

Gandhiji's Yearning to Heal Others

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I did not write the title of this talk, but I like it. There is lots of documentary evidence that Gandhi's vocation to be a medical healer was deeper than his vocation to practice law. It had been for the sake of financial security that he had studied jurisprudence. He practiced law for 20 years and then quit forever (though still engaged in politics), whereas his medical healing of sick individuals, once he started doing it, continued throughout the rest of his life. A clear piece of evidence is the following set of excerpts from a description of Gandhi written in 1940 by his secretary, Mahadev Desai: "Nursing those who are ailing mentally and physically has been a passion with him throughout his life. Though he chose public law as his profession, and then, public life has claimed the bulk of his time, the passion [for caring for ailing individuals] has ... developed from what it once was - a hobby - to a sort of spiritual need. ... When we are away from headquarters, the letters to be placed on the top of his day's post must be from these [individuals]. His most concentrated [political] work, his most important talk or interview may be interrupted by anyone seeking his advice about the diet, bath and treatment of these patients."

Back in 1908 in Africa, a good friend of Gandhi's, Hermann Kallenbach, mentioned (in a letter to a doctor) that Gandhi was thinking of resettling for a while in England in order

to study medicine professionally in London. Corroboration of this fact is in a British book published in 1908 and entitled *A Winter in South Africa*. The author of the book said, in regard to Gandhi, that "He practices as a barrister but, not content with one profession, is hoping to visit London again ... to study medicine and give his sons wider opportunities for realizing the ideal with which he has inspired them."

Gandhi-scholars know that the basic ideal with which he inspired himself and most of his sons was that of rendering service. I think he must have felt in 1908 that he could serve people better by practicing medicine professionally than by practicing law.

During his visit to London in 1909, Gandhi wrote, in a letter to his friend Henry Polak, that a certain doctor in London "tells me that in the course of his studies he must have killed about fifty frogs. An examination in physiology without this, he tells me, is not possible. If this is so, I have absolutely no desire to go in for medical studies." Now I suspect that the reason why Gandhi had thought he could earn the MD degree without doing dissections was that Anna Kingsford had done it that way in Paris. She was a spiritually vibrant mystic, much admired by Gandhi on that account. (He admired, for instance, her precept that "In order to be made in the image of God, the individual

must be spiritually both man and woman.") Her final thesis for the MD degree, published in 1880 in French, argued that humans are naturally meant to be non-carnivorous and that tuberculosis, gout and epilepsy are caused by eating too much meat. Gandhi not only read the English translation of that thesis (entitled *The Perfect Way in Diet: A Treatise Advocating a Return to the Natural and Ancient Food of Our Race*) but he also became, in the mid-1890s, an agent for its sale. (I am, however, obliged for the sake of truthfulness to mention that Anna Kingsford was often in poor health, and died at the age of 41.)

Another notable expectation of Gandhi's when he was planning to study in London for an MD degree was that it would be feasible for him to integrate what he would learn there with what he had already learned from reading English versions of two German books which had been given to him a year or two before by a good friend of his who was to become his son Harilal's father-in-law. Those two books had, Gandhi recalled in 1947, made him "a confirmed convert to Nature Cure", and he never lost his regard for them. One of them had been written in about 1890 by Louis Kuhne (who had in 1883 established a hydrotherapy clinic in a big German city). Its English translation was entitled *The New Science of Healing, or the Doctrine of the Unity of Diseases, Forming*

the Basis of a Uniform Method of Cure, Without Medicines and Without Operations.

The 'uniform method' was as follows: the patient, sitting in a tub filled with cool water (10°-14° centigrade) up to the level of the seat, dips a coarse linen cloth into the water underneath, and gently washes his or her genitals with that cloth, making use of lots of water. No higher part of the body should come into contact with the water; only the outer, and not the inner, pubic parts should be bathed; and there should be no sharp rubbing, but only gentle washing with as much water as possible. "The duration of this bathing is 10-60 minutes, depending on the age and strength of the patient. ... The chosen parts of the body are particularly suitable ... because most of the nerves [in a human body] converge here, so that the entire nervous system of the organism can be positively influenced in this way."

The other Nature-Cure book which impressed Gandhi so highly was entitled *Return to Nature: Paradise Regained*. Its original German title was nearly 50 words long and said that the only way to heal any and all illnesses and sufferings of the body, of the spirit and of the soul was to adopt a certain way of life taking advantage of, among other things, the strength of earth as the most important healing-means of Nature. This

book had been published in 1896. Its author, Adolf Just, had begun in 1895 to establish mud-cure clinics in Germany which were quite successful commercially.

Gandhi in the fullness of time became a discriminating student of the teachings of these and other Nature-Cure advocates. Here is some of what he said in the 1920s in a chapter of his *Autobiography* praising Nature Cures: "Those who purchase [Adolf] Just's book on the strength of this chapter [of mine] should not take everything in it to be gospel truth. A writer almost always presents one aspect of a case, whereas every case can be seen from no less than seven points of view, all of which are probably correct by themselves, but not correct at the same time and in the same circumstances. And then many books are written with a view to gaining customers and earning name and fame. Let those, therefore, who read such books as these do so with discernment."

Gandhi himself never merchandised 'Nature Cure', but only fashioned his own version of it in order to try to heal sick people. He said that the term 'Nature Cure' "implies that the treatment should be the cheapest and the simplest possible" and that Nature Cure "connotes a way of life which has to be learnt; it is not a drug cure as we understand it". This last point would of course be part of his justification for regarding it as more

'natural' than pharmaceutical remedies. He said that the ideal Naturopath "recognizes physical, mental and spiritual ills, and treats them mainly by developing inner powers." Those inner powers would include what an ordinary Western doctor would tag as the client's 'psychosomatic' capacities. For a materialistically inclined such doctor, the word "inner" would here mean "physically within the organism", but for Gandhi it might refer also to a non-physical thing for which the standard term in English is "soul" but in Hindi, with some different connotations, *atman*.

Having just now mentioned pharmaceutical remedies and 'psychosomatic' cures, I am reminded of Gandhi's attitude toward Homoeopathy, which is a pharmacologically oriented kind of treatment (and thus unlikely to appeal to Gandhi) that had been invented by a German doctor in the early 19th century. One of its two basic premises is that a diseased person can always be cured by ingesting a substance which would produce, in a healthy person, symptoms similar to those of the disease but would not actually make the healthy person sick. The other basic precept is that an extremely tiny amount of the substance will achieve the cure. Gandhi is known to have referred to Homeopathy on six occasions, each time in a letter. Those references reveal his open-mindedness toward empirical evidence. Here are excerpts from some of them:

In 1933 he told a practitioner of Homeopathy: "I have never been able to take kindly to it, though some of my friends have often recommended it to me. I have noticed, too, that these friends themselves at critical moments have given up Homoeopathy and gone to Allopathy [Western-type medical practice]. Though I should like to believe the contrary, I am driven to the conclusion that Allopathy, although it has great limitations and much superstition about it, is still the most universal and justifiably the most popular system.... It is an all-inclusive system. It can well include Homoeopathy, bio-chemistry and the latest Nature Cures. If therefore Allopathy rids itself of the worship of mammon, which has overtaken most human activities, and [if it could] could exclude vivisection and other practices which I call black, and liberally take advantage of the new methods discovered by lay people, it would become all-satisfying."

In 1936, Gandhi told Gangabehn Vaidya, a close associate of his at Sabarmati: "I was pained to read about Bachubhai [Gangabehn's nephew]. You cannot leave him as long as he is bed-ridden. Tell Jugatram [a certain Ayurvedic physician, evidently the one treating Bachubhai] to consult a Homoeopath. Homoeopathy has not won my faith, but it helped Devdas [Gandhi's youngest son], and a medical specialist whom we met here is all praise for it. In any case it will do no harm, and [it] may do some good."

In 1944 he said: "I wish I could have faith in Homoeopathy and biochemical medicines, but I don't. Now I am thinking of taking Allopathic drugs to get rid of the hook-worms and the amoebae" [which Sushila Nayyar, his primary-care physician, was telling him were the cause of his health problems at that time].

Modern assessments of Homeopathy, conducted thoroughly and independently by the Swiss Federal Health Office, the French National Authority for Health, the European Union's Science Advisory Council, the British House of Commons Science and Technology Committee, and the Australian National Health and Medical Research Council, have concluded that Homoeopathy is ineffective, and the World Health Organization has warned against using it to try to treat severe diseases such as HIV and malaria. So it's fair to say that 21st-century Allopathy (which, since it strives to be evidence-based, does sometimes embrace Nature Cure and Acupuncture and some other methods developed in non-Western cultures), doesn't embrace Homoeopathy.

In a few minutes I will cite some evidence about Gandhi's attitude in the mid-1940s toward contemporary Ayurvedic methods and toward Naturopathy, but let me first, since my talk is mainly about Gandhi as a medical healer, describe five cases of his

achievements as such in the first three decades of the century.

My Case Number 1 is his *self-curative* use of mud-packs (as taught by Adolf Just) after he had been assaulted and battered in 1908 by some men who felt that he had compromised too much in a political settlement he had negotiated with General Smuts. Gandhi convalesced in the home of a friend whose son recalled, years later: "I can see Mr Gandhi, now, propped up with pillows, his lacerated face swathed with bandages, unable to speak, and writing answers to questions on a slate before him. The healing of the wounds was slow, and he got impatient. He told my father that if he could get a plaster of 'clean mud' on his face, he was sure it would help. So off I was sent with spade and bucket to clean away the topsoil and get uncontaminated lower earth for the plaster. We made the mud plasters, and my mother applied them. Well do we remember the consternation of the doctor when he found out what had been done. ...But in two days Mr Gandhi was sitting out on the verandah, in the study armchair, and eating fruit."

(Most MDs would indeed consider it quite risky to put mud on an open sore. A lot would depend on exactly which mud is chosen (perhaps it could indeed contain a chemical of

therapeutic value), on whether it has been sterilized, irradiated, and analyzed chemically for toxins, and on the extent to which the patient might have developed, after exposures to similar stuff, immunity to potentially harmful organisms or viruses in it.)

My Case Number 2 is an expert display, during one of Gandhi's prison terms in Africa, of a skill which he had mastered in his military ambulance-corps work. An account of it was written (with palpably racist overtones) by a fellow prisoner of his. It describes how an illiterate Black African prison-attendant was "stung by a scorpion and came howling to Bapu", who "without wasting a moment, washed that part of the Negro's hand thoroughly clean with water, dried it, and then started sucking the poison out of the sting. He sucked with such vim and gusto that much of the poison was drawn out, and the poor man began to feel better. Then Bapu applied various other treatments, and the Negro got rid of his pain."

My Case Number 3 is Gandhi's cure of Kasturba's dire illness in December of 1908. An MD had misdiagnosed her as suffering from pernicious anemia, and she was in grave condition as the doctor's curative methods were not working at all. Here is an eye-witness account of how Gandhi succeeded where the MD had failed: "Mr Gandhi put

everything on one side and devoted everything to her. During one of her conscious periods he asked her if she trusted him absolutely. She replied in the affirmative. Then he said, 'Will you let me try and help you?'. This she agreed to, placing herself entirely in his hands. After this he stopped all medicines and refused to allow the doctor to try and force his patient to take meat extracts. The doctor abused Mr Gandhi, who, however, stood firm. For the next two weeks Mr Gandhi scarcely left his wife's side. He fed her at intervals with pure lemon juice, and no other food or drink of any kind was given to her. He poured his calm energy into her, and did for her all the little delicate duties that a very sick woman required. For these two weeks Mrs Gandhi semi-consciously struggled for life, but by the end of that time a marked change was noticeable. The conscious periods were much longer, sleep became more natural, the dropsical swellings became less, and the eyes began to look clearer. Then by slow degrees, a little fruit and milk were given, and lastly vegetables without condiments, and cereals. And without a single relapse, Mrs Gandhi slowly but surely returned to health."

One reason for Gandhi's success in this case was undoubtedly his wife's "absolute" trust. He could rally her psychosomatic resilience better than the doctor could.

Case Number 4 is Gandhi's equally amazing cure in 1912 of Raojibhai Manibhai Patel's rheumatism. Here is an abridged and edited version of a translation of Patel's account (which was written originally - some 20 years after the cure - in Gujarati): "I was rheumatic since childhood. The doctors had tried numerous treatments but the symptoms kept erupting. When I joined Phoenix Ashram in 1912, Gandhiji was permanently living there. The first thing that happened on my joining Phoenix was a drastic change in my food habits. Earlier I had eaten impulsively. No one had ever thought of restraint. Large doses of oral medication had suppressed the superficial pain. But now I gradually stopped eating food-grains, and supped only on fruit. Within a month of my experimenting with the fruit diet, all my joints became rheumatic; I could barely go to the toilet. Gandhiji knew everything because he always took upon himself the responsibility to feed and nurse the sick. He was the guardian of both the body and the soul. He kept me on a fruit diet, but avoiding sour fruits. He had me eat a lot of tomatoes and provided oiling to the system with olive oil.

"Early in the morning, Gandhiji would put his hand on my head. What affection, what comfort did I experience in that touch! He would examine my mouth and tongue. After cleaning up and washing, I would go to a separate room where Gandhiji would come at

the appointed time. He would prepare about two liters of lukewarm whitish soapy water solution, add about 25 grams of castor oil, and give me a douche of that solution. After this cleansing of the bowels I had to sit in a tub full of water for half an hour, massaging my stomach. I then bathed with cold water. This treatment was administered every alternate day; on the intermittent day there would be a steam-bath. And thus the blood in my body was gradually purified. The diet was now altered to wheat *chapatis*, olive oil and ripe tomatoes. My pain was reduced, but became 'mobile' - one day in the knees, another day in the wrists, and another day in the back or in the finger joints. However, it was an essential part of the treatment to continue to work and not to be bed-ridden. The daily routine was as follows: 6-7 a.m., ablutions and bowel-clearing etc.; 7-8, with the students at school; 8-9, treatment: douche etc. or steam-bath; 9-10, kitchen work; 10-12, lunch and rest; 12-2, work as compositor at the press [for the journal, *Indian Opinion*]; 2-4, picking fruits or preparing plantation beds in the gardens; 4-5, work in the kitchen; 5-6, supper; 6-7, relaxation or strolling around; 7-7:30, prayers; 7:30-8:30, conversation and discussion on varied topics with Gandhiji; 9-6, rest and sleep (during illness; when healthy I would get up at 4 a.m.) My treatment continued for three months. Gandhi rarely left the ashram. As I recall now his exacting care,

I feel overwhelmed. During the initial stage of the treatment, when I was unable to sit up, he would examine my stool after the douche to see if the food was getting digested, and then would clean the pot himself. I can compare his care only with that of my mother who had devotedly looked after my needs regardless of the uncleanness entailed. The soul-filling experience is fresh in my mind even after twenty years. I was cured of rheumatism for good."

(Now it seems to me that if the arthritis was due to auto-immune inflammation, then the cure must have been 'psychosomatic', and I consider it arguable that such an intimate and intense relationship as Patel recalled might indeed have a such physiological result. The cause of the rheumatism could, however, have been a food allergy, and indeed Gandhi seems to have probed to identify it by eliminating one dietary component at a time. If we had confirming evidence that Patel continued to avoid the dangerous (to him) kind of fruit, this would render this explanation quite likely. Allergy to one or more fruits is not uncommon, and an allergic reaction of inflammation in multiple joints is also fairly common.)

My Case Number 5 is a cure performed by Gandhi in India in 1930 during one of his

detentions there: "The Superintendent, Major Martin, had appointed a Maharashtri named Dattoba to cook for Bapu. The poor fellow suffered from pain in his foot, and limped noticeably as he went about his work. One day Bapu spoke to Major Martin about this. Major Martin gave some medicine, but it did no good. A month went by, and then Bapu said to Major Martin, 'Have you any objection to my treating this man?' 'None whatsoever', said the Major. Bapu said, 'Diet is the most important part of my treatment. I shall provide him with the special things I want him to eat.' Major Martin agreed to this also. Bapu started giving treatment to Dattoba. He began by keeping him on fast for a few days, and cleaned out his stomach [the writer should have said "his lower intestines"] with an enema. Then, for a few days, he kept him on nothing but vegetables. Later on, he kept making adjustments in his diet as occasion arose. The lame man began to improve. He said to me [the writer was a fellow prisoner of Gandhi's], 'I have been bothered by this pain for years and now, look how much better my foot is! I find no difficulty in walking whatever. I find it so surprising - to be able to walk like other men.'"

Now let me come to what will be perhaps the most interesting part of my talk. It has to do with the fact that the reason why the Viceroy released Gandhi, in May of 1944,

from detention in the Aga Khan Palace was that Gandhi's health-condition was dire, and the Viceroy was afraid that if Gandhi died while in detention, there would be a vast amount of political trouble. However, Gandhi was by no means willing to die at that time; so, he had to decide how to try to recover his good health. At first, he considered mainly Allopathy (represented very well by Sushila Nayyar) and Ayurveda, but then in the course of 1945 he tried Nature Cure as well, and was impressed with the result. Let me share with you some of the documentary evidence in regard to this episode of his life.

He told a friend, on November 30th, 1944: "Ramesh is a very nice person but he failed to reveal the wonders of Ayurveda to me. He is hard-working. He tries to compete with Allopathy. A great deal of diligence and experience is required to compete with Allopathy. I have grown very weak. Sushilabehn of course recommends her line of treatment. I am still keen on getting well with the help of Ayurveda or my own methods of treatment. Let us see what I decide to do."

In a statement to the press which Gandhi issued a day later, he said: "Dr. Sushila Nayyar assures me that there is nothing physically wrong with me except that my old friends, the hookworms and the amoebae, have not left me."

And here then is a salient passage from a letter written by Gandhi on January 4th, 1945: "I am reaping what I sowed. I went on taking Ayurvedic medicines without thinking and had to suffer the consequences. I am now getting rid of the poison. I am daily improving and getting stronger."

Equally salient are the following remarks from a letter he sent, in that same month of January 1945, to a representative of the Indian Institute of Natural Therapeutics: "I have met most Naturopaths. They do not agree [with one another] and they are obstinate and even lazy. ... You will now see why I cannot preside or be at your conference. ... I [do] want Naturopathy to make real progress."

He had by no means, however, given up hope for such progress: Early in December of 1944 he had said (in a letter written in Gujarati) to a colleague who was dealing with an epidemic in a village: "You will soon get lots of drugs, but they will not be very helpful. Revive people's knowledge of Nature Cure remedies. Local medicinal drugs should be made available. Give rice water.... If you mix jaggery with it, it will provide more energy. Teach people the rules of hygiene. If food is stopped to people suffering from fever or diarrhea and if they are put on boiled water, then more than 50 per cent of the

cases will recover. ... I have suggested only the simplest remedies."

A few weeks before then, Gandhi had sent a letter to a colleague who was thinking of setting up a Nature Cure clinic. Gandhi's own health at that time had been so very frail that he couldn't offer personal help; but he did offer advice, including the following: "The halls for treatment and experiment should be surrounded by decent huts for the residence of patients and children entrusted to our care. The sanatorium should grow fruit, flowers, food grains and vegetables. It should have cattle sheds and roads good enough for vehicles. It should also have a gymnasium, a tank for bathing and other facilities. Patients should be given such treatment as does not involve the use of electricity...."

And then, after having written those various letters in 1944 and in January of 1945, Gandhi spent 90 days, in August, September, October and November of 1945, residing at the Nature Cure Clinic and Sanatorium in Pune (which is hosting this webinar talk of mine) and taking a course of treatments there. Those treatments clearly improved his health. He gained more than 2½ kilos of weight and felt much better when he left than he had felt when he had come in. And so in 1946, he spent nine days in a certain

village setting up and directing, himself, a Nature-Cure center which he then left in charge of a designated medical instructor and a designated administrative manager. Here are some of the instructions he left for carrying on without him: "The treatment is to be limited to sun bath, hip bath, friction bath, Kuhne bath, mud poultice, massage, [and] fomentation with hot water. [However,] Ramanama [that is, saying the name of Lord "Rama" over and over again] is the king of all treatments. Everyone should rise at 4 a.m., and the [morning] prayer should be held at 4:30. All should maintain a diary. The tub [for the hip-baths] should be washed with water and hot ashes after every use. A clean brush should be used for scrubbing with the ashes. All kitchen work and cleaning should be done by the inmates themselves.... The food should be the simplest possible." Perhaps one reason why repeated Ramanama might help Gandhi's patients could have been that to take religious advice from such an incredibly great counselor could rally one's 'psychosomatic' powers of recovery more than to take the advice of a normal doctor. Moreover, a patient dying while calmly repeating the name "Rama" would spend his or her last moments in a serene way which all good doctors and friends would prefer to see. Some brief excerpts from Gandhi's comments in regard to a few of the villagers whose treatments he supervised during his nine days at that clinic will show that he had a

sense of limits to the curative powers of Nature Cure, especially under conditions where he did not have a modicum of personal familiarity with the clients. Here are some of his notes about one of his cases at that village clinic, indicating that such was the case: "What has she tied to her abdomen? In the first place she should not gird up so tight. She should lie prostrate and naked in a solitary place. She should give up eating bread, and subsist on milk and fruit. Does she pass stools? ... With whom has she come? Does she have anyone at home?" (At that clinic, he was just as unfamiliar with the clients as most of the primary-care physicians working nowadays in hospitals in the USA are with many of *their* clients. The hospital managers there insist that the primary-care physicians spend, on average, only 12 or in relatively better hospitals 15 minutes per appointment. It is a scandalous aspect of American health-care in hospitals nowadays. I think there ought to be a law stipulating that the specified *average* must be at least 20 minutes. Even better in practice might be to allow the primary-care physicians as much time with each client as they like. One of the findings of careful statistical research conducted in the last few years at the University of Chicago by Prof. David Meltzer, who has an MD degree and a PhD degree in economics, has been that people who have a primary-care physician with whom they have plenty of leisurely

appointments fare so much better health-wise in the long run that their health-care-insurance companies make more profit from insuring *them* than from insuring individuals who have only short appointments with primary-care physicians. Whatever kind of health-care you may be engaged in, if helping others improve their health is a top concern for you, then you should try to figure out a way to earn their trust and to understand all the relevant circumstances of their health problems.)

But let me return now to my assigned topic of *Gandhi's* yearning to heal others. The following remarks show that in his village-Nature-Cure clinic in 1946, he was alert to the difference between 'getting better' and 'a complete cure'; he said, in regard to a certain case which had been reported to him: "I would advise this. She should take sun-bath in the nude, followed by a hip-bath and a friction-bath in cold water. Her diet should consist of only fruit juice and milk or buttermilk. If she does this regularly, she is sure to get better. Complete cure is rather difficult. She may possibly be cured, if she has faith in Rama."

Here are his remarks about a case where he advised a more intrusive procedure than Nature Cure could provide: "He must get himself admitted to the hospital. If he is willing [to do that] and wants to have a note [from us for the hospital], he may go with

one [provided by us]. There is no other remedy for hernia. A strap-belt can also be worn. If he does not want to do all this, he should surrender to Rama and rest content."

Here are Gandhi's remarks about a case in regard to which the views of most 21st-century MDs would probably differ from his views at that time and under those circumstances; he said: "What is the use of removing cataracts from a poor person's eyes? One should live with it, recite Ramanama and, when the time is up, depart with Ramanama on one's lips. If this cannot be done, she may be taken to a hospital and have the cataracts removed. I do not remember any [Nature Cure] treatment for cataract..."

(Let mention here, however, that one of Gandhi's general underlying precepts in this last case - namely, that the doctor should take into account the quality of life which a client may reasonably be hoped to have as a result of the treatment being mooted - was sensible. The decisions which responsible doctors have to make as to how to proceed in problematic cases are often based on informal estimates of how this or that procedure under consideration seems likely to affect the client's quality of life.)

There were rarely house calls from that village Nature Cure clinic in 1946. But there was, in effect, an equivalent to house calls the following year, 1947, during Gandhi's

walking tour of Noakhali in the wake of the religious violence which had been suffered there. Here are some excerpts from Narayan Desai's account (written years later) of Gandhi's tour of Noakhali: "During the disturbances many hospitals were burnt down and not a doctor [was now] in sight for miles together. Gandhiji found in this situation an opportunity to suggest Nature Cures for small ailments. For many families he became a family physician. In a short time, his reputation as a Nature Cure expert spread. Villagers spoke of the healing touch of a man of God. He had immense faith in Nature Cure, but did not impose it on others. Once, two Muslim boys with *kala-azar* [that is, Black Fever] were brought to him. He called Dr Sushila Nayyar, who had set up a dispensary in a nearby village. She was made to walk six miles daily to administer injections to the two boys."

My main task in this talk has been to show that Gandhi's vocation for medical healing was deeper than his vocation to practice law. I hope that this fact may serve to inspire health-care workers of all kinds in India to deepen their vocations.

If time permits, I would like to discuss briefly one additional aspect of Gandhi's Nature-Cure approach to promoting good health, namely fasting. A long essay on health

and health-care which he wrote in 1913 in Gujarati recommends it as part of the treatment for certain diseases, and includes the following remarks: "Fever has its origin generally in some stomach trouble. The first step to be taken therefore is fasting. The notion that a weak person or one suffering from fever will be weakened by fasting is entirely mistaken. By stopping all intake of food, we give the stomach a chance to do its [curative] work. The fast, therefore, must be continued for at least a day or longer. Kuhne baths should be administered during and after the fast."

Gandhi knew of course about the Ayurvedic tradition of *langhanam* - that is, of fasting, perhaps once a month or maybe even once a fortnight, for a day or so in order to preserve good health. In 1929 he advised Mirabehn to take "an occasional fast or semi-fast even when you are feeling well", and two years later he told her that "an occasional fast, at least once per month, is a good thing, it seems, even for light-weight people."

The word "fast" as a noun or verb has often been often used without saying clearly what is meant. A fairly clear definition is included in an article published in 2013 by two MDs at a first-rate clinic in Berlin. In that article, fasting is defined as "voluntary abstinence from solid food and [from] stimulants (like caffeine or nicotine) for a lim-

ited period of time", and it is said to depend upon "the [person's] ability to meet the body's requirements for macro- and micronutrients, during a limited period of either shortage or absence of food, by using almost exclusively the body's energy reserves without endangering health. During fasting, intake of food in forms of vegetable broth and vegetable or fruit juice should not exceed 500 kilocalories per day.... When fasting is done properly, one should experience a good level of vitality and absence of hunger." I myself have seldom fasted, and never for more than one day. I would like to know the views of you Nature Cure experts on this matter.

Thank you very much for your attention.

Query: Gandhiji's vocation to be a medical healer was deeper than the vocation to practice law. What helped Gandhiji to console himself for the loss of his vocation to become a professional healer?

Reply: Well, in the short run, he was *not* consoled, he was upset. This is clear to me from the *excessively* sharp remarks about Western medical practice that he made in the essay, *Hind Swaraj*, which he wrote on board the ship that took him back from London to Africa in 1909. He wrote it in such a state of passion that his right hand sometimes became cramped from writing too hard and so he would write the next page with his left hand. This is shown by the slants of the handwriting in the manuscript. I think that essay of his has many defects of detail in its arguments, because it was written with not enough calm reflection; and I think that one of the two main reasons for *that* was that his hopes of earning an MD degree had been dashed by the apparent impossibility of doing it without dissecting live frogs. (The other main reason for his dismay at that time was his encounter in London with Savarkar.) In the long run he gradually arrived at a sensibly balanced attitude of critical appreciation for Allopathy. He was a persistent seeker after truth.

Query: How has Gandhi's preaching on health been taken in Western countries in respect to health and health-care?

Reply: It seems to me that practically no one there pays any attention at all to it. I have tried, and failed, to arrange for guest lectures on this topic in the USA and in Germany. I have given plenty of well-received lectures on other topics in both of those countries; but Gandhi is not regarded there as a possible source of insight in regard to health or health-care, even though he is widely admired personally and as a great politician.

Query: Can you please throw some light on "Apostle of Applied Human Ecology"?

Reply: I admire Triloki Nath Khoshoo's book, *Mahatma Gandhi: An Apostle of Applied Human Ecology*, but I myself don't use the phrase "human ecology" because it has been used by various writers to mean different things. I think one aspect of what Khoshoo meant is that Gandhi was in a certain sense a Humanist: he valued human life more than he did the lives of, say, dogs and snakes. In 1927 he approved of using a gun to kill rabid dogs (dogs infected with rabies) before they might bite humans and give *them* the disease, and in 1944 he approved, for the same kind of reason, of killing poisonous snakes at Sevagram, rather than capturing them and setting them free in the forest. Another important point which can be conveyed by the phrase "human ecology" is that the great danger now in the 21st century is not at all to Planet Earth, but only to various biological species, including *Homo sapiens*. If one of the consequences of maintaining too much of our 20th-century-

modern way of life happens to be that Humankind becomes extinct in a fairly moderate number of decades from now, the planet will still be OK for millions of years more, just as it was after various biologically destructive geological episodes in the course of the last billion years or so.

Query: We have many stories about Gandhi treating people with Nature Cure(s). Can you share an anecdote which can make us understand his concepts on mental health?

Reply: You are asking me some very good questions. I haven't done any research on *this* one, but I can say that Gandhi's concept of the *atman*, which he regarded as the divine aspect of human nature, was that when it is isolated from the ocean of the *para-atman*, it's like a feeble little droplet of water that will shrivel up, but when it's joined in love with the mighty ocean, it partakes of that power. I think Gandhi felt that a good way of the droplet getting back to the ocean would be by the person doing work that is useful to other people. Here is an eye-witness account of a ten-minute interview which Gandhi in 1945 on a Monday - his silent day of the week - granted to a gentleman who had a distressing emotional problem and came to Sevagram to ask him about it: "Bapuji wrote out his answers on a slate. I too was present at the interview. The interviewer eloquently explained his problem to Bapuji for seven minutes and sought Bapuji's advice.... Bapu wrote

the reply: 'The fact you talked so long on the problem shows you have not understood the problem.' The gentleman was dumbfounded. Bapuji wrote again: 'A worker goes straight to the practical difficulty.' The gentleman felt humble and said meekly, 'I have difficulties, Bapuji.' Bapu wrote in reply: 'Go and work. Work solves your difficulties.' The ten minutes were over and Bapuji turned away his face." This reminds me of the fact that when Gandhi was dealing with Manibhai Patel's rheumatism, he would never let him be bed-ridden. To do some clearly useful work every day notwithstanding your health-problem can be part of the cure. I'm reminded also of a wonderful fictional character in a great novel, by Charles Dickens, entitled *David Copperfield* and set in the first half of the 19th century. The character has an emotional crisis whenever the historical fact that King Charles II of England had been beheaded back in 1685 is mentioned. But at other times, he is an insightful fellow - not a genius like Einstein, but smart - and it is he who figures out who is the man who has been deviously causing a lot of trouble in the lives of David Copperfield and some of the other characters. The moral of the story is that in some cases a person who is mentally unbalanced about one thing can be perfectly OK when dealing with other things, and that if (s)he spends a lot of time and effort functioning sanely in regard to those other things, then the mental-health problem may become a lot less bothersome.