

# The Infinitesimal Dose

— an extract

## Playing the Devil's Advocate

In purely mechanistic terms, potentiation means the process of serial dilution and serial succussion peculiar to homœopathy. More fundamentally, however, it may be defined as the transference of medicinal information to, and its amplification within, a diluent. Posology is the methodology of dosage in general, but in this case with reference to homœopathy in particular.

Unfortunately, the whole matter of homœopathic posology would appear to be in a state of chaotic disorder. Patient sensitivity aside, one practitioner treats a bruise with *Arnica* 200c, another with *Arnica* 6c, and a third uses 30c (pronouncing that he uses that potency 'for everything'). In more generalised disorders, some start with a few doses of 10M (10000c); others, perhaps more cautiously, advocate a 6c of the appropriate remedy every 12 hours. To this must be added the fact that there are three standard scales of serial dilution (centesimal, decimal and fifty millesimal), each with its own adherents, and, beyond that, an enormous variation in the actual material amounts given. One practitioner may give a single tiny globule the size of a pin-head, another advocates a pilule fifty times the size, and yet another recommends one full drop of liquid potency. Some say a child should have one pilule, and adults two. Others refute this, and state that the dose for a mouse is the same as that for an elephant. Surely, nothing could be more contrived to deter the initiate.

At the root of this dilemma has been a failure to supply a reasonable and cohesive theory of the process of potentiation. For, whereas the dictionary defines posology as the science of dosage, homœopathic posology appears to rely on inability to define not only the exact nature of its remedies but also, therefore, their concrete magnitude. Perhaps naturally, the more recent confirmatory statistical clinical analyses of remedial action have fortified the homœopathists; and upon these techniques, as laudable as they may be, they have concentrated their efforts, rather than the search for the scientific basis of their practice. In so doing, and in constantly asserting 'a natural law', the Law of Similars (*Similia similibus curentur*), as the foundation of their therapy, they feel that they have elevated their art to a science, but what science is it that knows what it dispenses, nor in which quantity?

The enigma is further exacerbated when we come to examine the practices of homœopathic pharmacy. In the preparation of liquid potencies, some pharmacies employ ten succussions per dilution, and others twenty.

Hahnemann advocated two, and finally settled upon one hundred; although admittedly he did change his method of dilution to match the larger number of succussions. Most say that distilled water should be the aqueous basis for the diluent, and tap water is acceptable to a minority of others. The alcoholic strength of the diluent employed in serial dilution varies from 15 to 95%, according to economics and apparently according to the whim of the pharmacy. The drive

for respectability and 'science', however, has engendered a movement within the EEC to standardise pharmaceutical methods in homœopathy. Indeed, with regard to fundamental matters, such as the preparation of mother tinctures, this is a most commendable approach. However, when we come to the sticky matter of potentiation, how will it be possible to standardise the method in the light of ignorance of its physiochemical foundation? Whichever method might be chosen would be totally arbitrary.

The problem, in a sense, begins with Hahnemann himself, who through his genius developed his methods both intuitively and empirically. What might have appeared in the 19th Century to be scientific explanations of his methodology are no longer valid in the modern world; a thing, of course, for which he cannot be criticised. Indeed, intuition and empiricism in homœopathy have been its saving grace over the years, not to mention its realism and pragmatism. But one thing it has not been is a science. Strangely perhaps, it survives because it works.

In all fairness, these matters must be put in perspective. Orthodox medicine, or allopathy as it is termed, is highly scientific in its reductionism. However, it peers down the microscope at a cell, but fails to see the man to whom it has belonged. It prostitutes its science by disallowing an ingress of holistic art. It frequently fails to see that one disease may be linked to another of remote or current chronology, and prescribes a number of unassociated medicines. It supports itself with an hierarchy of technical investigative strength and diagnostic imbalance.

The truth of the matter, however, is that despite the prodigious vagaries of both its pharmaceuticals and posology, homœopathy has been enormously successful; and whilst making no claims to replace the totality of its orthodox antagonist, does in fact constitute a serious and often superior rival. Nevertheless, we are not absolved from comprehending better what we do. Can we, 150 years or so beyond his death, do better than Hahnemann in his quasi-scientific explanation of the phenomenon of potentiation.

"It becomes uncommonly evident that the material part (of an original substance) by means of such dynamisation (potentiation) will ultimately dissolve into its individual spirit like (conceptual) essence. In its crude state, therefore, it may be considered to consist really only of this undeveloped conceptual essence" — Organon, 6th edition, section 270 (footnote).

Personally, I think we can.

## From Chaos to Curry

If there were one thing in common life that might represent the infinite, it would be the chicken curry. With a few basic spices, the repertoire of alternative recipes is seemingly endless. But, at the conclusion of cooking, we mostly have something that is identifiable as a chicken curry. Despite the considerable

differences in methods of potentiation, in terms of both technique and scale of dilution, we always seem to produce a remedy of recognisable clinical properties; although some preparations appear more potent than others. Perhaps naively, some people mistakenly believe that a 6c of Pulsatilla from pharmacy A is of necessity the same as that produced by pharmacy B. It is true that both will have the 'flavour' of Pulsatilla, but there may well be a considerable difference in therapeutic strength. Until techniques are standardised, this will ever be so, and they cannot be sensibly standardised until we have a reasonable understanding of the fundamental chemistry of potentiation. Producing a uniform, albeit mundane, canned curry is apparently a lot easier.

When we come to serve our guests, there are a limited number of modes of presentation. We may dispense our remedies in *Balti* fashion, as they come, straight from the 'pan': that is to say, in liquid potency (but sometimes watered down). Alternatively, we may place them on beds of sugar of various types, and give them as impregnated granules, pilules, tablets or powders. In more avant-garde establishments, they appear as creams, suppositories, injections or inhalants. Garnishing and presentation, however, are generally more to do with psychology and convenience than therapy as such.

What is far more important is the correct satiation of the physiological appetite. We may eat little and often with chopsticks (low potency technique); or, entering the age of the quick and easy, we may administer capsules of curry concentrate at infrequent intervals (high potency technique). Different techniques suit different individuals. Those with less robust constitutions are better suited to the 'Chinese' method. Overdosage, with the dire consequences of 'curry poisoning', is obviously more likely in the capsular approach; an over-zealous dose being the straw to break the metabolic back, with the production of what is euphemistically referred to as homœopathic aggravation. Chopsticks are safer in this respect.

Let us now briefly review the three standard scales of homœopathic serial dilution, with particular reference to the molecular (or ionic) presence of any original substance, be it arsenic or otherwise. The centesimal scale (denoted by c, cH or C) involves serial dilutions of 1 in 100. The decimal scale (denoted by x or D), more popular in Germany, requires serial dilutions of 1 in 10. The fifty millesimal (or LM) scale, based on serial dilutions of 1 in 50,000 (though using 3c as its initial base), grows in favour, and employs one hundred succussions per dilution, as opposed to the ten or so of its rivals. The safe point, as we might term it, is that stage of serial dilution where the concentration of any original substance is so low that, in normal therapeutic dosage, there is negligible toxicity; even with regard to the most virulent poisons. This point, for practical purposes and according to scale, may be taken to be 6c, 11x or LM1. Furthermore, dilutions beyond 12c, 24x and LM4 are unlikely to contain any molecules of original substance whatsoever (except, perhaps, the odd one occasionally). These matters will be material to our analysis of the process of potentiation.

For the moment, it is important to realise that, except for the initial processing of insoluble substances, all three of the above scales are prepared by essentially the same method: that is to say, serial dilution in ethanol (ethyl alcohol) – water and succussion within a glass vial. They must all, therefore, produce something very similar, but with subtle quantitative and qualitative variations, enough to produce discernible therapeutic differences. Whilst accepting that LM potencies might well be the mildest and most thorough in action, often

producing a profound and unaggravated cure, what justifies the inexplicit statement, as some would make, they are also 'the most energised?' Without a comprehension of the process involved, edicts such as this are fairly meaningless.

As you are all aware, not all substances are initially soluble in ethanol-water, and these must be prepared by the method of prolonged grinding with Lactose (milk sugar) in a mortar and pestle or some equivalent device. In any event, the 3c or 6x trituration of any substance is always soluble in ethanol-water, whatever its nature, and potentiation proceeds thereafter in the liquid phase.

Whereas many are prepared to accept that the diluent may hold some message characteristic of the original substance, the idea that dilution increases that effect has, not surprisingly, met with much disbelief on the part of non-homœopaths. We, of course, feel that serial succussion distinguishes potentiation from simple or progressive dilution. Moreover, whilst correctly maintaining that dilution is required to render a medicine non-toxic, many homœopaths also maintain that serial dilution is essential for the magnification of the medicinal message. However, from Hahnemann's writings we see that he did not believe that this was so:

"In order to have a determinate rule for the moderate development of power of the fluid medicines, multiplied experience and observation have led me to retain two shakes for every vial, in preference to a greater number, which had previously been used, but which developed the energy in too great a degree. On the contrary, there are homœopaths who, in their visits to the sick, carry about their persons the medicines in a fluid state, which, they nevertheless affirm, do not in time become increased in energy by the frequent agitation to which they are subjected. This declaration, however, betrays on their part the want of talent for accurate observation. I dissolved a grain of natron (native sequicarbonate of soda) in half an ounce of mixture of water and a little alcohol, poured the solution into a little vial, which was thereby filled two thirds, and shook it uninterruptedly for half an hour. By this agitation, the fluid attained an energy equal to that of the thirtieth dilution" – *Organon*, 1st American edition, section 270 (footnote).

What he did perceive, however, was the desirability of dilution.

"But with so small a diluting medium as 100 to 1 of the medicine, if many succussions by means of a powerful machine are forced in to it, medicines are then developed which, especially in the higher degrees of dynamisation (potentiation), act almost immediately, but with furious, even dangerous, violence, especially in weakly patients, without having a lasting, mild reaction of the vital principle." – *Organon*, 6th edition, Section 270 (footnote).

In Hahnemann's view, serial dilution qualifies the development of the medicinal message engendered by succussion. It retards its aggressive evolution, so as to provide a gentle gradation of ascending therapeutic levels, which are the potencies, reaching the zenith of 'perfection' in the LM scale (although Hahnemann, had he lived longer, might well have found an even 'more perfect' method). The idea that dilution increases the 'energy' of a remedy may stem from Hahnemann's unfortunate use of the word power or its derivative powerful):

"... the preparations thus produced (the LM potencies), I have found after many laborious experiments and counter experiments, to be the most powerful and at the same time mildest in action, ie the most perfected ..."

“... the material part of the medicine is lessened with each degree of dynamisation (potentisation) 50,000 times and yet incredibly increased in power ...” – Organon, 6th edition, Section 270 (footnote).

These statements would seem, at first sight, to be contradictory to his view of dilution as a retardent factor. However, this is, in fact, not the case. The clue to unravelling the apparent paradox is given in the following quotation:

“The highest idea of cure is rapid, gentle and permanent restoration of health, or removal and annihilation of the disease in its whole extent, in the shortest, most reliable, and most harmless way” – Organon, 6th edition, Section 2.

In Hahnemann's view, the most powerful form of medicine is that which cures in accordance with the above principles. Medicines that are harmless, but slower or more incomplete in action, are obviously to be regarded as weaker. Medicines that are excessively strong in action and produce an aggravation of the patient's condition, act against these principles, and are, therefore, also to be regarded as weaker therapeutic agents. The most powerful medicines are swift and complete in therapeutic effect, and unlikely to produce aggravations. Looking at it another way, anything short of optimal is lesser or weaker. Rather like tuning a radio set into a particular station there is one optimal tuning point, and wavelength points above and below are sub-optimal. By extension of this concept, the LM scale, although more dilute, is considered to be more powerful than the centesimal, in that the potencies produced thereby are more readily attuned to the patient, and, by definition, is less likely to induce homœopathic aggravation. The concept of power in Hahnemannian terminology is thus one of therapeutic power, and has nothing whatsoever to do with the amplitude of medicinal information or 'energy' contained within the diluent. If anything, it relates to its qualitative, rather than its quantitative attributes.

Unfortunately, the consistent inability of homœopaths in general to comprehend the physiochemical mechanisms involved in potentisation has generated deviant practices, which substitute the wit of the disciple for the profound intuition of the master.

The view of modernists, who believe that quantity and quality are one and the same, has coerced many, with regard to the centesimal potencies, to over-multiply their succussions, and to varying degrees. It is not too surprising to learn, therefore, that the Bryonia 6c of one pharmacy exceeds the therapeutic power of the Bryonia 30c of another; and, whilst accepting that this might be explained on the basis of meticulous purity of preparation in the former cases, it seems to me more likely that the succussion is at the root of the matter. The very existence of the decimal scale, the child of Hahnemann's followers, is also the product of a profession in too much of a hurry and too mean with its alcohol.

The belief that serial dilution enhances the succussive development of medicinal effect, rather than attenuates it, has led to a justifiable opposition to our methods, in the face of our inability to explain why. For, a theory based upon an increase in the level of medicinal information dependent upon dilution apparently defies logical conception, whereas one that embraces both dilutional quantitative reduction and qualitative modification does not.

Surely it is better said that succussion alone magnifies medicinal energy, and that dilution subdues it. The concept of dilution as a means of attenuation is an easier pill for most to swallow.

However, as will become apparent in the evolution of our

discussion, the most palatable medicine is not necessarily the best. We shall discover that potentisation involves the development of two distinct, though physically related, elements within the diluent. One concerns the actual representation of the original solute, and the other relates to potency.

Whereas the imprint of the solute upon the diluent is lessened by dilution (as one might logically expect), the element of potency cannot be enhanced unless succussion is preceded by it. Indeed, this matter of presuccussive enhancement by dilution, as we shall propose, is not so illogical and unscientific as, at first, it might seem. Furthermore, we shall see how the vague term 'energy', as it applies to potentised remedies, must be dissected into its various components for it to have any real meaning or significance.

As it would appear, homœopaths have developed their techniques entirely intuitively, and, in this respect, Hahnemann's intuition would seem to be better than that of its professional progeny. He exhibits a more subtle mastery of the balance between dilution and succussion and its effects, even without an overt knowledge of the processes involved. How much better it would be if we could comprehend the scientific basis for our art, so that those of lesser intuitive capacity could see how they might more elegantly conduct their affairs.

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