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Earthen Building Makes a Big Return

Forty percent of the world's population live in earthen dwellings. The most enduring earth building, Egypt's adobe Ramasseum, still stands (though damaged) after 3,300 years. In China's Fujian Province there are 30,000 earth buildings, dating mostly from the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties. India's oldest earthen building, the Tabo Monastery in Spiti Valley, Himachal Pradesh, built in 996, is still in use, having withstood Himalayan winters for a thousand years.

With the 20th century came the use of concrete, steel, treated lumber and all manner of synthetic materials, with serious consequences. Our rapacious thirst for lumber is stripping forests. And for every ton of concrete we produce, we generate one ton of greenhouse gas emissions. More pollution is caused by the need to transport these materials and to heat and air-condition the poorly designed buildings. Furthermore, many modern building materials continuously outgas toxic chemicals into the home or workplace for the inhabitants to breathe. Concerned builders are going "green " and turning back to the oldest building material: earth.

Imagine a healthy home, heated by the sun, cool in the summer without the noise of loud furnaces and air-conditioners. Such a home supports a non-polluting, sustainable economy and pays for itself over time.

Want to know more? The best starting place is <http://www.earth-auroville.com> Here is a wealth of history, international links and marvelous photos. You can find out all about soil classifications, dry or solid, humid, plastic, liquid and the 12 different basic earth building methods, such as earth dug out, cut blocks, rammed earth, poured earth, stacked earth, "cob, " adobe and its modern descendent, compressed earth blocks. Be ready to toss out preconceived "mud hut " notions. People are building exquisitely beautiful homes as well as huge structures that will last a

millennia and withstand hurricanes and earthquakes long after modern buildings have turned to rubble.

Google "earth builders " to find builders in your area, and see <http://www.eartharchitecture.org>, <http://www.greenhomebuilding.com> and <http://www.greenbuilder.com>

SCRIPTURES

Window on Our Ocean of Hymns

Celextel's online spiritual Library, based in Chennai, is a refreshingly simple site. It contains no clutter, no advertisements--nothing to detract from its one purpose: to provide unfettered access to the wealth of Hindu scriptural literature. With 300 links to English translations of scriptures on the home page itself at www.celextel.org, you have instant access to the Bhagavad Gita, Brahma Sutras, 108 Upanishads, 45 works by Adi Sankara, various Vedanta works, ashtottaras to various Deities and a few Vedic hymns and articles. It is a simple but huge treasure chest, all in a single location and all in excellent, readable modern English.