

# Christian Friedrich Samuel Hahnemann

## A Brief Biography of the Founder of Homeopathy

April 10, 1755 – July 2, 1843

Samuel Hahnemann was born to a poor family in Meissen, Saxony, Germany, the third child of five and the eldest son. He was a quick learner and brilliant thinker, excelling at language and science. By the age of 12, he was earning extra money for the family tutoring his fellow students in Latin and Greek.

In the spring of 1775, he left to study medicine in Leipzig, all the while supporting himself by translating scientific treatises and tutoring French and German students. Due to the poor facilities at the University of Leipzig, he transferred to Vienna in 1777. It proved to be costly and, after he was robbed, he didn't have the financial resources to continue his schooling. Fortunately he so impressed the physician to the royal court that he secured for him a practicing spot as family physician for one of his rich Transylvanian patrons, Samuel von Brukenthal, Governor of Hermannstadt. In 1779, after a single term's additional study, he graduated from Erlangen, applied for and was granted the degree of MD. He held several medical positions between 1780-1783, including village doctor in the Mansfeld, Saxony region.

In 1782, he married Johanna Leopoldine Henriette Kuchler and began a family (eventually fathering 11 children). He soon became disillusioned with the medicine of the day, noting that they often caused more harm than good. They moved to Dresden in 1784, and it wasn't long before he gave up his medical practice, earning a meager living with chemistry, writing and translating work. Although he was a talented translator, it didn't pay well and he chose to keep his family in poverty rather than practice a medicine he no longer believed in. His disillusionment with medicine soon turned to outspoken attacks against the orthodox medical community, resulting in his being outcast and rejected by most of his peers.

In 1790, he moved from Leipzig to Stotteritz, and as he was translating a *Materia Medica* by the well-known Scottish physician William Cullen, he came across an explanation that didn't make sense to him. Cullen claimed that the anti-malarial efficacy of cinchona (Peruvian bark) was due to its tonic, astringent properties on the stomach. Hahnemann reasoned that there were other even more astringent substances that had no effect on malaria, and began experimenting on himself. He discovered that, by ingesting cinchona bark, he could recreate the symptoms of malaria, thus creating the same symptoms in a healthy person that it cured in a sick patient. This discovery led to the foundational principle of homeopathy, the Law of Similars (*similia similibus curentur*), and set the stage for a new medicine.

As his experimentation continued, he discovered that diluting the substance would not only eliminate the accompanying toxic side effects, it would also retain its ability to eliminate symptoms in ailing patients. Enlisting the help of his family, students and friends, he worked tirelessly to collect and catalog the symptoms of his new approach, eventually 'proving' nearly 100 substances.

In 1796, Hahnemann published *Essay on a New Curative Principle* and laid the groundwork for his similia-based medicine.

His new medicine and philosophy was violently attacked by other medical professionals, and he was frequently the object of lawsuits, especially for making his own medicine. Eventually he was prohibited from dispensing his own medicines. Hahnemann was a restless wanderer, moving his growing family to 14 different towns between 1792 and 1804, seldom staying in one place for more than a few months.

It was during the scarlet fever epidemic of 1800 that Hahnemann demonstrated the efficacy of homeopathy, not only curing, but also preventing scarlet fever successfully.

Eventually Hahnemann settled down in Torgau, Saxony, Germany (1804 – 1811, referred to as his 'Torgau Period') where he wrote many of his more insightful essays.

In 1810, Hahnemann published the culmination of his years of study and research, the ***Organon of Rational Medical Science***, in which he laid out in exhaustive detail the fundamental principles of his new science of healing, homeopathy. Over the subsequent years, he would continue to refine his *Organon* with another five editions (the 6<sup>th</sup> edition posthumously published in 1920).

In 1812 he returned to Leipzig as a teacher at the medical school. His impressive fluency in English, German, French, Latin, Italian, Greek, Hebrew and Arabic easily secured him a position that was, regrettably, not lasting. His lectures frequently degenerated to irrational, open attacks on the orthodox medical establishment and their harmful practices, until students actually refused to attend his classes. He quickly lost his status and once again became the object of a vicious campaign of persecution.

The typhus epidemic of 1813 was another successful demonstration of homeopathy, when Napoleon's soldiers succumbed after their invasion of Russia. His success drew even more adamant attacks, resulting in the Leipzig city council ordering him to cease all such activity in 1820.

In spite of the demonstrated success of homeopathy, the persecution continued and he was finally forced to move to Coethen in 1821. There, under the protection by the Duke Ferdinand of Antona-Coethen, he was allowed to resume his practice and make his own medicines. Patients traveled from all over Europe seeking his care, and his practice and research flourished. During this time, he fought unsuccessfully to have the 30c potency established as the standard, and introduced the theories of miasms in his 1828 *The Chronic Diseases*, again stirring controversy even in his most devoted followers.

In 1830, while in Coethen, his wife Johanna passed away from lung catarrh, leaving his 2 daughters to care for him and their household.

On October 8, 1834, a beautiful, 32-year-old Parisian artist arrived to consult with Hahnemann for neuralgia. After a three-month whirlwind romance, on January 18, 1835 Marie Melanie d'Hervilly-Gohier became his second wife. Their relationship was a sensation, cloaked with allegations of scandal. Regardless, she was well connected and affluent, and brought many of the French nobility to his practice. 5 months later, she convinced Hahnemann to move to Paris, thus isolating him from his children. With his new young new wife, who was also a dedicated student of his, his practice thrived as they rubbed elbows with high society and became physician to the wealthy.

Few know that Hahnemann was also responsible for a humanitarian revolution in the treatment of the mentally ill. Asylums were tortuous places, and he demonstrated that the insane could often recover with compassionate care and treatment. He also promoted good hygiene and a responsible diet as important lifestyle components of health and well-being.

During his final years in Paris, he continued to refine his ideas on remedies and dosing, introducing concepts such as olfactory administration and LM potencies. After a lifetime of poverty and persecution, Samuel Hahnemann died a happy, respected celebrity in France on July 2, 1843 at the age of 88.