

Quack Attack: Folk Medicine or Fake Medicine?

Adapted from the writings of Dayan Yitzhak Grossman

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AP reports:

A New York midwife who gave nearly 1,500 children homeopathic pellets instead of required vaccinations has been fined \$300,000, the state's health department announced this week.

Jeanette Breen, who operates Baldwin Midwifery on Long Island, administered the pellets as an alternative to vaccinations and then falsified the immunization records, the agency said Wednesday.

The scheme, which goes back at least to the 2019-2020 school year, involved families throughout the state, but the majority reside on suburban Long Island. In 2019, New York ended a religious exemption to vaccine requirements for schoolchildren...

Breen, a state-licensed healthcare provider, supplied patients with the "Real Immunity Homeoprophylaxis Program," a series of oral pellets that are marketed as an alternative to vaccination but are not recognized or approved by state or federal regulators as valid immunizations, according to the health department.

She administered 12,449 of the fake immunizations to roughly 1,500 school-aged patients before submitting information to the state's immunization database claiming the children had received their required vaccinations against measles, mumps, rubella, polio, chickenpox, diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis, hepatitis B, and a host of other diseases, the department said.[1]

This account raises several very important and interesting questions, regarding attitudes toward vaccination per se as well as vaccine mandates; the falsification of official records; and the line between legitimate governmental authority and overreach. In this article, however, we consider only the topic of homeopathy itself.

What is homeopathy?

The National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health (NCCIH, a unit of the National Institutes of Health/NIH), explains:

Homeopathy, also known as homeopathic medicine, is a medical system that was developed in Germany more than 200 years ago. It's based on two unconventional theories:

- "Like cures like"—the notion that a disease can be cured by a substance that produces similar symptoms in healthy people.
- "The law of minimum dose"—the notion that the *lower* the dose of the medication, the *greater* its effectiveness. Many homeopathic products are so diluted that no molecules of the original substance remain...[2]

Perspectives on homeopathy

In 5742 (1982), R' Chaim Rosenberg of Antwerp queried several *gedolei* Torah regarding homeopathic preparations. He was concerned that they might contain nonkosher ingredients, and he considered various arguments for allowing their use nonetheless.

Rav Rosenberg submitted his analysis to R' Moshe Feinstein, and he received the following reply from R' Moshe's son-in-law R' Moshe David Tendler:

My master and father-in-law Rav Feinstein *shlit"a* asked me to inform you that he does not desire to relate to your question, despite its interesting halachic aspects...

Homeopathic therapy cannot be considered therapy that is "proven and tested" and thus possible for people to use without it being in opposition to the will of Hashem.

A therapeutic doctrine that disparages rationality leads to nonsensical beliefs and renders its practitioners dangerously susceptible to the influence of foreign worship, hidden beliefs, and finally to the denial of the order of the world ordained by Hashem Yisbarach.

Since he does not wish to be involved with these doctrines, Rav

Feinstein *shlit"a* is compelled to decline to respond to your query.[3]

Rav Rosenberg records that upon receiving this acerbic reply, he became quite disturbed and realized that while he had been completely convinced of homeopathy's efficacy and legitimacy, the matter was apparently not as clear as he had thought, so he consulted a number of other rabanim.

R' Meir Amsel: Mussar or hora'ah?

He had apparently corresponded previously on homeopathy with R' Meir Amsel, the editor of the rabbinic journal *Hamaor*. (He had been one of R' Moshe's formidable opponents in the fierce controversy, two decades earlier, about the permissibility of artificial insemination of a married woman with donor sperm.) In response to Rav Rosenberg's report of the reply he had received in the name of R' Moshe, Rav Amsel insinuated that Rav Tendler may have been putting his own words into the mouth of his father-in-law:

The words of Rav Tendler are baffling—he has written like a *ba'al mussar*, not like a *ba'al hora'ah*. Particularly baffling are his words in the name of his father-in-law, the gaon R' Moshe Feinstein *shlit"a*, whose style is always that of a pillar of *hora'ah*, halacha *lema'aseh*, and does not utilize words of mussar.

Rav Amsel raised various objections to the letter's opposition to homeopathy, and he concludes by apparently directing Rav Rosenberg to ignore it and continue in his embrace of homeopathy.[4]

R' Menashe Klein: Not different from conventional medicine

Rav Rosenberg also reported the letter to R' Menashe Klein, who, apparently unaware of the fundamental distinctions between conventional and homeopathic medicine, was baffled by the letter's objection to homeopathy:

I have not understood his intention, for all these (homeopathic) therapies are, on the contrary, natural therapies, which are made from various types of herbs, and most (conventional) medicines and therapies come from various herbs...and I therefore do not know what he is talking about that this is not in the category of rational therapy...

I have not seen any basis to be stringent in our case and not utilize these (homeopathic) therapies that are made from various sorts of herbs, and these are the therapies that were traditionally used, and it is not a new thing...[5]

R' Shmuel Wosner: Natural vs. supernatural medicine

Rav Rosenberg consulted R' Shmuel Wosner (the Sheivet Halevi), who, in the course of his analysis, considers the question of whether homeopathy's (putative) efficacy should be characterized as supernatural (based on *sgulah*) or natural (based on *teva*):

Perhaps this is one of the laws of nature that Hakadosh Baruch Hu established in Creation, but we do not know,[6] and why should it be called supernatural?

Rav Wosner actually inclines toward the view that homeopathy is considered a natural remedy. But he nevertheless maintains that the question of using homeopathic preparations containing nonkosher ingredients hinges, at least to some extent, on whether homeopathy's efficacy has been accepted by experts and whether it is supported by a lot of empirical evidence (questions that he is careful to avoid definitively answering).[7]

R' Asher Weiss: The Torah does not forbid being foolish

A comprehensive discussion of Torah perspectives on alternative medicine is beyond the scope of this article,[8] but we close with an excerpt of a brief *teshuvah* of R' Asher Weiss that stands in striking contrast to the position that Rav Tendler attributes to R' Moshe:

Regarding that which you asked my opinion on concerning complementary medicine, e.g., "One Brain" and "(applied) kinesiology," and you primarily asked about the therapeutic method of E.F.T. (Emotional Freedom Techniques)...

Now, his honor did not ask my opinion about the worth of all these, and to what extent they are effective. In my opinion, most of the things that the masses run after are matters of foolishness and nonsense. But the Torah does not forbid being foolish, and in my humble opinion, there is no prohibition whatsoever in any of these, because according to the doctrines of their practitioners, we are speaking about therapy that is based on the ways of nature, physical and spiritual, and we are not dealing with paranormal matters. And "anything that contains an element of healing does not contain an element of the (prohibited) ways of the Emori." [9]^[10]

[1] Philip Marcelo. NY midwife who gave kids homeopathic pellets instead of vaccines fined \$300K for falsifying records. AP News.

<https://apnews.com/article/vaccinations-midwife-children-homeopathic-pellet-s-new-york-b19344ea114e211811e465adf0550967>.

[2] NCCIH. Homeopathy: What You Need to Know.

[3] Hamaor 5743 Year 35 Shvat-Adar Kuntress 3 p. 34.

[4] Hamaor ibid. pp. 34-35.

[5] Shu"t Mishneh Halachos *cheilek* 10 (*Medor Hateshuvos*) *siman* 112.

[6] Shmos 10:26.

[7]Shu"t Sheivet Halevi *cheilek 5 siman* 55. Cf. R' Daniel Mann, Homeopathic Remedies on Shabbos, Torah Musings, Jul. 21, 2021; R' Dovid Cohen's Animal Products Ch. 6: Homeopathic Remedies.

[8]See R' Joshua Flug, Halachic Perspectives on Alternative Medicine, Journal of Halacha and Contemporary Society, spring 2004 (47) 60-80; R' Rephoel Szmerla's Alternative Medicine in Halacha; reviews of it by R' Yair Hoffman, Alternative Medicine in Halacha: a Review, and Daniel Shapiro, Sefer Review: Alternative Medicine in Halacha.

R' Shlomo Aviner, *Refuah Mashlimah Mistit Lemechetzah-Reiki Vehealing*; R' Yaakov Goldstein, Non-conventional Medicine; R' Yair Hoffman, The Six Torah Prohibitions in Gem Therapy; R' Yaron Ben-David, *Refuah Mashlimah Bahalacha*.

[9]Shabbos 67a.

[10]Shu"t Minchas Asher *cheilek 2 siman* 128.