Rajan Sankaran
Homeopathy for Today's World - Imperfect copy

Reading excerpt

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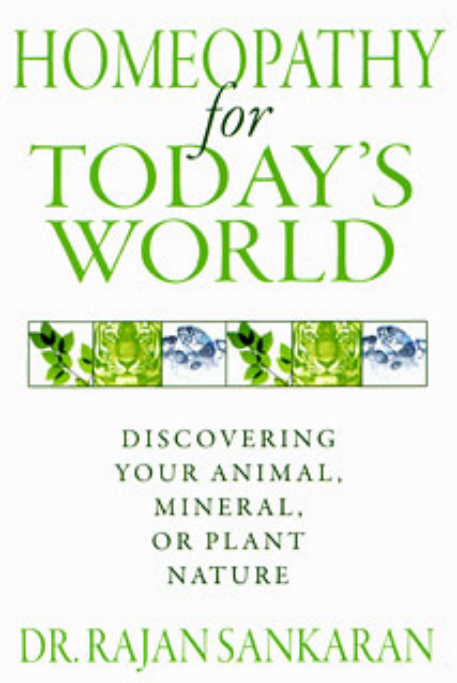

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6 Our Coping Reactions

AS I BEGAN my journey as a physician, I sought to deepen my understanding not only of my patients but also of all human behavior. Different individuals react very differently to the same situation, and I sought to detect what lay behind such differences in their ways of coping. I realized that the state of a person's mind is an attitude toward a perceived situation. Each individual perceives and reacts to the same external situation in a unique and different way. His state of mind is but an expression of his perception of reality.

For example, a panic-stricken man fleeing from a lion is responding in an entirely appropriate manner to a life-threatening situation. However, if he sees a cat and reacts in a similar manner, this reaction does not suit the reality of the external situation. In effect he is reacting as though he had seen a lion. The survival mechanism is inappropriate to the situation. He is acting out of a deluded perception of a situation that does not exist in the present moment.

Once I arrived at this idea, I took it a step further. If the state of mind is based on a delusion, a false perception of reality, then what are the different ways in which a situation can be perceived? Clearly there are as many different ways of perceiving and reacting as there are individuals, since each person's way of perceiving is unique. But is it possible to categorize, albeit broadly, these myriad ways of seeing and experiencing? I observed that not only is such a categorization possible, it is also extremely helpful.

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The survival response that an individual chooses depends on both the external situation and the individual's own perception of his internal capacity. Reaction to a threatening situation also varies with age. Consider the likely response to the advance of a snarling dog.

* A child will probably panic and flee.
* A young adult may throw a stone and try to scare it away.
* A middle-aged person might stay put and wave a stick in an effort to intimidate the dog and keep it at a distance.
* An infirm, aged person would not be able to mount any type of active reaction, might not be able to react at all, and might feel entirely helpless, give up, and wait for the dog to get him.

THE TEN REACTION TYPES

Depending on the depth, degree, and intensity of the survival response, we can classify ten basic ways of perceiving and reacting to a given situation. While individual responses vary, a given individual tends to react in the same way to all stressful situations in his life.

Types of reaction that function as lenses through which all of life is seen:

1. The Panic Type
2. The Crisis Type
3. The Possible Type
4. The Doubtful Type
5. The Persecuted Type
6. The Fixed Type
7. The Claustrophobic Type
8. The Chaotic Type
9. The Isolated Type
10. The Impossible Type

Each reaction is influenced by an individual's perception of the situation. The response of a completely healthy person (that is, one without any delusion) is flexible and appropriate to the situation. His reaction is determined by the external reality, not by his own fixed perception of that reality. If a bomb goes off he experiences acute alarm and flees; if a small fire starts in his house, he picks up the fire extinguisher and puts it out. If he is unfortunate and, say, loses a leg in an accident, a loss that must simply be accepted and adjusted to, he accepts the situation and adapts his life accordingly, feeling no need to hide his handicap. Even if the situation were hopeless—for example, he knows he is about to die due to a serious illness—he accepts even that, and so is free to be himself within it. Due to his open way of seeing, he is free to make the best of any situation. These are all examples of complete and healthy flexibility of reaction.

However, most of us tend to get stuck in one particular way of reacting to all stressful situations in our life. It becomes our habitual mode. Although we may have flexibility of response in mild situations, in more stressful situations we all tend to revert to our habitual mode of reacting; our default strategy remains remarkably constant throughout life. For instance, we could probably predict fairly accurately how each one of our close friends would react in a given emergency.

Although I have mentioned a particular stage of life exemplifying each type, this does not mean that a particular stage of life is synonymous with a particular type, or that individuals progress from one type to another as they age. A person usually remains fixed in a particular type throughout his life, so a young man fixed in the Impossible Type is just as likely as an elderly person in a Possible Type.

The majority of people can be classified into the ten broad types listed earlier and elaborated upon in the rest of this chapter.

The Panic Type

"I must escape and run because my very life defends on it."

The Panic Type perceives acute, sudden danger in most situations and therefore reacts instinctively, sharply, intensely, and violently. This type readily experiences alarm, then panic, followed by total terror. Here, feelings about one's self are not in the forefront. It is as if the situation itself is so overwhelming that it doesn't matter who is facing it, the reaction will be the same: Let me just escape and run because my life depends on it.

- **Stage of Life Representing the Panic Type's Attitude**

This type of response resembles the reaction seen in babies. At the earliest stage in life there is an instinctive reflex reaction to any external threat. Therefore, even in adults, this type of reaction carries the stamp of childishness.

An adult whose reactions are of the Panic Type will rapidly become acutely anxious but can be as rapidly reassured and made to feel safe by being held in the arms of a protective figure in his life. In general the Panic Type is excited, excitable, and hyperactive. He can sometimes go to the other extreme of being completely shut off and insensitive. His dreams, too, are full of excitement and contain examples of acutely threatening situations. His reactions are excessively loud, whether with laughter or excessive bursts of courage and cheerfulness. Panic Types usually function at a very high voltage.

- **Dreams Representative of the Panic Type's Perceived Situation**

Dreams of Panic Types often personify the terror and alarm that they innately feel. Typical dreams of Panic Types include natural and man-made calamities, such as earthquakes or plane crashes, in which victims typically might experience alarm and panic followed by total terror and have to run for their lives.

- **The Game that Mirrors the Panic Type's Pattern of Action**

The game that symbolizes this type of acute alarm response is peek-a-boo. Here the parent or familiar person momentarily hides his face

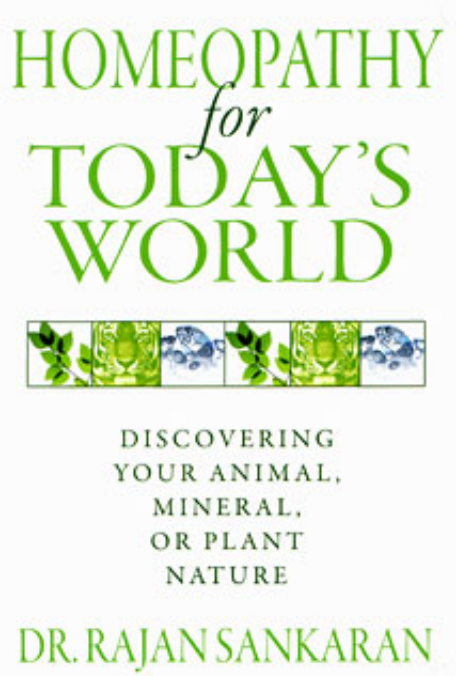
behind his hands, then peeks out again at the child. For a moment the infant loses sight of his parent or familiar person and his face shows alarm. But the very next moment he catches sight of the parent again and feels safe. Similarly, young children get a thrill out of being thrown into the air and then caught. Here, for a moment, the child is out of the secure grasp of the parent. This is momentarily both fearful and thrilling for him. Then he is caught and feels safe again. All is well.

The Crisis Type

> *"The situation is suddenly critical, but if I make an urgent, intense effort I can regain my security."*

The Crisis Type has the feeling of a sudden, unexpected crisis that, if handled correctly, can be overcome. The reaction to any crisis is therefore one of immediate and intense struggle. The Crisis Type readily perceives this acute threat, but unlike the Panic Type he perceives himself as having the inner capacity to save the situation through intense, concentrated effort on his own part. He feels he must rapidly regain his previous position of comfort and security, because there is always the inherent threat of sinking further during the time of crisis. Once the crisis is past, all is well with him again.

For example, if there is a bomb blast, the reaction to it is acute and instinctive; the situation is life-threatening and warrants acute panic and immediate response: to escape. In contrast, if one's house is on fire the response needed is one of intense struggle, a concentrated, swift effort to put out the fire and resolve the crisis. Similarly, if a person owns shares and the stock market suddenly crashes, he will feel the threat of a sudden acute drop in his financial security. However, an intense, concentrated effort can result in the recovery of his fortune. Once the loss is recovered the need for the effort ceases because a position of security and comfort has been regained.



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