

Fohat and Prāna

From The Web of Life by Annie Besant

You know that when you think of the world and its Lord - Īshvara, the Lord, the Logos, and Prakriti or Mūlaprakṛti, that on which He works, Matter - you have to remember that between the two is a link spoken of by H.P.B. as Daiviprakṛti, a name used in India for what is called by Swami Subba Rao "the Light of the LOGOS"; it is the outgoing energy of the LOGOS, that by which He works or "sports" in Matter; for the working is spoken of in Sanskrit books as Līlā, which means sport; the shaping of a world to that great Being is a delight, not a toil. Another word used for this link by H.P.B. is Fohat; Fohat is the relation between the LOGOS and the Matter of which He builds His Universe - the "Matter" taken in the highest sense. Where you think of the Matter as Mūlaprakṛti, or the Root of Matter, then the energy which plays within it and on it is called Fohat. The same phrase is used in regard to any system in the Kosmos, because in relation to the system it is the root of its matter.

Another word is sometimes used for this link - Prāna (pra, forth; ana, breath). Prāna has had in some of our books a very restricted significance. It has even been spoken of as though only a "principle" of man, confined to the physical plane. That, which is really an undue limiting of the Sanskrit term, has been cleared away by H.P.B. in the Instructions, which appear at the end of vol. 5 of The Secret Doctrine, Adyar Edition. It is truly spoken of as being on all planes, the life-breath everywhere. Both definitions of Prāna, the universal and the more restricted, are true; it is quite fair to use the word Prāna for the life-breath in man, if the word is not restricted to that meaning, and if it is understood that it can also be used synonymously with Daiviprakṛti, or Fohat. It is the out-breathing, the breathing forth, and it is as true for the whole system as the out-breathing of the LOGOS, as it is true in miniature as the breath of man.

.....

The Life-Web has two chief functions. In the first place it is an organ or vehicle of the Ego-consciousness; it is the vehicle of Self-consciousness. Coming down from the Self, or rather from its reflection, the Spiritual Triad, composed of buddhic matter, we think of it then simply as a vehicle of consciousness, the Self working in the matter of the body. Secondly, the Life-Web in its ensheathed state is a vehicle for Prāna on every plane, for the aggregate of life-forces on every plane. So that you must look upon it in these two lights: first, as being pure and simple buddhic matter, a vehicle of consciousness - the highest consciousness; second, in its ensheathed state as the vehicle of the life-forces in their application to the matter of each plane - to the matter which composes the bodies - the matter which is vitalized by Fohat and its differentiations. The word Fohat is not found in the Hindu cosmogony; its equivalent is Prāna. Keep these two ideas clearly in your mind: the purely buddhic life-web as the vehicle of consciousness; the sheaths of the life-web as the vehicle of the life-forces, or Prāna.

From *The Secret Doctrine*

Popular Science Review (pp. 329-334), they will find in it an article on “*Sun Force and Earth Force*,” by Dr. B. W. Richardson, F.R.S., which reads as follows: —

“As against the vibratory theory, Metcalfe further argues that if caloric were a *mere property or quality*, it could not augment the volume of other bodies; for this purpose it must itself have volume, it must occupy space, and it must, therefore, be a material agent. If caloric were *only the effect of vibratory motion* amongst the particles of ponderable matter, *it could not radiate from hot bodies* without the simultaneous transition of the vibrating particles; but the fact stands out that heat can radiate from material ponderable substance without loss of weight of such substance. . . With this view as to the material nature of caloric or sun-force; with the impression firmly fixed on his mind that ‘everything in Nature is composed of two descriptions of matter, the one essentially active and ethereal, the other passive and motionless,’* Metcalfe based the hypothesis that the Sun-force, or caloric, is a Self-active principle. (SD1 524 - 525)

* And how can it be otherwise? Gross ponderable matter is the body, the Shell of matter or Substance, the female passive principle; and this Fohatic force is the second principle, prāna — the male and the active? On our globe this Substance is the second principle of the septenary Element — Earth; in the atmosphere, it is that of air, which is the cosmic gross body; in the Sun it becomes the Solar body and that of the Seven rays; in sidereal space it corresponds with another principle, and so on. The whole is a homogeneous Unity alone, the parts are all differentiations. (SD1 fn 525)

. . . “The hypothesis of Metcalfe respecting sun-force and earth-force is not only very simple, but most fascinating. . . Here are two elements in the Universe, the one is ponderable matter . . . The second element is the all-pervading Ether, solar-fire. It is *without weight, substance, form, or colour; it is matter infinitely divisible*, and its particles repel each other; its rarity is such that we have no word, except ether,* by which to express it. It pervades and fills space, but alone it too is quiescent — dead.†

† And so does *prana* (Jiva) pervade the whole living body of man; but alone, without having an atom to act upon, it would be *quiescent* — dead; *i.e.*, would be in *laya*, or as Mr. Crookes has it, “locked in *protyle*.” It is the action of *Fohat* upon a compound or even a simple body that produces life. . .

(SD1 fn p525)