

“ Normal and paranormal — everything is a projection of our consciousness ”
— Deepak Chopra

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BRIEFLY

Banish Back Pain

Could mindfulness and meditation be more powerful than opioids for lower back pain? Melissa Day of the University of Queensland School of Psychology is conducting a project that will test that possibility and could even save lives. “Chronic pain is experienced by millions,” she says. “Pain medications become less effective over time as individuals develop tolerances to opioids. Many of the side effects of these drugs are unpleasant — nausea, possible



addiction, sedation and cognitive complaints. “Most do not have access to coping skills training to manage the pain and its effect on their mood, sleep, relationships and social functioning — and so they suffer alone.” She has a free eight-week course promoting nonpharmacological pain-management skills for chronic lower back pain that incorporates evidence-based applications of mindfulness, meditation and cognitive therapy. Research suggests these approaches changed the way the brain processed pain. The side-effects are positive — improving anxiety, depression and sleep problems — as well as pain.
— www.uq.edu.au

PARANORMAL ACTIVITY



Paranormal Society founder Gaurav Tiwari’s sudden and mysterious death at his home in Delhi has revived public discussion on the subject of ghosts, poltergeists and related phenomena. ANIL K RAJVANSHI wonders if a ‘powerful, focused mind’ could receive signals from such mysterious phenomena

The story goes that each time Ramakrishna would sit down to meditate below a banyan tree, a huge human with bloodshot eyes would come down the tree and tell him about future events. Ramakrishna referred to this being as Beta. There is this popular story of Vivekananda confronted by a luminous being while he was meditating in his room. Frightened, he ran out of the room. Later on, he referred to this as a visitation from the Buddha.

In my own life, too, there have been times of great despair and then suddenly things take a turn for the good. You can explain these as the mind becoming focused and suddenly gleaning opportunities that it could not see earlier. But it could also indicate that they are forms of help that come from a Higher Power.

Ghost Sightings

Every civilisation reports ghost sightings, poltergeist incidents, production of materials from thin air, out-of-body experiences and other paranormal phenomena. Some are dismissed as trickery or sleight-of-hand-type events, but a few of these have remained a mystery. They all point towards a reality clothed in several layers that are beyond our level of perception and four-dimensional world. What could be the nature of this reality and ‘paranormal’ entities and why should we be interested in knowing about them?

As humans, we have an inherently curious nature to know more about the unknown. Also, most people’s fear of the unknown leads the vulnerable to get influenced by so-called tantriks and witch doctors who promise to control these entities. With greater awareness of

the subject, perhaps such common fears can be reduced.

In some cases, entities or spirits may reside in your subconscious and influence your thought process. In other cases, their actions have changed the course of history. There have been claims that Hitler, otherwise a mediocre soldier would suddenly show sparks of brilliant war strategy as if guided by a shining being. It was also rumoured that he was a medium that could channel some of these entities.

Another unexplained phenomena is that of people getting sudden visions of great ideas and inventions in their dreams or at unguarded moments. Is this the power of a prepared mind? Or is this an unexplained occurrence for which we can find no answers?

M K Gandhi would often say that he was an ordinary person but sometimes ‘truth’ spoke through him — these were times when he reached the level of a super human being.

Is it possible to perceive these layers of reality by expanding our consciousness through a powerful brain? A powerful brain (or processor) is one which can focus and concentrate on a single thought for a long time. This is called *Sanyam* in Patanjali Yoga. Such a powerful mind can process information from sensory inputs effectively and hence becomes ‘hungry’ for more information and experience. This is a mind-expanding process.

Such a powerful and evolved brain becomes acutely aware of its surround-



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— SAGE PATANJALI

ings. It becomes an enhanced signal receiver able to get information and knowledge from external sources including the knowledge space (KS). As the name implies, KS is filled with knowledge both from present and past civilisations and this knowledge can be assessed by the prepared mind.

This expansion of our horizons or

this yearning for Universal Consciousness gives us awareness of the reality of life in different dimensions. Patanjali has described this reality in his *shlokas*: *When a yogi is fairly advanced in his sadhana he will be approached by celestial beings. The yogi should be careful about such a contact and there should be neither attachment nor surprise for undesirable connections can occur again.* Patanjali does not discuss the nature of these beings and what their attributes are.

Nevertheless, the fact that evolved yogis like Ramakrishna, Vivekananda and Aurobindo have spoken about these entities and stressed that one should not get entangled with them, does indicate that such exist.

What are these layers of reality? Are energy packets in ghost form differentiated into their layers of existence by the energy they possess? Compare them to the quantum state of an electron in an atom where the electron energy level corresponds to various levels of its existence.

The higher energy level electrons are farthest from the nucleus whereas the lowest energy level ones are closest to it. Similarly, lower entities remain attached to the earth’s gravity field and for their stability, they feed on the psychic energy of individuals. This could be the basis of Shamanic rituals and religion. It is possible that the concept of ‘sacrifice’ of life and food and offerings to gods might have originated from this concept.

Strong Memories

Another theory is that ghost forms are strong memories of physical beings — both humans and animals — and often manifest in cases of unnatural deaths. When these psychic energy structures interact with humans and animals, they are capable of influencing their minds and sway them to exhibit latent tendencies of their past existence. Thus they continue to ‘live’ through the medium of a host’s body. These are described as ‘possessions’ that have been described in almost all societies since ancient times. They get attached to those who ‘will them’ and it is reportedly difficult to get rid of them. How are these entities formed? It is possible that the ghost form is a template of the physical being and takes time to ‘dissolve’ even after the entity’s physical death. This entity is further fed by psychic energies of the new host body. In Indian mythology, this ghost form is sometimes called *Sukshma shareer*, ethereal body.

This is similar to Prigogine’s dissipative structure that remains stable because of the energy feeding it. One example of a dissipative structure is convection currents in a body of water heated from below. The heated water rises in the container and is replaced by the cold water from top and thus convection is developed and exists as long as the container gets energy from the heat source.

Higher Dimension

It is believed that many of these higher energy entities eventually lose their negative attributes and become benevolent gods that almost all religions talk about.

Awareness of a higher dimensional space and reality can remove our fear of death — since death is a simple transition between various forms and dimensions. This is also the lesson of the *Bhagavad Gita*. With fearlessness comes the ability to do new things and follow uncharted paths that can give us a quantum jump in our spiritual and technological developments and understanding of natural forces. ■

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Gravest Threats To Humanity

THE SPEAKING TREE draws from various reports on what we think are ‘real’ threats

The *Independent* reports: Professor Stephen Hawking says he believes pollution and human ‘stupidity’ remain the biggest threats to mankind. The world’s leading theoretical physicist argued that ‘we have certainly not become less greedy or less stupid’ in our treatment of the environment over the past decade. In a popular TV show, he also outlined his concerns about the use of artificial intelligence in warfare: ‘Once machines... (are) able to evolve themselves, we cannot predict whether their goals will be the same as ours.’

In another unrelated report, PM Narendra Modi is quoted as saying repeatedly, especially in his talks during the recent Africa tour, that the gravest threat to humanity is terrorism.

According to Prof Noam Chomsky, there are two grave threats to the world: climate change and nuclear weapons.

Aakar Patel in a column recently expressed his puzzlement over various perceived ‘gravest’ threats including armed combat. Numbers-wise, that is, taking into

account the number of victims and fatalities, all of the above threats are no match for the vast numbers destroyed or debilitated by poverty, which is what seems to be the most dangerous threat to all of humanity. Patel quotes figures to back his deduction: “In Europe, a continent of 750 million, a total of 150 people died in terror attacks in 2015. But in the 1970s, over 400 Europeans a year died for many years, killed by various non-Islamist terror groups, including Irish and Basque separatists. So it would be incorrect to say terrorism is a bigger threat there today. In the US, the number of fatalities from terrorism is in the single digits annually on average”. So why is terrorism seen as a grave threat?”



PERSPECTIVE

Patel answers the question why terrorism is such a big deal: “The answer is that it is an issue which angers many of us, unlike malnourishment, poverty and illiteracy. I am not surprised when my uncle in Surat bangs his armchair and says we have to ‘fix Pakistan’ and hang terrorists.” So many people, so many more per-

spectives. But it might be instructive to come back to Prof Hawking’s observation about human ‘stupidity’ being in danger of posing perhaps the biggest threat to... well, humans and the rest of the world. Does he mean ignorance when he says ‘stupidity’?

Maybe — because most misperceptions, misconceptions and misunderstandings that we knowingly or unknowingly endorse and encourage, seem to arise out of sheer ignorance. In an article titled ‘Ignorance is not bliss’, *The Economist* in its May 28, 2016 issue points out that it is not the ‘unknown unknowns’ that catch people out, but the truths they hold to be self-evident that turn out to be completely wrong.

“On many issues, the gap between public perceptions and reality is wide. Polling company Ipsos Mori found that Americans think 33% of the population are immigrants, when the actual number is 14%. A 2013 poll found that Britons thought 24% of the population was Muslim — almost five times the correct figure of 5%,” reports *The Economist*. The article says that some of this is because “people are also heavily influenced by anecdotal evidence and by fears for themselves or their families.” ■



ST REPORT

No one except Gujjars and Jats are native to Delhi. The rest who have come to live here over the past thousand years, are outsiders, who came and lent their language and lifestyle to the city, turning it into a pluri-cultural society over the years.

We learn this by studying the languages spoken in Delhi and their evolution, particularly of Hindustani.

“Some consider Hindustani to be Hindi, others think it’s Urdu, and sceptics deny that it’s a language at all, yet Hindustani evolved as a ‘communicative intention’ in Delhi over centuries,” says Alok Rai, a culture commentator. He was speaking at a panel discussion on ‘Languages of Delhi’, the second in a series of programmes organised by India Habitat Centre, Delhi, as a run-up to the 6th Indian Languages Festival (ILF) in November. “Language is a living thing; it

Many Tongues

The language spoken in Delhi shows that it is a pluri-cultural society. MONA MEHTA reports

evolves in an urban setting where you interact with people different from you. Although grammars and dictionaries try to freeze it in time, it is important to tune into the wisdom of language for what it can tell us,” said Rai.

Hindustani developed by imbibing words from Turks, Persians, Afghans, Pakhtuns, Uzbeks, Tajiks, and later the Portuguese and Dutch who came to Delhi at different times, said Sohail Hashmi, heritage activist. It evolved in *caravan sarais* where traders met; at discourses between Nirgun and Sufi poets; in army camps where Turk commanders interacted with soldiers from Rohaikhand, Bunderkhand, Bhojpur, and Mewat. It travelled to Gujarat with Turkish sardars and eventually, became the official language of Bijapur and Golconda. It returned to Delhi again via poetry. “Mughal courts did not patronise Urdu. Aurangzeb wrote love poetry for his favourite queen in Braj,” he said.

As the city evolved, so did its language. With the first train from Kolkata to Delhi in 1856, Marathi and Bangla-speaking people arrived; later, Partition brought an influx of Punjabis. New colonies and cultures sprang up and Delhi grew. “There are pockets in Delhi which became home to certain languages and cultures: Bengalis in Chittaranjan Park, *babus* and bureaucrats from Kerala and Tamil Nadu in R K Puram; Mangolpuri has blocks where Tamil is spoken because of the Tamil workers living there,” said Hashmi.

Language carries the stamp of a community, its culture, history, and future, said Rai. To map the ever-evolving linguistic space in Delhi, ILF has embarked on an audio-visual documentation project to show the city as a pluri-cultural, multilingual space.

“It is our response to counter growing intolerance in the city,” said Rizio Y Raj, creative director of the festival. ■