.

Reports on the toxicological effects of substances have been published in medical journals and compendiums for several hundred years. Descriptions of the effects of poisons can be found more generally in works dating back to the beginning of written history, whether they be works of natural history, of medicine or other recorded observations of poisonings. Plato's description of the death of Socrates after he had been given Hemlock is a toxicological report and stands as an excellent proving of *Conium maculatum*. In spite of the fact that it is two and a half thousand years old it describes very well many of the symptoms of *Conium*.

There are advantages to using toxicology reports to build up a picture of the remedy. The most important of these is that the information is available and a matter of record. It can be accessed reasonably easily, especially now we have

computer databases of this information. On the whole the information is reliable and not questioned, or at least its reliability is apparent. A toxicological report is often the way in which some of the distinct nature of a remedy first comes to the attention of the homoeopathic community and offers a reason to investigate further. Hering's first experience of Lachesis was an accidental poisoning but it informed him sufficiently to make sure that the remedy was more completely studied and so added to the ranks of our polychrests.

The disadvantages of the toxicology report are many. It is only available for those substances that have a toxic effect. Many of the substances that we use are innocuous in their natural form and only develop toxic and so medicinal effects when they are potentized. Natrum muriaticum was the first example of this. As Hahnemann observed, the medicinal, and so the toxic, effects lie hidden within it. A large proportion of the materia medica is of this type and toxicology gives no information on it.

Toxicology describes the very crude effects of a substance. Usually it is only the extreme physical effects that are noted. Symptoms, especially the mental and emotional symptoms, are expressed in a generalized and undifferentiated way. The subtleties and, more importantly, the characteristic nature of symptoms are rarely expressed.

There is one area where toxicology can be more akin to a proper proving and where the information can be of real value and this is when considering recreational drugs and hallucinogens. The people who take these drugs are often doing so in an exploratory and sometimes shamanistic way. The drugs often act in a way similar to the way a potentized remedy works and sometimes the person taking the drug

makes a personal and detailed report of what happened. There are vast databases of these personal experiences on the internet and they often contain far more useful information than any ordinary proving would provide.

HEROIC PROVING

The heroic proving could be described as a deliberate poisoning in order to provide a toxicology report. It has always been a part of the dispute between the users of high and low potencies. Low potency prescribers described themselves as heroic in providing information at personal cost and risk. High potency prescribers used the term ironically for those foolish enough to put themselves at personal risk in order to obtain second rate information. The last major tranche of heroic provers died in the Staines air crash and it is not a common method today.

The disadvantages of the heroic proving are the same as those of the toxicology report with the added problem of the severe risk of harm to the prover. Yet it offers none of the advantages.

CASUAL PROVING

A casual proving can be a version of any of the different types of proving. It is merely one that is often undertaken by an individual and is not conducted in a structured way. It is, for example, when a person takes a remedy more or less on a whim and observes what happens.

It is weakened by a lack of structure and methodology and usually does not reveal a full range of the remedy's properties. However, some of the most insightful and useful

descriptions of remedies have come out of casual provings. They have an important role to play in the proving of remedies.

DREAM PROVING

The dream proving is one in which the provers accept the effect of a remedy and record their ensuing dreams. They might take the remedy but will more usually hold it for a while, meditate on it or, most commonly, sleep with it near them, often under the pillow.

The advantages of the dream proving is that it is relatively unintrusive and so does not require a great deal of commitment from the provers or supervision by the organizers. The proving can be set up quickly and easily and it is also easy to collate and publish. The dream proving can also reveal useful, and sometimes dramatic, imagery that can be a good way into understanding the remedy.

The disadvantages lie in the quality and the reliability of the information that is obtained. Physical symptoms are not looked for and are rarely received. Emotional symptoms are the main ones that are produced.

Proving dreams are always a combination of the remedy's influence and the prover's own concerns and situation. Experienced provers and collators learn to recognize the particular properties and peculiar nature of a proving dream but unless the dream prover has this experience he or she is unlikely to be able to fully distinguish the proving from the personal aspects of the dream. The dream is always, to some degree, personalized. Not only is it very difficult for the provers and collators to separate personality from proving but it is even more difficult for them to know and

express the degree to which they have succeeded in doing this. The reliability of the information is therefore never certain and it becomes very difficult to judge how the information can be used.

MEDITATIVE PROVING

The meditative proving is in many ways the most controversial. It is the one most distant from what conventional thought would accept as a drug trial. It is also the type in which the quality can be the most variable.

Many people feel that the meditative proving is a nonsense and at the far end of what should be acceptable in a scientific discipline. It stands in absolute opposition to the completely practical and physical heroic proving. Meditative provings can be carelessly conducted and badly presented but this applies to all types of proving and is not intrinsic to any one type. There are a number of extensive Hahnemannian provings that can be compared with meditative provings of the same substance. *Salix fragilis* is one example: the information from both corresponds entirely, and there is no indication that the meditative proving is inaccurate in any way.

Meditative provings, especially if they are conducted by a group that is cohesive and experienced in meditation, can be a very fast way of gaining extensive information about a remedy. It is also a process that requires commitment and effort but is relatively uninvasive and does not take a great deal of time or cause significant inconvenience.

The difficulty that is intrinsic to the meditative proving is that it is a shortcut and as such becomes an often irresistible temptation to further shortcuts. It becomes a

question not of what the substance causes but what and how the remedy cures. This may seem to be a meaningless difference but the outcome is very different. For one thing, by taking this shortcut the subtle but important details of what is unusual and characteristic are lost, the details become blurred. What is special and unusual about a remedy are the things that are at the edge and away from the mainstream. They are the things that are far from the quickest and most travelled route and are missed when rushing by.

The question of what and how the remedy will cure also introduces an element of prejudice. A proving will show a remedy causes a feeling of being unconfident. This remedy is then given to patients who lack confidence. Meditative provings are often framed in terms of "this remedy makes people more confident". It is then given to patients who, the practitioner has decided, should be more confident. This is not properly a decision for the practitioner, rather one that the remedy and the vital force negotiate.

Meditative provings have tended to produce therapeutic rather than truly homoeopathic information and they, seemingly by their nature, fall short of what they might have to offer.

TRITURATION PROVING

The trituration proving could be seen as a form of meditative proving. It is one in which the preparation of the remedy by trituration is accompanied by an awareness of the effect of the remedy. It usually involves a group of about half a dozen provers.



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