

# “It’s Done with Mirrors”

## Observations on the Nature of Healing

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**Abstract:** The metaphor of the mirror is useful in describing the phenomenon that takes place when the *simile* or *simillimum* is administered to the ill patient, to initiate a healing process. This transformational event is explored through references to the *Organon* of Hahnemann and his concept of the power of the vital force compared with the power of the similar medicine in the promotion of healing. The relevance of the mirror metaphor to the healing process in general is explored in other fields, with reference to Jungian psychology, mythology and the Bible, among others.

**Keywords:** mirror, metaphor for healing with homeopathy, Jungian psychology; healing, general systems theory.

“For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: Now I know in part; but then I shall know even as also I am known.” (St. Paul’s epistle to the Corinthians I, chapter 13, verse 12)

Despite homœopathy’s long history and multitude of practitioners, we have yet to explain its mechanism of initiation of cure. As we all know, our existing vocabulary is inadequate to describe what we experience in the use of homœopathic medicines. We talk of the vital force, the morbidic stimulus and the healing stimulus (in our case the homœopathic medicine). We then try to piece together what happens when the (properly chosen) medicine is introduced to a vital force that is in the throes of challenge by a certain morbidic stimulus.

Hahnemann, in the *Organon*, in the footnotes to aphorism 22, speaks of the vital force as only *maintaining the organism in health but not having the ability to heal the organism when diseased...* “for if it possessed an ability so worthy of imitation, it would never allow the organism to fall ill.” He further recognizes the vital force, when untuned, as “(bringing) about in the organism the disagreeable sensations and abnormal functions that we call disease.” (§ 11) Then, “It is only the pathologically untuned vital force that causes diseases” (§ 12), and “the physician has only to eliminate the totality of symptoms in order to remove simultane-

ously the inner alteration...thereby removing and annihilating the disease itself.” (§ 17) (1). This portrays the vital force as having limited capability (maintenance of the organism in health) and the capacity to be affected and to manifest symptoms when subjected to the influence of a morbidic stimulus. In aphorism 64, the vital force is described as behaving in a receptive or passive way during the primary action of artificial disease agents (medicines), “(receiving) into itself the artificial power acting from without, so allowing its state of health to be changed.” However Hahnemann says, “But then it seems to rally in response to this influence (primary action) that it has taken on.” (emphasis mine). And further, “It produces the exactly opposite condition (*secondary action*)...the intensity of this reaction is proportionate to the effect (*primary action*) exerted on it by the artificial disease agent and, of course, to its own energy as well.” In aphorism 66, he states, “...in a healthy body one will not notice any conspicuous... counteraction (*secondary action*) to the effect of very small homœopathic doses of pathogenetic substances... the counteraction of the living organism is only

as much as is needed to restore the normal condition.” These last two statements seem to imply that the vital force possesses more ability to act effectively in the diseased state than is stated in the previous aphorisms. The vital force, or basic life force (and its ability to [at least] bring forth symptoms), seems to possess a certain strength, depending on nutrition, psychological well-being (I use psychological in its most generic sense: psycho/psychic-logical) and factors of inheritance, as well as previous experience in this lifetime.

Dr. Hahnemann, in aphorism 29 of the *Organon*, despite asserting in aphorism 28 that—because it is based on factual experience—a scientific explanation of the mode of action of homœopathy is actually of little importance, proceeds nonetheless to propose his own explanation:

“...by administering a medicinal potency chosen exactly in accordance with the similitude of symptoms, a somewhat stronger, similar, artificial morbid affection is implanted upon the vital power deranged by a natural disease; this artificial affection is *substituted*, as it were, for the weaker similar natural disease, *against which the instinctive vital force, now only excited to stronger effort* by the drug-affection, needs only to direct its increased energy; but owing to its brief duration it will soon be *overcome by the vital force*, which, liberated first from the natural disease, and finally from the substituted artificial (drug-) affection, now again finds itself enabled to continue the life of the organism in health.” (emphasis mine) (This is from the 5<sup>th</sup> edition of the *Organon*) (2).

This presents the notion of a “sham” illness (stronger than the actual illness), which is presented to the vital force, and which stimulates it to greater action, then evaporates, as it were, after the vital force has dealt successfully with the original illness. In the 6<sup>th</sup> edition of the *Organon*, it is stated slightly differently:

“...this vital principle, which has been dynamically untuned by natural disease, is *taken over* by a similar and somewhat stronger artificial disease, through the administration of a potentized medicine that has been accurately chosen for the similarity of its symptoms. Consequently the (weaker) dynamic disease is extinguished and disappears; from then on it no longer exists for the vital principle, which is controlled and occupied by the stronger artificial disease; this in turn presently wanes, so that the patient is left free and cured. Thus delivered, the *dynamis* can again maintain the organism in health.”

*In this later version, the presumption is that the similar medicinal disease and not the vital force is responsible for extinguishing the natural disease.*

Here, the vital force is described as having no power to restore health or to work toward healing, whereas in the 5<sup>th</sup> Edition it is described as “direct(ing) its increased energy...”- the implication being that it possesses some power which is excited by the presence of the healing similar medicine.

In summary, it seems that Hahnemann is telling us: (1) that the vital force has insufficient ability to cure disease but instead maintains the organism in health and produces symptoms of illness as a result of a morbid stimulus, but (2) that the vital force plays an active role—to some degree—in restoring health, but with the lion’s share of the work being effected by the presence of the spirit-like artificial disease (similar medicine). Nonetheless, there seems to be some ambiguity regarding his perception of the extent of capability of the vital force.

The process by which an effective healing stimulus participates in a curative manner is basically theoretical, and our understanding of it is not necessary to the effective practice of homœopathy. On the other hand, most of us are products of medical training in the mid-to-late 20<sup>th</sup> century, in which part of the emphasis has been—more than ever—on understanding what we do. Further, another 20<sup>th</sup> century phenomenon called General Systems Theory tells us that the human being in health and illness has laws (visible or invisible to us) by which it operates, which have something in common with the workings of other systems in our universe, be it the carburetion system of an internal combustion engine, the dynamics of a headstart classroom or the physiology of a centipede. (I refer you to the book, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*.) (3)

I would like to examine a related view of the mechanism of the effective healing stimulus, hoping it will add to our curiosity, if not our clarity in understanding what we do. Twentyman uses the analogy of the mirror in attempting to represent the process that takes place in the initiation of cure by homœopathic remedies:

“It befalls everyone, from time to time, to get into a fixed state of emotional behavior...isolated in an attitude which seems to us indubitably right and to everyone else wrong. Our friends and families get fed up with us, we become intolerable and quite unable to see the fault that everyone else sees all too clearly. Or perhaps we do half see it, but can do nothing to change it. Then with luck one of these suffering friends may succeed in holding a mirror up to us in which we can see ourselves. Drama often serves this purpose and we can see ourselves as one of the characters of the play. If

we can recognize our impossible behavior clearly enough we can and will begin to change and become whole again. Something of this sort must be known to all of us, and what enables the process of self-cure to come about is a mirror image, *a mere nothing substantially speaking*. (emphasis mine) We succeed in holding a mirror up to nature.” (4) Shakespeare tells us that in Hamlet’s remark about the nature of the drama: “The purpose of playing... is to hold, as ‘twere, the mirror up to nature; to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure.” (5)

Consider the example of the mirror metaphor in the healing ceremony of the Navajo Indian culture, as I came to know of it during my time there as a mainstream physician. There exist, among the Navajos, people with extraordinary abilities of perception, called “hand tremblers” (so-named because their hands begin to tremble when they are in the midst of perceiving what is out of balance in the individual patient). After the diagnostician, or “hand trembler,” has made the diagnosis (which usually relates to a sequence of events leading up to the state of illness, and originates from some act which was out of harmony with nature), then a specially gifted and trained medicine man begins a long and detailed ritual that often includes the making of a sand painting. The sand painting depicts the sequence of events referred to above, which led up to the illness. The sand painting acts as a mirror, “held up” briefly to the patient, and again can be seen as involving the process of reflection (in this instance at least partly on a conscious level) as part of the stimulus of the healing process. This mirror image is likewise transient, since it is destroyed before the following day.

An interesting example of the homeopathic/mirror principle from the orthodox medical community is the “tinnitus-masker” which is a small device that makes a noise very similar to the tinnitus experienced by the patient. “Patients who use the device daily report varying periods of extended relief when they remove it. Commonly, the tinnitus does not return for 30 to 40 minutes. Several have found that they can wear the masker for two days and be free of tinnitus for the next two days. Among the patients using one or another form of masking, the clinic reports that 72% have had complete relief of tinnitus.” (6) A very simple and material example of the mirroring phenomenon in the service of promoting motion or advancement is the key. When only one key, from a whole ring of them, is effective in unlocking a door or starting a car, we witness the phenomenon once again.

Dr. Edward Edinger, a Jungian psychologist

and brilliant interpreter of Jung’s writings, when referring to the images of darkness encountered in the process of analysis in depressed patients says, “We need to know these images in all their variety because dark moods are healed by images of darkness, not by images of light. You need only consider how you feel in a depressed state when you encounter images of lightness and good cheer; that’s not what you’re interested in when you’re in that condition. What you’re interested in are symbolic images that represent the condition you’re experiencing, because they bring objectivity; they give you your bearings so you know what you’re dealing with. It is therefore healing, when in a dark mood, to encounter images of darkness.” (7)

The psychological literature, especially Jungian psychology, is full of references to the mirroring phenomenon as animating the healing process. In dreams, the reflections are inevitably symbolic, some more easily “decoded” than others. “...a man in the early stages of analysis dreamed that *he looked into a mirror and was amazed to see that his face was his father’s face*. This man was identified with his father and was living out his father’s unhappy fate. The dream was a mirror enabling him to see that fact—to make his identification with his father an object of his knowledge (consciousness).” (8)

Whitmont, in *The Symbolic Quest and Psyche and Substance*, cites many examples of cures of physical pathology as a result of dream symbols becoming consciously understood by individual patients. (9), (10)

In the Bible, there is a reference to the healing derived from the phenomenon of mirroring: “And the people kept speaking against God...(who then) sent poisonous serpents among the people, and they kept biting the people, so that many people of Israel died...(and the people came to Moses and said), ‘Intercede with God that he may remove the serpents from upon us’...and Moses interceded...and Moses made a serpent of copper and placed it upon a signal pole and it did occur that if a serpent had bitten a man and he gazed at the copper serpent, he then kept alive.” (11)

A partial reflection, or indicator of an individual’s approaching the threshold of trouble, can be built into different individuals in different ways. For example, I have a patient who has a patch of eczema on his right wrist. When he overextends himself, the patch becomes active, with itching and redness, and reminds him to slow down. When he does, the patch once again becomes quiescent, without any other treatment.

Perseus, in his succeeding in the slaying of the Medusa (symbolizing the dreadful level of

existence which has petrifying effects), receives the assistance of Hermes (a sickle to cut off the Medusa's head) and the polished shield of Athena, that functioned as a mirror, enabling him to avoid looking directly at her and thereby being turned to stone.

Pegasus—the winged horse—sprang from the severed head of Medusa and started the Peirene spring flowing, the spring of the Muses, with a stamp of his moon-shaped hoof... a symbol of transformation following the “healing process” of the slaying of the Medusa.

“Athena's mirror, we should remember, is showing us an image of something we dare not look at directly; to grasp what we are dealing with, we need an image of it, we need to see it indirectly, which allows a more objective view. Surely it is not an accident that the term ‘reflection’ refers to the specific capacity of human consciousness, the capacity to consider itself... The things we react to are mirroring some aspect of our inner nature and enabl(ing) us to see it.”(12) This version of the mirroring phenomenon as a stimulus to healing also incorporates the notion of the “similar” medicine as opposed to the “identical” medicine or healing stimulus (i.e., seeing Medusa in the mirror as opposed to face to face).

The taking of the homœopathic case represents another very basic variant of the mirror metaphor. We have all observed the phenomenon of disappearance of symptoms and progression in the direction of cure in patients whose case we are taking but to whom we have not yet administered a remedy. I would assert that the process is the same. By acting as the reflective “sounding board” during the case-taking process we make space for the patient to portray themselves in detail for us, as well as for themselves. Our reflective comments or “playbacks” of what they have said, help to further clarify the picture for us both, permitting their own conscious and unconscious insights in the process.

The mirror of dreams is another instance of the same theme, in which the symbolic figures and story of the dream (presented by our unconscious) are available to our conscious mind as a healing stimulus. *Alice in Wonderland* and *The Wizard of Oz* are two popular “dreams” which portray this process. The mirror metaphor, then, can be extended to other healing experiences, demonstrating again, that the *simillimum* principle is at work in areas other than homœopathy, on a conscious and an unconscious level.

If we look at the parallel of *symbols*, as providing access to unconscious contents of the psyche, and *symptoms*, as providing access to the unconscious

processes of the body, the autonomic nervous system, etc., we have the basis for a fascinating speculation: The *homœopathic medicine* (a constellation of the totality of symptoms, including the striking and individualizing symptoms of the patient) and the *dream image*, for example, (a constellation of symbols which—when “decoded”—portray an aspect of an individual that strives to become conscious) represent two facets of the healing process which animate healing in the same way.

We can still ask ourselves, in healing through homœopathy or other areas, does the mirror “image,” be it a potentized medicine, a dream image or another form of the mirroring phenomenon, possess the primary energy to complete the healing transaction or is there a central and crucial inherent healing (vital) force with more power than Dr. Hahnemann acknowledged. In Chinese medicine, Qi—the basic energy animating living beings—indeed is known to have the power to heal chronic illness, given the appropriate stimulus. In Jungian psychology, the greater Self, likewise animating the individual, is the source of not only the power to heal but to “in-form” the individual over a lifetime about his or her true nature.

From what has been cited, it appears to me that the vital force has a substantial power to heal as well as to maintain balance, though in the state of chronic illness a healing factor is required, in the nature of a “template” or an “energetic mirroring experience” to animate the vital force to more effective action.

*“When you get what you want in your struggle  
for self,  
And the world makes you king for a day;  
Then go to the mirror and look at yourself  
And see what that guy has to say.  
For it isn't your father, or mother or wife  
Whose judgment upon you must pass:  
The fellow whose verdict counts most in your  
life  
Is the guy staring back from the glass.  
He's the fellow to please, never mind all the  
rest,  
For he's with you clear up to the end;  
And you've passed your most dangerous,  
difficult test  
If the guy in the glass is your friend.  
You may be like Jack Horner and chisel a  
plum,  
And think you're a wonderful guy;  
But the man in the glass says you're **only a  
bum**  
If you can't look him straight in the eye.  
You can fool the whole world down the path-*

way of years,  
And get pats on the back as you pass;  
But your final reward will be heartaches and  
tears  
If you've cheated the guy in the glass."

- Anonymous (13)

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