

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Peter Fraser was a bookseller and publisher before discovering Homœopathy. His work on many provings of new remedies led to an interest in contemporary disease which resulted in his book *The AIDS Miasm*.

Having taught in many parts of the world he realized there was a need for basic introductions to many of the concepts used in homœopathy, which this series aims to fill. He is the Director of the Institute of Homœopathy and practises in Bristol and London.

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USING MAPS AND SYSTEMS
IN HOMŒOPATHY

On these experiments depends the exactitude of the whole medical art, and the weal of all future generations of mankind.

Hahnemann The Organon § 122

A proving properly conducted will improve the health of anybody; it will help to turn things into order.

Kent Lecture 28 on Philosophy

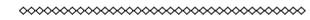
Using
Provings
in Homœopathy

(The Lens)

by

Peter Fraser

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ISBN 987 1874581 291

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Cover design by Colin Winter

Printed by Good News Digital Books, Ongar, UK

Text and artwork © Winter Press, 2010

Published by Winter Press in 2010



Winter Press
16 Stambourne Way
West Wickham
Kent BR4 9NF
e: prov@winterpress.net

USING MAPS AND SYSTEMS IN HOMŒOPATHY

There are many systems that are used by homœopaths to look at their patients and their remedies and so to understand them better. This series of books offers an introduction to some of the most important of them, outlining their origins, development and some of the more significant versions. The books describe the systems and how they can be used to better understand both cases and remedies and so better match them. The approach is versatile and open and allows the reader to adapt the system to their own particular needs and to their understanding of homœopathy.

REALMS

We are inhabitants of the Earthly Realm but many of our remedies come from, or have powerful connections to, the other Realms of The Sea, The Sky and The Underworld. By understanding their nature and the issues that are important in each of the Realms it is much easier to recognize them in a case and so to know when a remedy from a particular Realm is indicated.

MAPPA MUNDI

The Mappa Mundi, also known as The Circle, is a way of looking at cases that is derived from the classical principles of balance between the humours and between the elements.

MIASMS

The Miasms are a concept that has been central to homœopathy since its earliest days and offers a valuable understanding of the particular nature and character of a case.

PHILOSOPHY

Homœopathic philosophy often seems abstruse and impractical, however when used properly it can be a powerful and immensely practical tool not only for finding the remedy but for managing the case.

CORRESPONDENCES

Homœopathy has always recognised that a disease is a physical manifestation of a central, but intangible disturbance of the Vital Force. Only by understanding the relationship between symptoms and the disturbance can we understand the disease. Mystic ideas such as the Cabbala and Swedenborgianism can be used to better understand the correspondence between a disease and its symptoms.

PROVINGS

Provings lie at the very basis of homœopathy. The practice of homœopathy consists of a comparison between the remedy pictures as gained from provings and the patient's disease picture. Commentators from Hahnemann onward have made clear that only the experiential knowledge gained from provings is the deepest knowledge about remedies. Understanding how provings are conducted is necessary in order to interpret provings and to gauge their reliability and depth. This book is useful both for conducting and publishing provings and for being able to read them quickly and accurately.

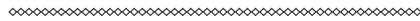
THE SERIES SUPPLEMENT:

TRANSFORMATION

This is a larger work than the other books, following on from and building on the series it explores and charts new territories.

When a case involves movement between two Realms it is often the dynamic centre of the case and a careful analysis of the issues involved in that movement can differentiate between similar and related indicated remedies. A detailed materia medica of the transformational issues in groups of remedies is extremely helpful in making such a differentiation. The groups of remedies examined include: the birds, the snakes, the insects and spiders, the trees, the drug remedies and several more.

INTRODUCTION



In describing homœopathy Hahnemann was very clear that the discipline or the art was one consisting of three parts. One part is to understand the disease as expressed in the patient, one part to understand the remedies and one part to be able to compare them and, through finding similarities, match the remedy to the particular disease expressed by the patient.

Homœopathy, as described by Hahnemann, has many extraordinary features. There is the preparation and potentization of the remedies; there is the absolute law of similars; there is the understanding of the vital force and the holistic nature of disease; but one of the most important was a new way of understanding the properties of a medicine. All other means of testing a medicine are by examining its effect on a disease. Whether we look at the traditional, herbal and folk methodologies or the gold standard, randomized, double blind trial – they all look purely at the effect the medicine has on the disease. Only in homœopathy do we try to understand the remedy itself so it can be used in new diseases and in new and different situations for, to us, every patient is new and different.

The understanding of a remedy is not gained through a distant and impersonal process but through a personal encounter. The English language is generally an excellent and finely nuanced tool but one of the interesting deficiencies in it is the lack of differentiation between knowing by report and intellect and knowing by experience. In German and French and most other languages there are different words for these different kinds of knowledge. In English we only have the one verb “to know” which covers both types.

This deficit in the language gives rise to a deficit in understanding. We do not see that there is a difference between experiential understanding and learned understanding quite as clearly as do those who have the difference spelt out for them in their language.

The proving of a substance is an experiential investigation. It is a shamanistic process in which a contact is made between the prover and the essence of the substance. Each prover makes a personal contact and has a personal experience of the substance. He or she will therefore only experience a part of the substance’s nature, which is why several provers are needed, but it is a direct experience. Even for those that experience it second hand, by reading the proving, it is still about the experience rather than just the facts. Secondary and tertiary materia medica that give the facts may be useful but they can never make the direct contact with the nature of a remedy that can be seen and felt in a proving.

One can know a remedy as we know the nine times table through many materia medica but we can only know a remedy as we do our oldest and dearest friends by proving them or by looking properly at the provings that others have done.

We also need to understand provings in order to be able to evaluate the reliability and certitude of the information we use to understand a remedy and to compare and match that remedy to our patients.

I believe that participating in a proving is necessary to becoming a homœopath. Only the experience of a proving can give us a full comprehension of the process of homœopathy and a proper understanding of how we understand and know a remedy.

WHAT IS A PROVING?

.....

A proving is a test of the genuineness of something or of its qualities. Precious metals are proved to confirm their composition before they can receive a hallmark. Seventeenth Century armour had a proving mark where a musket had been shot at it to prove it could withstand a musket ball in battle. Proving therefore has two roles: to investigate the qualities of something and to confirm it is fit for purpose.

This is no less so in the proving of a substance, it is an investigation of the qualities of that substance as a remedy and it validates the substance as a remedy and welcomes it into the materia medica.

A proving is a form of experiential learning. An important aspect of it is observation and awareness but first of all we must have something to observe. In order to discover the nature of a remedy it must be given a place to express itself. We choose a place that is closest to the place it will be used and one where both expression and observation can happen in an optimal way. We do not use lab rats but offer ourselves as a venue for the remedy's expression.

This is a shamanistic process. It involves putting our own personality and concerns to one side and allowing the remedy to express its personality and concerns through us. Of course this is not entirely true as a remedy can only express a symptom, feeling or issue in a person if there is a degree of susceptibility in that person already. Each individual prover produces a picture from that place where his or her susceptibility overlaps with the remedy's possible action. This is why we need a number of different provers with their own individual susceptibilities in order that the remedy has sufficient scope to express a reason-

ably complete picture of the symptoms that it is capable of causing.

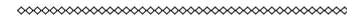
When we learn in this way we learn not only about the remedy but also about ourselves. Just as we reveal parts of the remedy, so the remedy reveals parts of ourselves. Some of these are things that we already knew. Some of them are things that are part of us or which we have experienced before but of which we have not taken much notice. Some of them are things that we had not experienced before and so they reveal to us a more complete picture of who we might be in other circumstances or other times. The proving is therefore an important part of the prover's personal development.

Although there are many other sides to it, it should never be forgotten that the proving is an important piece of scientific research. It needs to be undertaken with care, accuracy and precision; it needs to be published in a way that is not only accessible but is also clear and transparent. It is particularly important that the properties of the remedy are not prejudged or assumed but are allowed to reveal themselves in their own way and their own pace. A proving is not a test of a hypothesis or a way of confirming speculative assumptions. It is purely an investigation of the properties and qualities of a remedy.

A proving is there to provide information about a remedy so that the remedy can be used to cure patients. The physician's high and only mission is to restore the sick to health, to cure. The proving is no less a part of that mission than is the observation of the patient, the selection of the remedy and the follow up. If the mission becomes confused and is driven by any objective other than the restoration of the sick to health it begins to fail and to get lost

in conflicting motives. If the clear mission is pursued, not only are the sick restored to health but there are many corollary benefits, for the patient, the physician and for the greater society.

WHY ARE PROVINGS IMPORTANT?



Proving are important because they are the only way to investigate and so understand the whole nature and qualities of a remedy. As Kent says: "You cannot become acquainted with unproved drugs."

We are able to make many informed guesses and speculations about the properties of a remedy. These are valuable and not to be ignored or discounted. They are often a useful way of finding an indicated remedy that has not been properly proved. However, these are only speculations. Some are confirmed by clinical experience but even these confirmations are superficial. They do not lead to a deeper or clearer understanding of the remedy. They only validate assumptions and reinforce speculations.

The traditional and folk use of a substance can also indicate its homœopathic uses. Again this is therapeutic and often superficial information. It can also be that the action is allopathic and the remedy should not be used in this way in homœopathic practice.

The use of groupings of miasms, of the periodic table, of botanical and zoological families, is another way into using unknown remedies. It can be quite useful and accurate but for it to work there need to be many provings of related remedies. If there have been a number of provings of members of a group and they have all produced a symptom, then it is possible to assume that the same symptom might be found in other members of the group. However, the certitude with which we can make the assumption is directly related to the number of provings that there have

been of other members of the group. It is often, in fact almost always, easier to identify a case as a member of the group than to differentiate within the group and the things that best differentiate are the symptoms that are revealed in a proving.

The signature is often a way into the nature of a remedy. It is a methodology that has become more prevalent in recent years and some homœopaths are now using it as their main way of looking at remedies. When looking at a proving it is often very easy to see the powerful way in which the signature has been revealed in the proving and to think “Oh yes, that is obvious”. However, the same process without hindsight is by no means obvious. There are many possible signatures to a substance and it is not possible to be sure which of these is important, or indeed relevant at all, in the remedy picture. Some of them are central to the remedy picture, some are interesting but not central and some are completely absent from the remedy. Only a proving reveals which areas of signature are to be found in the remedy.

It is also very easy to misinterpret what a feature of the signature might mean. To give an example. Recent provings in general and particularly those of social insects, herd animals and flocking birds, have shown the interaction with the group to be of great importance. When proving the Herring (*Clupea harengus*), a fish that is found only in schools which can be very large and have been known to comprise billions of individuals, it would be natural to assume that the signature indicated the importance of the group. However, the proving revealed absolutely no issues about being part of the group or being outside it. It was never mentioned, which is extremely unusual in modern

provings. In interpreting the proving, it can be seen that the herring is an “obligate schooler”, it can only survive as part of the school. There can be no question of being outside the group as that would represent instant and certain death. However, though this is clear in retrospect, it is not an interpretation that many people would have made without the evidence provided by the proving.

The signature can provide only a small part of the picture; many of the most useful symptoms in a remedy seem to come out of nowhere. This applies particularly to §153, the strange, rare and peculiar symptoms. Modalities and the particular physical expressions of a remedy are made up of a combination of factors, the reason for some of them are obvious but many, and perhaps most, have no obvious reason why they should be so, they are just a feature of the remedy and the only way to discover these symptoms is through the proving.

Provings are thus important and indeed necessary, if we are to find more remedies that we can use in the restoration to health of our patients. It has been argued that it is not necessary to have any more remedies. Some homœopaths believe that there is a wide enough range in the current materia medica and we do not need any more. There are many arguments against this view. The law of similars suggests that an unusual case will require an unusual remedy and that a new disease will require a new remedy. A world that has speeded up, developed new technologies and introduced new toxins into our environment, is almost certainly going to be a world that needs new remedies. There are clearly diseases that were not of importance in Hahnemann’s day which are serious today and some of the major diseases of his day have all but disappeared. HIV/

AIDS is the obvious example of a disease that has a major impact on contemporary health but was unknown forty years ago. Homœopathy is a science rooted deeply in the principle of individuation of the characteristic and individual nature of every person and of their disease. As a discipline that is advancing and maturing, homœopathy will always be looking to match more precisely the remedy to the disease and in order to do this, especially in a time when a wider range of individual expression is not only allowed but actively encouraged, we will need a wider range of remedies. For me the most important argument for more remedies is the clinical confirmation of their efficacy. I have seen too many cases, my own and those of many other homœopaths, which have been more completely cured by new remedies than they ever could have been with just the materia medica of fifty years ago. The Bird remedies have all been proved within the last twenty years but there are thousands of cases where they have proved irreplaceable.

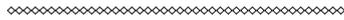
Provings are also important because they are part of our living history and tradition. They represent one of the most important parts of how homœopathy has developed and matured over the years. Even if there was no active need for provings, and there is, it would still be important to keep alive something that has been so significant in bringing us to our current understanding. The fact that provings are being conducted strengthens and solidifies the whole field of homœopathy. It is interesting to note that almost all the important homœopathic thinkers from Hahnemann, through Hering and Kent, to the modern day have been deeply involved in provings. The notable exception being George Vithoulkas, whose achievement was to revive and enliven a moribund discipline and return it to a

former glory. This process was not an easy one and allowed little time or energy for introducing new things, though his achievements gave those that followed him the space to take things further.

Provings are important for the experiential learning that they offer to those who undertake them. For those who are involved in the continuing process of becoming a homœopath and for those who are on a path of homœopathic healing, a great deal of what homœopathy is and does can be observed through the process of receiving treatment and seeing the way in which the body and soul responds. However, this process is often too personal and too all engrossing to allow for truly open observation. The process of a proving allows the distance to observe and so understand the way in which a remedy acts and how “though nothing happens, everything changes”. Without provings an understanding of what homœopathy is would be much less available to us.

Finally, provings are needed if we are to understand how to read and interpret the provings that were conducted in the past. In order to understand and maintain anything it is necessary to understand how that thing was originally put together. Only by undertaking a proving can we fully understand the stresses and pressures that are involved and see how they will affect the final result. Through knowing the process it is easier to see where there are possibilities and openings for errors and so it is easier to perceive that error. In the same way it is easier to see where we can have confidence in the process and the information that it produces.

THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF PROVING



There are many different types of proving that all provide information about a remedy. Each has its strengths and weaknesses. In order to understand how reliable and how useful information is, we need to understand how it was obtained and what limitations apply to it.

TOXICOLOGY

The most basic form of proving is a report of the toxicology of a substance. This was the starting point of homœopathy and it was only the later development of the potentization of remedies that opened up the possibility of deeper provings.

Reports on the toxicological effects of substances have been published in medical journals and compendiums for several hundred years. Descriptions of the effects of poisons can be found more generally in works dating back to the beginning of written history, whether they be works of natural history, of medicine or other recorded observations of poisonings. Plato's description of the death of Socrates after he had been given Hemlock is a toxicological report and stands as an excellent proving of *Conium maculatum*. In spite of the fact that it is two and a half thousand years old it describes very well many of the symptoms of *Conium*.

There are advantages to using toxicology reports to build up a picture of the remedy. The most important of these is that the information is available and a matter of record. It can be accessed reasonably easily, especially now we have

computer databases of this information. On the whole the information is reliable and not questioned, or at least its reliability is apparent. A toxicological report is often the way in which some of the distinct nature of a remedy first comes to the attention of the homœopathic community and offers a reason to investigate further. Hering's first experience of *Lachesis* was an accidental poisoning but it informed him sufficiently to make sure that the remedy was more completely studied and so added to the ranks of our polychrests.

The disadvantages of the toxicology report are many. It is only available for those substances that have a toxic effect. Many of the substances that we use are innocuous in their natural form and only develop toxic and so medicinal effects when they are potentized. *Natrum muriaticum* was the first example of this. As Hahnemann observed, the medicinal, and so the toxic, effects lie hidden within it. A large proportion of the materia medica is of this type and toxicology gives no information on it.

Toxicology describes the very crude effects of a substance. Usually it is only the extreme physical effects that are noted. Symptoms, especially the mental and emotional symptoms, are expressed in a generalized and undifferentiated way. The subtleties and, more importantly, the characteristic nature of symptoms are rarely expressed.

There is one area where toxicology can be more akin to a proper proving and where the information can be of real value and this is when considering recreational drugs and hallucinogens. The people who take these drugs are often doing so in an exploratory and sometimes shamanistic way. The drugs often act in a way similar to the way a potentized remedy works and sometimes the person taking the drug

makes a personal and detailed report of what happened. There are vast databases of these personal experiences on the internet and they often contain far more useful information than any ordinary proving would provide.

HEROIC PROVING

The heroic proving could be described as a deliberate poisoning in order to provide a toxicology report. It has always been a part of the dispute between the users of high and low potencies. Low potency prescribers described themselves as heroic in providing information at personal cost and risk. High potency prescribers used the term ironically for those foolish enough to put themselves at personal risk in order to obtain second rate information. The last major tranche of heroic provers died in the Staines air crash and it is not a common method today.

The disadvantages of the heroic proving are the same as those of the toxicology report with the added problem of the severe risk of harm to the prover. Yet it offers none of the advantages.

CASUAL PROVING

A casual proving can be a version of any of the different types of proving. It is merely one that is often undertaken by an individual and is not conducted in a structured way. It is, for example, when a person takes a remedy more or less on a whim and observes what happens.

It is weakened by a lack of structure and methodology and usually does not reveal a full range of the remedy's properties. However, some of the most insightful and useful

descriptions of remedies have come out of casual provings. They have an important role to play in the proving of remedies.

DREAM PROVING

The dream proving is one in which the provers accept the effect of a remedy and record their ensuing dreams. They might take the remedy but will more usually hold it for a while, meditate on it or, most commonly, sleep with it near them, often under the pillow.

The advantages of the dream proving is that it is relatively unintrusive and so does not require a great deal of commitment from the provers or supervision by the organizers. The proving can be set up quickly and easily and it is also easy to collate and publish. The dream proving can also reveal useful, and sometimes dramatic, imagery that can be a good way into understanding the remedy.

The disadvantages lie in the quality and the reliability of the information that is obtained. Physical symptoms are not looked for and are rarely received. Emotional symptoms are the main ones that are produced.

Proving dreams are always a combination of the remedy's influence and the prover's own concerns and situation. Experienced provers and collators learn to recognize the particular properties and peculiar nature of a proving dream but unless the dream prover has this experience he or she is unlikely to be able to fully distinguish the proving from the personal aspects of the dream. The dream is always, to some degree, personalized. Not only is it very difficult for the provers and collators to separate personality from proving but it is even more difficult for them to know and

express the degree to which they have succeeded in doing this. The reliability of the information is therefore never certain and it becomes very difficult to judge how the information can be used.

MEDITATIVE PROVING

The meditative proving is in many ways the most controversial. It is the one most distant from what conventional thought would accept as a drug trial. It is also the type in which the quality can be the most variable.

Many people feel that the meditative proving is a nonsense and at the far end of what should be acceptable in a scientific discipline. It stands in absolute opposition to the completely practical and physical heroic proving. Meditative provings can be carelessly conducted and badly presented but this applies to all types of proving and is not intrinsic to any one type. There are a number of extensive Hahnemannian provings that can be compared with meditative provings of the same substance. *Salix fragilis* is one example: the information from both corresponds entirely, and there is no indication that the meditative proving is inaccurate in any way.

Meditative provings, especially if they are conducted by a group that is cohesive and experienced in meditation, can be a very fast way of gaining extensive information about a remedy. It is also a process that requires commitment and effort but is relatively uninvasive and does not take a great deal of time or cause significant inconvenience.

The difficulty that is intrinsic to the meditative proving is that it is a shortcut and as such becomes an often irresistible temptation to further shortcuts. It becomes a

question not of what the substance causes but what and how the remedy cures. This may seem to be a meaningless difference but the outcome is very different. For one thing, by taking this shortcut the subtle but important details of what is unusual and characteristic are lost, the details become blurred. What is special and unusual about a remedy are the things that are at the edge and away from the mainstream. They are the things that are far from the quickest and most travelled route and are missed when rushing by.

The question of what and how the remedy will cure also introduces an element of prejudice. A proving will show a remedy causes a feeling of being unconfident. This remedy is then given to patients who lack confidence. Meditative provings are often framed in terms of “this remedy makes people more confident”. It is then given to patients who, the practitioner has decided, should be more confident. This is not properly a decision for the practitioner, rather one that the remedy and the vital force negotiate.

Meditative provings have tended to produce therapeutic rather than truly homœopathic information and they, seemingly by their nature, fall short of what they might have to offer.

TRITURATION PROVING

The trituration proving could be seen as a form of meditative proving. It is one in which the preparation of the remedy by trituration is accompanied by an awareness of the effect of the remedy. It usually involves a group of about half a dozen provers.

In theory the strengths and weaknesses should be much the same as they are for meditative provings. In practice they seem to be very different. It may be that the physical presence of the remedy makes a big difference or it may be that the various histories of the groups involved in each type has an effect. It may also be that the trituration proving is one in which the information offered by the remedy is accepted for what it is whereas in the meditative proving definite questions are asked about the remedy and the answers given are coloured by the nature of the questions. Whatever the case, trituration provings tend to produce more grounded proving data that is easier to interpret and to use.

The trituration provings tend to produce the deeper emotional symptoms and the important themes of the remedy but are much weaker on the physical symptoms which tend to be general and undifferentiated.

It is generally a fast and safe way to get a broad picture of a remedy. In a world where proving resources are restricted and the substances calling out for a proving are endless, the trituration proving is an important resource.

Trituration provings can also be the first stage in a wider process. The trituration proving can establish the framework of a remedy that can then be fleshed out by another type of proving. When this is done the two together produce a much better understanding of the remedy than either would separately.

SEMINAR PROVING

The seminar proving is a description that covers a number of different scenarios. The proving takes place when a group of homœopaths gather for a period, often for a seminar, conference or summer school. The format can range from a Hahnemannian proving to a dream proving or a brief meditation. The results can be as varied as the format. It can be a valuable and deep proving, it can be the briefest of introductions to the proving process and to the remedy or it can be anything in between.

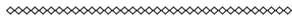
They are particularly useful in inspiring an interest in provings and harnessing the energy and enthusiasm of a gathering of homœopaths.

HAHNEMANNIAN PROVING

The Hahnemannian proving is the standard and most important form of proving. It involves a group of people, usually between 5 and 25 individuals, who take the remedy in potency and record symptoms over several weeks or months. Ideally each prover has a supervisor who helps them analyse and record their symptoms.

There are numerous areas of variability. Blinding and double blinding can be used. Different potencies might be given or only one. Some provers can be given placebo. The question of whether primary and secondary symptoms are differentiated is important to some people. There are also differences concerning how much contact there is between the provers during the proving. Some are group provings which are undertaken by a cohesive group with significant contact between provers during the proving. In other cases

HOW TO CONDUCT A PROVING



In the following pages I describe how to conduct a variety of provings. I describe what I regard as best practice in each of these types but it is by no means restrictive. There are many variations that can be introduced. Some may reduce the effectiveness of the proving but if they allow something that might not otherwise happen at all it is always worthwhile.

TOXICOLOGY

A toxicological proving is not undertaken. It is by definition an accident. To compile a toxicological proving one gathers as many reports of accidental poisonings as possible and tries to bring them into order so a pattern can be found. The difficulty in this is that the most reliable information, the scientific papers and clinical reports are the least useful because they discard characteristic and individual symptoms leaving almost meaningless facts and figures. The anecdotal and narrative reports contain the information that is useful to homœopaths but this information is unreliable and hard to find. It contains exaggerations and distortions and has often been through many hands, each of whom might have embellished it or found ways to improve it. All the compiler can do is gather as much information as possible and make clear how reliable it is.

HEROIC PROVING

The heroic proving seems to have become a thing of the past and it would be best if it stayed that way. It is dangerous and, if provers do not know what the substance is, probably unethical. The information that comes out of an heroic proving is of a very poor quality being really nothing more than a detailed toxicology report.

The heroic proving was conducted by taking small but significant doses of poisonous substances and repeating these doses until symptoms appeared; a careful record of these symptoms was kept and they were published in the same way as any other proving.

CASUAL PROVING

The casual proving involves a person taking a remedy and observing the effect it has on them, usually over a period of a few days. If the prover can put aside time for the proving, even if it is only a few days, he or she should be able to keep a very careful record.

The key factor in a casual proving is the limited susceptibility available for the remedy to express itself. The chances of any symptom being expressed by one person over a few days is far less than the chance of it being expressed somewhere in a group of people over many weeks. If a person selects the remedy at random the chance of the proving being useful are not great. However, if a remedy is chosen with care, if the prover feels they have a resonance with it and especially if it falls into a place somewhere half way between self-prescribing and proving, then there is likely to be a great deal of susceptibility in the prover that matches