

Madame Blavatsky on Aethrobacy and Fakirs



Abstract and train of thoughts¹

Aethrobacy is the effect of altered polarity.

Christian ascetics, through contemplation and self-denial, acquire powers of levitation which, though attributed to the miraculous intervention of God, are nevertheless real and the result of physiological changes in the human body. 3

The ascetic, by seeing with the spiritual eye in the Astral Light, hearing with the spiritual ear sounds inaudible to others, lives in the Unseen Universe. 4

Madame Blavatsky tells the truth and shames the devil.

She challenges the assumption that behind the law which draws bodies toward the earth's centre, here is not another law, equally immutable, that under certain conditions appears to counteract it. 5

Bodies oppositely electrified attract each other; similarly electrified, repulse each other. 6

Until gravitation is understood to be simply magnetic attraction and repulsion, and the part played by magnetism itself in the endless correlations of forces in the ether of space, it is neither fair nor wise to deny the levitation of either fakir or table. 6



¹ Frontispiece by the Mbamoe Vectory. Levitation photography, on page 4, by Ion Paciu.

Aethrobacy is the effect of altered polarity.

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[The writer, Babu Krishna Indra Sandyal, speaking of the various *Siddhis*, says that “it is quite clear that the *Siddhis Anima* and *Mahima* pertain to the conditions of even the physical body as was manifest in *virat rupa darshana*” (*Bhagavad Gītā*, ch. XI). To this H.P. Blavatsky remarks as follows:]

Babu Krishna is wrong. It is impossible to so inflate the extremities of the human body with simple air as to cause it to float in air. A body floats in water because it displaces an equal bulk with its own of that denser element. If he will but figure to himself a vessel of any material as dense as human flesh and bone, filled ever so compactly with common air and left lying on the ground, he will see that his theory of aethrobacy is untenable; for, just as the vessel in question would lie on the ground where placed an indefinite time without showing the slightest tendency to rise, so would the ascetic’s body, though pumped full of air from crown to toes. No, there is another cause for this aethrobacy and it is the one described by F.T.S. . . .¹ as “altered polarity.” The system of inhalations and exhalations practiced in Yoga effect the polaric change by alterations produced, of both a physiological and psychological character.

The Babu is also mistaken in supposing that this body of flesh can be separated into atoms and made to fill the whole void of space, or compressed into one infinitesimal atomic point like a diamond-grain. Let him reflect but one instant upon the nature of bioplastic matter and he will see the fact as it is. It is the inner self which, by virtue of its ethereal nature and its relationship to the all-pervading “Anima Mundi” or World-Soul, is capable of exhibiting the properties of *Anima* and *Mahima*. Anything in Āryan literature seeming to convey a contrary idea may be at once taken as figurative language intended to be understood only by the *wise*. The sages who wrote these books were adepts in psychological science, and we must not take them to have been ignorant of its plainest laws.

Christian ascetics, through contemplation and self-denial, acquire powers of levitation which, though attributed to the miraculous intervention of God, are nevertheless real and the result of physiological changes in the human body.

From *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (COMMENTS ON “A TREATISE ON THE YOGA PHILOSOPHY”) II pp. 466-67; [on Hatha Yoga]

. . . behind the external ridiculous postures of the Yogis of today, lies concealed the profound wisdom of the archaic ages; one that included among other things a perfect knowledge of what are now termed physiology and psychology. Ammonius Saccas, Porphyry, Proclus and others practiced it in Egypt; and Greece and Rome did not shrink at all even in their time of philosophical glory to follow suit. Pythagoras speaks of the celestial music of the spheres that one hears in hours of ecstasy; Zeno

¹ [This refers to a lengthy essay on “Yoga Vidya” which was published serially in the October and November 1879, and January 1880, issues of *The Theosophist*, Vol. I. The author of this series was never revealed, but the three dots following the initials might indicate a man of certain spiritual attainment. — *Boris de Zirkoff*.]

finds a wise man who having conquered all passions, feels happiness and emotion, but in the midst of torture; Plato advocates the man of meditation and likens his powers to those of the divinity; and we see the Christian ascetics themselves through a mere life of contemplation and self-torture acquire powers of levitation or aethrobacy, which, though attributed to the miraculous intervention of a personal God, are nevertheless real and the result of physiological changes in the human body.

The ascetic, by seeing with the spiritual eye in the Astral Light, hearing with the spiritual ear sounds inaudible to others, lives in the Unseen Universe.

Says Patañjali:

The Yogi will hear celestial sounds, the songs and conversations of celestial choirs. He will have the perception of their touch in their passage through the air

— which, translated into a more sober language, means that the ascetic is enabled to see with the spiritual eye in the Astral Light, hear with the spiritual ear subjective sounds inaudible to others, and live and feel, so to say, in the Unseen Universe.



Madame Blavatsky tells the truth and shames the devil.

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To the Editor of *The Sun*:

Sir,

However ignorant I may be of the laws of the solar system, I am, at all events, so firm a believer in heliocentric journalism that I subscribe for *The Sun*. I have, therefore, seen your remarks in to-day's *Sun* upon my "iconoclasm."

No doubt it is a great honour for an unpretentious foreigner to be thus crucified between the two greatest celebrities of your chivalrous country — the truly good Deacon Richard Smith, of the blue gauze trousers, and the nightingale [242] of the willow and the cypress, G. Washington Childs, A.M. But I am not a Hindu fakir, and therefore cannot say that I enjoy crucifixion, especially when unmerited. I would not even fancy being swung round the "tall tower" with the steel hooks of your satire metaphorically thrust through my back. I have not invited the reporters to a show. I have not sought notoriety. I have only taken up a quiet corner in your free country, and, as a woman who has travelled much, shall try to tell a Western public what strange things I have seen among Eastern peoples. If I could have enjoyed this privilege at home, I should not be here. Being here, I shall, as your old English proverb expresses it, "Tell the truth and shame the devil."

The World reporter who visited me wrote an article which mingled his souvenirs of my stuffed apes and my canaries, my tiger-heads and palms, with aerial music and the flitting *doppelgängers* of adepts. It was a very interesting article, and certainly intended to be very impartial. If he made me appear to deny the immutability of natural law, and inferentially to affirm the possibility of miracle, it is due to my faulty English or to the carelessness of the reader.

She challenges the assumption that behind the law which draws bodies toward the earth's centre, here is not another law, equally immutable, that under certain conditions appears to counteract it.

There are no such uncompromising believers in the immutability and universality of the laws of nature as students of occultism. Let us then, with your permission, leave the shade of the great Newton to rest in peace. It is not the principle of the law of gravitation, or the necessity of a central force acting toward the sun, that is denied, but the assumption that behind the law which draws bodies toward the earth's centre, and which is our most familiar example of gravitation, there is not another law, equally immutable, that under certain conditions appears to counteract it. If but once in a hundred years a table or a fakir is seen to rise in the air, without a visible mechanical cause, then that rising is a manifestation of a natural law of which our scientists are yet ignorant. Christians believe in miracles; occultists credit them even less than pious scientists — Sir David Brewster, for instance. Show an occultist an unfamiliar phenomenon, and he will never affirm *a priori* that [243] it is either a trick or a miracle. He will search for the cause in the region of causes.

There was an anecdote about Babinet, the astronomer, current in Paris in 1854, when the great war was raging between the Academy and the “waltzing tables.” This sceptical man of science had proclaimed in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*¹ that the levitation of furniture without contact “was simply as impossible as perpetual motion.” A few days later, during an experimental *séance*, a table was levitated, without contact, in his presence. The result was that Babinet went straight to a dentist to have a molar tooth extracted, which the iconoclastic table, in its aerial flight, had seriously damaged. But it was too late to recall his article.

I suppose nine men out of ten, including editors, would maintain that the undulatory theory of light is one of the most firmly established. And yet, if you will turn to page 22 of *The New Chemistry*,² by Professor Josiah P. Cooke, Jr., of Harvard University, you will find him saying:

I cannot agree with those who regard the wave theory of light as an established principle of science. . . . [it] requires a combination of qualities in the ether of space, which I find it difficult to believe are actually realized.

What is this but iconoclasm?

Let us bear in mind that Newton himself received the corpuscular theory of Pythagoras and his predecessors, from whom he learned it, and that it was only *en désespoir de cause* that later scientists accepted the wave theory of Descartes and Huyghens. Kepler maintained the magnetic nature of the sun. Leibnitz ascribed the planetary motions to agitations of an ether. Borelli anticipated Newton in his discovery, although he failed to demonstrate it as triumphantly. Huyghens and Boyle, Horrocks and Hooke, Halley and Wren, all had ideas of a central force acting toward the sun, and of the true principle of diminution of action of the force in the ratio of the inverse square of the distance.

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The last word has not yet been spoken with respect to gravitation; its limitations can never be known until the nature of the sun is better understood. They are just beginning [244] to recognize³ the intimate connection between the sun’s spots and the position of the heavenly bodies. The interplanetary magnetic attractions are but just being demonstrated. Until gravitation is understood to be simply magnetic attraction and repulsion, and the part played by magnetism itself in the endless correlations of forces in the ether of space — that “hypothetical medium,” as Webster terms it, I maintain that it is neither fair nor wise to deny the levitation of either fakir or table. Bodies oppositely electrified attract each other; similarly electrified, repulse each oth-

¹ January 15th, 1854, p. 414

² New York, 1876

³ See Professor Balfour Stewart’s lecture at Manchester, entitled “The Sun and the Earth,” and Professor A.M. Mayer’s lecture, “The Earth a Great Magnet.”

er. Admit, therefore, that anybody having weight, whether man or inanimate object, can by any cause whatever, external or internal, be given the same polarity as the spot on which it stands, and what is to prevent its rising?

Before charging me with falsehood when I affirm that I have seen both men and objects levitated, you must first dispose of the abundant testimony of persons far better known than my humble self. Mr. Crookes, Professor Thury of Geneva, Louis Jacolliot, your own Dr. Gray and Dr. Warner, and hundreds of others, have, first and last, certified to the fact of levitation.

I am surprised to find how little even the editors of your erudite contemporary, *The World*, are acquainted with Oriental metaphysics in general, and the trousers of Hindu fakirs in particular. It was bad enough to make those holy mendicants of the religion of Brahmā graduate from the Buddhist Lamaseries of Tibet; but it is unpardonable to make them wear baggy breeches in the exercise of their religious functions. This is as bad as if a Hindu journalist had represented the Rev. Mr. Beecher entering his pulpit in the scant costume of the fakir — the *dhoti*, a cloth about the loins; “only that and nothing more.” To account, therefore, for the oft-witnessed, open-air levitations of the *Svāmis* and Gurus upon the theory of an iron frame concealed beneath the clothing, is as reasonable as Monsieur Babinet’s [245] explanation of the table-tipping and tapping as “unconscious ventriloquism.”

You may object to the act of disembowelling, which I am compelled to affirm I have seen performed. It is, as you say, “remarkable”; but still not miraculous. Your suggestion that Dr. *Hammond should go and see* it is a *good one*. Science would be the gainer, and your humble correspondent be justified. Are you, however, in a position to guarantee that he would furnish the world of sceptics with an example of “veracious reporting,” if his observation should tend to overthrow the pet theories of what we loosely call science?

Yours very respectfully,

H.P. BLAVATSKY

New York, March 28th, 1877

