

## Introduction: A Brief Overview of Hahnemann's Life

by Luc De Schepper

Samuel Hahnemann, the founder of homeopathy, was a Renaissance genius who was skilled in many fields: he was a master pharmacist, a skilled linguist and translator who was fluent in seven languages, and the forerunner of today's natural healers who promote a natural diet and healthy lifestyle. He could also be called the first psychiatrist, because he was the first person in modern times to promote the humane treatment of the mentally ill as well as curing them with his remedies. Decades before Koch and Pasteur, he understood the principles of contagious illnesses and successfully treated the deadly epidemics which ravaged Europe in the first half of the nineteenth century. Hahnemann could even be considered a pioneer of modern public health and sanitation measures.

Hahnemann would merit a prominent place in the history of medicine for any of his contributions. His greatest contribution, of course, is the founding of the system of homeopathy, an unparalleled achievement: so far as we know, Hahnemann is the only person to have envisioned an entire system of medicine and then fully developed it into a powerful and practical tool within the span of a single lifetime. He was a true visionary whose understanding of the energetic basis of health and healing anticipated by a century the paradigm of matter as energy in modern physics. And allopathic medicine has barely begun to incorporate an understanding of the mind-body connection which Hahnemann delineated nearly two centuries ago.

I would like to begin this exposition of Hahnemann's system with a brief overview of his life, and I would encourage interested readers to explore the topic further. Rima Handley's *A Homeopathic Love Story* provides an enjoyable introduction, with her In Search of the Later Hahnemann helpful for understanding how Hahnemann practiced at the culmination of his career. Of the several biographies of Hahnemann available, my favorites are Haehl's *Life and Works of Hahnemann* and Bradford's *Life and Letters of Hahnemann*. These worthwhile books will provide a deep insight into Hahnemann's struggles and the obstacles he had to overcome.

**Hahnemann was born on April 11, 1755**, in Meissen, Saxony, Germany where his father was employed as a porcelain painter. Money was scarce, and in his early years the young Samuel was frequently taken out of school for lack of money. He helped pay for his own education starting at the age of 12 by tutoring his fellow students in Latin and Greek. Hahnemann's father cultivated original thinking in Samuel from the time he was young. Before going to the porcelain factory, he would often shut Samuel up in a room, giving him a knotty question to ponder. "Prove all things, hold fast to what is good, dare to be wise" was the substance of his advice to his son. He petitioned the Prince's school, St. Afra, in

Meissen where Hahnemann was admitted in 1770. Hahnemann was such a brilliant student that one of his professors arranged for free tuition. He left this school in 1775 after presenting a dissertation in Latin on "The wonderful construction of the human hand." With very little money, Hahnemann left for Leipzig in the spring of 1775 to study medicine. He supported himself by giving private lessons in French and German as well as translating treatises on medicine, botany, and chemistry, a work he would continue for the next 20 years. One of his professors, Dr. Bergrath, was so impressed with the young student that he obtained for Hahnemann the privilege of attending lectures for free. Not satisfied with the dull book-knowledge that this university had to offer (they had no hospital of their own), he soon moved to Vienna. Again, he found good fortune in Dr. Quarin, who helped Hahnemann through his years of a meager existence.

After receiving his degree in 1779, Hahnemann settled down to practice medicine in various small villages in Germany. Within five years he had given up his practice, candidly admitting that his patients would do better without his help. In the mean time he had married Johanna Leopoldine Henriette K  chler, an apothecary's daughter, in 1782. He supported his growing family (the couple eventually had 11 children) exclusively with writing and chemistry in Dresden from 1785 until 1789. For a while he tried private practice again but found he could not count on it as a source of income: "I can only look upon my practice as good for the heart." (Haehl, *Life and Works of Hahnemann*, Vol. II, p. 23).

Hahnemann published many works on chemistry, the most celebrated being a treatise on arsenic poisoning. Some of his critics would later say that Hahnemann would have been a great chemist had he not turned into a great quack. In 1789 the family moved to Leipzig and Hahnemann published a treatise on syphilis, remarkable for its description of a new preparation of mercury which he had developed and which is known to this day as Hahnemanniann soluble mercury. Hahnemann's writing and chemistry provided only a meager income for his family, however, and they often lacked the bare necessities for survival. In one touching vignette, Hahnemann recounts scrubbing the family's laundry with raw potatoes because they could not afford soap.

Hahnemann began attacking the medical practices of his time as early as 1784, attracting notoriety, ridicule and rejection by his colleagues. Emperor Leopold of Austria died unexpectedly in 1792 after having been bled four times in 24 hours for a high fever and abdominal distension. Hahnemann publicly criticized the emperor's physicians and continued to speak out strongly against bloodletting, although he himself was denounced as a murderer because he denied his patients the "benefits" of bleeding. (Hahnemann had begun practicing medicine again, but soon gave it up out of frustration with the ineffective methods available and with his difficulty in collecting adequate reimbursement from his patients.) He and his family, including five children at that point, were living in one room in the direst circumstances. Hahnemann stayed up every other night doing translation work, the family's main source of income, so that he could continue researching more effective methods of healing during the day. During this period he also picked up his "useless" habit

of pipe smoking, as he called it. However, Hahnemann was already concerned with hygienics and diet at this point, advocating the consumption of as little meat as possible and encouraging goat's and sheep's milk rather than cow's milk.

The year 1791, when Hahnemann was 46, marked a turning point in the development of his thought. Up to that point he could see the limitations, even the dangers, of the medicine he had been trained in, but he had no good alternative to offer. In 1791 Hahnemann had a remarkable insight while translating Cullen's *Materia Medica*. Cullen attributed the antimalarial properties of Cinchona bark (from which quinine is made) to its bitterness, but Hahnemann knew that other bitter herbs are not active against malaria. He began a practice which he would continue throughout his life and which demonstrated his great integrity and love of knowledge: he experimented on himself. He found that Cinchona bark (from which the homeopathic remedy China is made) could induce in him, a healthy person, the same symptoms it would cure in the sick person. This discovery led to the first law of homeopathy: the Law of Similars, or "Like Cures Like."

It was also around this time that Hahnemann made his mark as a psychiatrist. Asylums at this time were usually run in connection with prisons; the mentally ill were crowded in close quarters with insufficient food. Worse, they were abandoned by physicians, who believed that insanity was contagious. Instead, the mentally ill were chained, flogged, and teased for the amusement of visitors. The first real asylum for mental patients was opened by Hahnemann in Georgenthal, where Duke Ernst of Gotha put one of the wings of his castle at Hahnemann's disposal. It was designed for the wealthy insane and melancholic. He had only one patient, the well-known author Klockenbring of Hannover, who was suffering from a full-blown mania which modern psychiatrists would have great difficulty treating. Yet Hahnemann cured him completely in seven months. In order to get a sense of this magnificent cure, I urge the reader to read this case in Dudgeon's *Lesser Writings of Samuel Hahnemann*, page 243. It was the first time in the modern era that insane people were treated with gentleness, humaneness and compassion instead of coercion.

After this, mainly out of financial need he moved again from one village to another, violently attacked by doctors and pharmacists. His practice of making his own medicines aroused their jealousy, and the pharmacists brought action against him for interfering with their privileges. Unfortunately his enemies won and Hahnemann was prohibited from dispensing his own medicines. It was during one of those moves in 1794 that he lost a newborn son in a carriage accident in which his son Friedrich (the only one of the family who would become a homeopathic physician) was also injured.

In 1800 a scarlet fever epidemic gave Hahnemann the opportunity to demonstrate the effectiveness of the new type of medicine he was researching, based not only on the Law of Similars but also on the concept of highly diluted, potentized doses. Hahnemann created a sensation when he successfully used Belladonna in homeopathic doses as a cure and preventive for the epidemic. Hahnemann was attacked again because he asked a small remuneration for his discovery (which was understandable, considering his poverty-stricken circumstances), although he made his Belladonna available free of charge to poor patients.

In 1810 Hahnemann published the first edition of the *Organon of the Healing Art*, his most important work. This book laid out the foundations of his new approach to healing, including the Law of Similars, the principle of giving a single medicine which had been potentized, and in the smallest possible dose, and only giving remedies which had been proven on healthy people. (These principles are all explained in detail in Chapter Three). In the next few years Hahnemann proved many remedies on himself and his family members, and from 1814 on, he expanded the group to include his closest friends and associates (called the "Prover's Union"). These provers were some of his earliest disciples like Gross, Stapf, Hartman, and Rückert.

Success was achieved again in 1813 when Hahnemann used homeopathy to treat an epidemic of typhus, which affected Napoleon's soldiers after their invasion of Russia. Soon the epidemic spread to Germany, where Hahnemann cured the first stage with Bryonia and Rhus tox. Again he was attacked by the pharmacists for encroaching on their privileges by dispensing his own medicines. The Leipzig city council ordered Hahnemann to cease such activity in 1820. This persecution reached its climax in 1821, forcing Hahnemann to move to Köthen. There he was protected by Duke Ferdinand of Anhalt-Köthen, who was one of his patients and who allowed him to practice as a doctor and dispense his own medications. (Germany at that time was a loose association of duchies and city-states, each with its own laws.)

For a dozen years Hahnemann was able to practice and further develop his ideas in peace and quiet, settled in Köthen under the Duke's protection. Patients traveled from all over Europe to see him. His wife Johanna, who had borne her husband eleven children, died in 1830 from severe lung catarrh, but Hahnemann was well taken care of by his surviving daughters, especially Charlotte and Luise. He was joined by Dr. Theodore Mossdorf, one of his students who became his assistant and son-in-law.

During this time Hahnemann developed the next stage of his understanding of chronic diseases, the concept of miasms. He published his discovery in 1828 in the first edition of *Chronic Diseases*. Although the concept was well received by Hahnemann's staunchest supporters (Stapf, Gross, Hering, and von Boenninghausen), most homeopaths felt it was too far-fetched and disavowed it. A Dr. Trink had schemed behind Hahnemann's back with Hahnemann's publisher to delay its publication, another of the many obstacles Hahnemann faced in developing and publicizing his new system.

In 1831 homeopathy triumphed again, this time over the cholera epidemic which spread westward from Russia, while allopathic medicine was helpless against the virulent disease. The remedies Hahnemann used—Camphor, Cuprum and Veratrum—would still be among the top remedies used in a cholera epidemic today. Even Napoleon himself was treated successfully with a homeopathic remedy for a case of pthiriasis.



Hahnemann was joined in Köthen by his next energetic assistant, Dr. Gottfried Lehman, who turned out to be the most faithful of Hahnemann's helpers. But he was dissatisfied with the "pseudo-homeopaths" of nearby Leipzig, and he distanced himself from them more and more. In 1833 the first homeopathic hospital was opened in Leipzig under the direction of Dr. Moritz Müller; its founders hoped it would benefit from its proximity to the internationally-famous Hahnemann. At first Hahnemann was very enthusiastic, providing financial support and traveling to inspect it in 1834. But the clinic ran into financial problems after Hahnemann left for Paris in 1835 and closed for good in 1842.

This brings us to the last chapter of Hahnemann's life, which reads like a romance novel. In 1834, a beautiful and vivacious Parisienne, Marie Mélanie d'Herville-Gohier, undertook the lengthy journey to consult Hahnemann in Germany, ostensibly for the treatment of her neuralgic pains. (Later Mélanie stated that her real reason was her interest in Hahnemann's new system of medicine and a curiosity about its famous founder. Based on the turn of events, we can speculate as to whether Mélanie had ulterior motives in mind.) Mélanie gave her age as 32, although others said she was 35 (she must have been a Phosphorus!). She swept the 80-year-old widower off his feet, and they were married only three months after their first meeting.

Mélanie's role in Hahnemann's life is controversial. After eight decades of struggles, poverty, and adversity, he was able to enjoy the evening of his life with his young, beautiful, well-to-do and well-connected wife, who brought many members of the French nobility and high society to see him. On the other hand, Mélanie successfully isolated him from his children for the rest of his life. Mélanie convinced Hahnemann to come back to Paris with her, holding out the promise of his enjoying rest and the adulation of French society, many of whose members had adopted homeopathy. But after a long and strenuous trip to Paris, she convinced Hahnemann to practice again. The practice was probably tiring for the elderly Hahnemann, but we can be grateful to Mélanie because it gave him the opportunity to experiment and perfect his LM method. Mélanie learned homeopathy from her husband and worked as his assistant in the afternoon, running her own clinic for poor people in the morning. She even printed her business cards as Dr. Mélanie Hahnemann, the first female "physician" in France.

Hahnemann had great fame and success in France and completed his "most complete and best method," described in the sixth edition of the *Organon*. The manuscript was in the hands of his publisher when Hahnemann died in 1843, at the ripe old age of 88. Mélanie has been blamed for her role in withholding publication of this all-important edition, as well as for burying her husband in a private ceremony in an unmarked grave in her family's mausoleum.

To conclude this little prologue about Hahnemann, it is fitting to mention Hahnemann's great qualities of character which we homeopaths, his intellectual heirs, could all aspire to. First, Hahnemann had tremendous *perseverance* in pursuing what he believed to be true. At every step in developing his system he met with great discouragement and abuse.

Hahnemann suffered from the attacks of the orthodox medical establishment of his time, which used all the legal and political weapons at their disposal to stop him. The journals of his time printed scathing, even libelous, critiques. The criticisms he endured only stimulated him to perfect his system. But many letters found after his death revealed how much Hahnemann suffered from this undeserved and unceasing persecution.

Next, Hahnemann's integrity was strikingly displayed in his abandoning his medical practice when he found it harmful to his patients, instead trying to support his large family on a meager income from translating books. He also demonstrated his integrity by doing something which physicians and pharmacists of today would never think of: he experimented on himself with the remedies he gave to his patients. This brings us to another admirable quality, his industriousness. In addition to developing an entire system of medicine and proving about a hundred remedies, he wrote about 70 original works on chemistry and medicine and translated about 24 works from English, French, Latin, Italian. Finally, he was humble. He wrote to his friend Dr. Stapf, "Be as sparing as possible with your praises. I do not like them, I feel that I am only an honest, straightforward man who does not more than his duty."

Hahnemann had an unfortunate limitation which in some ways hindered the development of homeopathy, and which we modern homeopaths would do well to learn from. At a later stage in his life he became intolerant of contradiction, viewing with suspicion anyone who did not agree with him in every detail. He said: "He who does not walk exactly on the same line with me, who diverges, if it be but the breadth of a straw to the left or right, is a traitor and I will have nothing to do with him." Dr. Gross, one of Hahnemann's first and best disciples, wrote to Hahnemann that the loss of his child had taught him that homeopathy did not suffice in every case. Hahnemann never forgave him for this remark. Hahnemann alienated many of his followers with his rigidity and intolerance, although it is also true that he felt betrayed by many of them.

Millions of people owe the relief of their suffering to the greatest genius in medical history. This book is the exposition of his system. While it also draws from many of his greatest followers-von Boenninghausen, Hering, Kent, Lippe and others-Hahnemann provided the foundation, the laws and principles, on which everything else is built.

**Excerpted from Luc De Schepper's book, available in bookstore:**

**WholeHealthNow**

**Hahnemann Revisted:**

**A Textbook of Classical Homeopathy  
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