

Suck it and See

Alastair C Gray

Everyone has conducted a proving at some point in their lives. Every time you have a symptom and you attempt in some way to cure that symptom but get the dose of the medicine wrong, you can develop and generate symptoms which belong to that medicine or substance.

Imagine this. You are feeling a bit tired and low. You go to Starbucks and order a second latte because the first one makes you feel so fine and dandy! Soon you are experiencing the power of coffee: jangled nerves, shaking, dry mouth and later that night, insomnia. This is a proving. These are the adverse effects of coffee: their proving symptoms.

Another scenario would be the case of the person who takes an allopathic medication, (prescribed or OTC) and experiences side effects. Like those who took a daily dose of Aspirin for their hearts and who experienced stomach pains and even bleeding as a result.

As Jeremy Sherr tell us when talking of drugs, "There are *no* side effects. There are only *effects*." In homeopathic terms, those effects are a proving of the substance. They can be unintentional provings (as these two examples are) or intentional.

## **Intentional homeopathic provings**

A homeopathic proving occurs when a person introduces into a healthy system a homeopathic drug for the purpose of creating symptoms that were previously not there.

A homeopathic proving differs from the scenarios above in that the substance being proven is in a homeopathic potency (it has been diluted and succussed) and the person conducting the proving observes and records everything that happens to them.

In a homeopathic proving the intention is experimental and scientific. A proving is therefore the process of tracing and charting the medicinal potential within a substance and determining how it acts on a human being.

One would think that there is enough clarity around that to end the conversation but unfortunately it is not so. In fact that is the starting point for debate for there are a number of different ways in which provings are carried out.

## **Different types of provings**

**Hahnemannian:** Hahnemann conducted provings on himself and then his family and friends. After a while there was an inner circle of physicians who took part in these experiments and who wrote down all the symptoms they experienced. How they took place however is poorly understood as Hahnemann did not discuss the nuts and bolts of the procedure. What we do know is that in the early nineteenth century there was no such thing as a placebo control or a cross over, or a process of blinding.

**Hahnemannian Plus:** There are the variations on Hahnemann's provings, including some that include the entire rigor of the modern day double blind, crossover, placebo controlled clinical drug trials in an attempt to include the necessary checks and balances needed in the twenty-first century age of evidenced based medicine.

**Meditation:** In a meditation proving the participants may sit together with the remedy (either taking it or not) and after a period of time has elapsed, begin to discuss and observe and write down their experiences.

**Dream:** In these provings the participants take or hold a remedy overnight and observe their dreams to gain insight into the medicinal potential of a remedy. And then there are combinations of all the above.

### **Differences of opinion**

There are significant differences of opinion over how many doses of a remedy to take over what period of time and there are questions over which potencies to take, as well as different ways to conduct a proving. There are differences over how the information is gathered and what is included in the final proving reports.

### **Formal proving process**

1. A volunteer gives their informed consent

2. There may be a period of observation by a supervisor to establish a base line of health, to determine which symptoms belong the person and which belong to the remedy. The volunteer has their full case taken.
3. The volunteer takes their remedy
4. They observe everything that happens, writing down all of those observations, and are supervised closely.
5. The information from all the volunteer provers is extracted:
  - a. editing, collation, and publishing.

In more informal provings, a remedy is taken in a more casual setting and they see what happens. The floating factors are whether there is a case taking, a run in period for observation and/or any supervision. The proving may take place over a short period of time (a weekend seminar or a number of hours) and involve a medication or a dream. It may just involve one or a few people. Controversially, information from both the formal and informal provings find their way into homeopathic literature.

When it comes to maintaining the standard rigor and the discipline and the lineage of homeopathic repertory there are homeopaths who look at meditation or dream provings in particular who throw their hands up in horror at what is perceived to be flakey methodology.

Yet it is only flakey if you believe in the value of the double blind clinical trial. Arguably one can make a trial give any desired result, and if your understanding of health and healing is different then the genuine symptoms of the provers who took the remedy

and experienced symptoms, whether they meditated on a remedy or took it, then these methods could be valid and valuable and can easily be included in our results. The point of course not to negate the experience of provers but to question whether or not some of that information is to find its way into our text books and whether that information is verifiable.

The conflict seems to center around what is 'good' and 'not good' homeopathy. Everyone wants good homeopathy but no one can agree quite what it is. New provings have often been at the centre of these discussions and are often dismissed. There are two main reasons.

The first is the indiscriminate inclusion of **secondary symptoms** in the extraction process. It is argued by some that only primary symptoms of a remedy be included in the literature. A primary symptom is created by the impression made by the medicine on the vital force of the healthy prover. A secondary symptom is a symptom of the person's own vital force attempting to reestablish dynamic equilibrium having been knocked off balance by the medicine. This is what Hershco terms the 'Stress and Strain' and it is argued that the strain is not to be included because it is not caused by the action of the remedy.

Is this just semantics and technical issues and outdated interpretations of the Organon? Some say to this, 'Who cares? Any deviation from the usual health is a proving symptom and therefore warrants inclusion, even all of those opposing or polarity symptoms should be included as the body struggles to

retain homeostasis'. Or does it truly go the heart of Homeopathic medicine; a pillar which must not be compromised given that Homeopathy is an inductive science based on the principle of similars; that what a substance creates it can cure. It is argued that this is so crucial because our materia medica's and repertories become clogged with symptoms that are unreliable, and the job of the professional homeopath becomes harder. What is absolutely for sure is that practically determining what is primary and secondary is incredibly difficult. So difficult in fact that most simply put them together.

The second reason is the indiscriminate inclusion in our literature of what is obviously **group dynamic symptoms**. This is crucial because the provings become flavoured with the charisma of the teacher or organizer and become in some way biased. Often the relative value perceived of different proving methods comes down to the inclusion or exclusion of what is a real part of a proving process – a field effect, or group dynamics. There can be no doubt that some symptoms of this effect and not the actual proving substance have made their way into our repertories, or materia medicas, and the argument is whether this is valid proving information. Some, for example Paul Herscu in his two recent excellent books on provings, argue absolutely not. But some more liberal homeopaths would argue that the flavour of the group dynamic is in fact a reflection of the proving substance itself and must be understood – the signature of the remedy. This is a very real group field and dynamic which any prover experiences in taking part in a proving. When we ingest a proving substance we become the remedy, but we also assume the flavor

of the group of which we are a part, or of the leader and coordinator of the group. An example is the delegate at the conference who put the bottle of a proving substance in her pocket, gets an attack of Eupatorium influenza-type symptoms, and later learns that the proving substance was Eupatorium. She never took the remedy because she had taken to her bed. This is an important issue for it tells us that there is a significant part of the proving process which we do not fully understand. We cannot dismiss it because it is there. We cannot see it and measure it with an instrument. But we must be aware of it and be careful of it.

It is for these reasons that some homeopaths dismiss most if not all modern provings. There is often a lot of dross and speculation, the inclusion of special sensitive provers information at the expense of others, and the inclusion of secondary symptoms and group dynamic. Yet we have hundreds of cures and improved cases with these modern remedies such as Scorpion, Bamboo, Brassica, Wolfs Milk or Box Jellyfish.

The answer is for professional homeopaths to find a place of peace where they are able to make up their own mind as to the validity of a proving or the symptoms found from that proving and make a judgment call based on their capacity to discriminate between what is good and useless information. And time weeds out the weeds. The relative merits of all of these different ways to do provings depend on where you stand, who you are, and the types of questions you ask.

So what is a proving? It is a wonderful process of self observation. Notwithstanding the arguments around the value of different methods of proving, the actual process of a proving is the most important thing in homeopathy. It is the best way for the homeopathic student to observe – maybe for the first time their own condition. And as a strategy of teaching observation and unprejudiced observation it can not be surpassed. When you partake in a proving you learn to become brilliant in observing yourself – a way to determine what is you and what is not you. This is exactly the same in any clinical situation. But if you want to try it at home, go and buy three, no, make that five, family sized blocks of chocolate and eat as much as you can! Write down what happens. That's a proving. Just don't turn it into a lifestyle!

Bio:

Alastair Gray has a passion for the proving caught from spending time with Jeremy Sherr. Believing that it is crucial as a homeopath to engage with the medicines he has formally conducted and coordinated eleven homeopathic drug trials in the Hahnemann style at two colleges of Homeopathic medicine in Sydney Australia. As well as publishing the homeopathic proving of Kauri, he has completed a manual on the provings of White Tailed Spider, Box Jelly Fish, Moreton Bay Fig, Tea Tree, Blatta Orientalis (Cockroach) and Mosquito (Culex), Liquorice and Bufo. He teaches in New Zealand, Australia, Malaysia, the UK and the US.

Alastair Gray DSH (UK) PCH (UK) PCH (Mal) RSHom (UK) AHA. ATMS. ARoH (Aus) BAHons (NZ)

