

Atom / Atomic

Definitional Essay

Theosophy Trust

Atom, from the Greek *atomos*, means indivisible or uncuttable. In Theosophy, however, the word has several related meanings. It may designate a spiritual point of differentiation, a germinal centre of life, a life-atom, or the physical atom. These meanings belong to different levels of manifestation and must be distinguished. In Professor Iyer's treatment, atomic can also describe the inward, causal activity of consciousness. The governing idea is a living centre whose existence expresses, and remains inseparable from, the One Life.

In "Aquarian Spirituality," Professor Iyer traces these meanings through the sevenfold creations. The first plurality of atoms arises with the differentiation of the sevenfold *Dhyani-energies* in the *Mahatattwa* creation. In the first three creations, atom refers to spiritual and formless realities, including Atma-Buddhic monads. Beginning with the fourth, or *mukhya*, creation, it acquires further meanings connected with germinal centres of the elemental, mineral, plant and animal kingdoms. The physical atom represents the most outward differentiation in this series. The same word therefore requires different interpretations according to its setting.

The Sanskrit term *anu* provides a further key. It can indicate minuteness or an atom; in its deepest metaphysical use, Professor Iyer relates it to the indivisible reality underlying all differentiation. The living atoms of every plane remain inseparable from this universal life. Indivisibility here concerns their ultimate ground of being. It should not be confused with a claim that a physical atom has no constituent structure. Nor does the One Life become a collection of detached pieces when innumerable centres of life appear.

The Gupta Vidya begins its cosmology with life and intelligence already present. In "Karma and Transmutation," Professor Iyer teaches that life precedes the first atom of form and that manifestation on the seven planes must be traced to *Dhyani-energies* on the plane of *Mahat*, Divine Mind. Atoms emerge from *laya*, a condition of latency, during the fire-mist stage of cosmic life. The teaching concerns the interior conditions of manifestation, through which differentiated forms become possible within an intelligible and living order.

H.P. Blavatsky connects this process with the Great Breath. In *The Secret Doctrine*, she describes eternal universal motion or vibration as differentiating in the primordial, first manifested Atom. The term primordial Atom belongs here to cosmogony, the account of a universe's manifestation. It is not simply another name for a chemical element. The image directs thought towards the first differentiation of universal motion, before the familiar multiplicity of material forms. Motion, substance and consciousness must consequently be considered together.

Blavatsky also teaches that every particle, whether called organic or inorganic, is a life. The same infinitesimal invisible lives compose the atoms of mountain and daisy, human being and ant, elephant and tree. Atoms and molecules participate in both the building and dissolution of the forms they sustain. This doctrine extends the meaning of life beyond biological classification. It does not attribute a human personality to every particle; it affirms degrees and modes of living participation throughout Nature.

This distinction changes the student's relation to the visible world. A stone need not possess human awareness to belong to a living cosmos. A plant's life need not resemble our reflective thought to deserve care. To recognize a common spiritual ground is also to respect the differences through which it is expressed. Brotherhood acquires a metaphysical foundation without erasing the varied conditions, capacities and responsibilities of beings. Reverence grows through attention to particular lives.

Professor Iyer's comparison of atom and molecule carries the teaching into psychology. From the standpoint he calls metachemistry, atomic energies derive from the indivisible unity of the One Life, while molecular actions involve secondary emanations and their interplay. Correspondingly, he distinguishes the noetic action of *Buddhi-Manas* from the psychic action of lower *Manas*. Noetic action draws upon spiritual intuition; psychic action remains conditioned by desire and the residual impressions of the mortal vestures. This is a philosophical correspondence, not a chemical classification of thoughts.

The distinction is practical. A person may repeatedly rearrange opinions while preserving the same fear, resentment or craving beneath them. Such rearrangement leaves the governing motive untouched. A deeper change begins when attention reaches the motive itself and opens to a more universal standpoint. One may still remember an injury, yet cease to organize one's conduct around retaliation. The outward circumstance has not necessarily altered; the inward source of action has begun to change.

In "Continuity of Consciousness," Professor Iyer explains that atomic, in this regenerative context, refers to something more rudimentary than what science calls atomic or subatomic. Through meditation, self-study and detachment, the student seeks the Buddhist potency within things. The task calls for disinterestedness and sustained ethical discipline. Its measure is increasing clarity, freedom from compulsive reaction, and usefulness to others. The word atomic thus points towards a depth of transformation rather than merely a smaller scale of observation.

The doctrine of life-atoms brings this perspective into everyday relationships. In "Karma and Transmutation," every human being is described as receiving life-atoms from innumerable other beings through a ceaseless circulation. These lives pass through the vestures and retain the impress of thought and feeling. Breath, speech, imagination and will therefore belong to a

shared field of influence. Within this teaching, what we entertain inwardly has consequences beyond the private story we tell about ourselves.

Professor Iyer makes outbreathing an occasion for considering what we return to the world. The ethical question is whether our contribution carries benevolence or hostility. A patient reply, a truthful word and a generous interpretation can become small acts of conscious stewardship. Such practice begins in ordinary conduct. It asks for care in how we meet another person, how we speak when irritated, and what mental atmosphere we repeatedly cultivate. Responsibility becomes intimate enough to practise at any moment.

“Self-Magnetization” gives this responsibility a patient and hopeful direction. Habits accumulated over time are altered through persistent countervailing effort. As a harmful tendency first appears, the student learns to recognize it calmly and cultivate an appropriate response. Repeated practice gradually changes what has become habitual. Professor Iyer describes this regeneration in terms of a refreshed class of life-atoms becoming part of one’s vestures. The teaching joins moral choice with the gradual renewal of the instruments through which consciousness acts.

An occasional generous mood is therefore only a beginning. What matters is the steadiness with which insight becomes conduct. The student may return daily to a simple intention: to leave the shared atmosphere clearer through truthfulness, quieter through restraint, and warmer through goodwill. Failure becomes material for honest self-study and renewed effort. In this way the doctrine supports an exacting compassion that includes both others and the unfinished work within oneself.

The modern release of immense energy from atomic processes gives the older teaching an added ethical resonance. Technical power places a corresponding demand upon judgment and responsibility. The metaphysical use of atomic does not turn nuclear physics into a proof of spiritual attainment. It invites reflection upon the relation between power and purpose: what kind of consciousness directs the forces available to humanity, and whose welfare does that consciousness serve?

Atom and atomic finally lead back to the relation of the One and the many. Each centre belongs to an order of life wider than its apparent boundary. To contemplate this is to become attentive to the smallest occasions of service. The particle, the passing thought and the spoken word all enter a world already shared. Nothing is too small for care; no sincere act of understanding is without a place in the continuing work of renewal.

Glossary

Anu — Minuteness or an atom; in Professor Iyer's metaphysical usage, a pointer to indivisible universal life.

Atma-Buddhi — The spiritual duad: universal spirit and its spiritual vehicle. Atma-Buddhic means pertaining to this duad.

Buddhi-Manas — Mind illumined by spiritual intuition; the basis of noetic action.

Dhyani-energies — Powers of spiritual intelligences active in cosmic differentiation.

Great Breath — Eternal universal motion and its cyclic expression.

Gupta Vidya — Secret wisdom; also the title of Professor Iyer's collected writings.

Karma — The universal law of cause, effect and the restoration of harmony.

Laya — Dissolution or latency, from which a new differentiation may emerge.

Life-atom — A minute living centre participating in vestures and receptive to impressions.

Mahat / Mahatattwa — Divine Mind / the great principle of the first creation.

Manas — The thinking principle, responsive to spiritual intuition or to desire.

Monad — A spiritual unit; here, an Atma-Buddhic centre rooted in universal life.

Molecule — A composite unit; here, a correspondence for secondary, conditioned action.

Mukhya — Chief or primary; here, the fourth creation, associated with material form.

Noetic — Pertaining to spiritual cognition and the activity of *Buddhi-Manas*.

Psychic — Here, action of lower *Manas* conditioned by desire and residual impressions.

Vesture — A sheath or vehicle through which consciousness functions.

Quotes for Meditation and Self Study

1. R.N. Iyer — "Aquarian Spirituality", Theosophy Trust.

"The first plurality of atoms arose with the pristine differentiation of the sevenfold *Dhyani-energies* in the *Mahatattwa* creation, which was in turn followed by further hierarchies of atoms in the succeeding two creations. The meanings of the term 'atom' as applied to the first three creations refer to spiritual and formless realities, including the use of the term to designate Atma-Buddhic monads."

Meditation thought: This quote gives the doctrinal root. Atom begins in spiritual and formless differentiation before it becomes a physical term.

2. R.N. Iyer — “Aquarian Spirituality”, Theosophy Trust.

“Beginning with the fourth, or *mukhya*, creation, sometimes called the primary creation because it is the first of a series of four creations connected with material form, the term ‘atom’ has a new series of meanings pertaining to the germinal centres of the elemental, mineral, plant and animal kingdoms.”

Meditation thought: This quote shows how atom descends into form. The atom becomes the germinal center of the lower kingdoms without losing its link to earlier spiritual meaning.

3. R.N. Iyer — “Aquarian Spirituality”, Theosophy Trust.

“The term ‘atom’ used in the customary physical sense applies to the extreme degree of differentiation in this series. Just as the infinite points of differentiated spaces are inseparable from the One Point that is the indivisible sum total of boundless Space, the living atoms of every plane are indivisible from *anu* – the ONE LIFE – and all resound to the fiery vibration of its eternal Motion.”

Meditation thought: The physical atom represents the most outward differentiation described here. The living centres of every plane remain inseparable from the One Life.

4. R.N. Iyer — “Aquarian Spirituality”, Theosophy Trust.

“From the standpoint of metachemistry, atomic energies derive from the indivisible unity of the One Life, whilst molecular actions stem from the interplay of vital though secondary emanations.”

Meditation thought: Professor Iyer’s metaphysical distinction relates atomic energy to fundamental unity and molecular action to secondary interplay.

5. R.N. Iyer — “Aquarian Spirituality”, Theosophy Trust.

“The same facts viewed from the standpoint of meta-psychology lead to the distinction between the noetic action of *Buddhi-Manas*, which draws upon the light of the one indivisible *Atman*, and the psychic action of the lower *Manas*, which is inherently restricted by the polarities of the *kama* principle to residual effects upon the composite mortal vestures.”

Meditation thought: The distinction concerns the source and quality of consciousness: spiritual intuition and freedom from desire, or action conditioned by its residual effects.

6. R.N. Iyer — “Karma and Transmutation”, Theosophy Trust.

“*The Gupta Vidya* teaches that life precedes the first atom of form, and that its manifestation on the seven planes must be traced to the active *Dhyani-energies* on the plane of *Mahat*.”

Meditation thought: In this account of manifestation, life and intelligence are prior to differentiated form. Consider how this starting point changes one’s understanding of Nature.

7. R.N. Iyer — “Karma and Transmutation”, Theosophy Trust.

“Every human being is a receptacle of life-atoms from billions of other beings, immersed in a constant circulation that passes in and out of every astral form.”

Meditation thought: This gives the ethical nearness of the teaching. The body and astral form are part of a vast circulation of lives.

8. R.N. Iyer — “Karma and Transmutation”, Theosophy Trust.

“Each opportunity to breathe outwards is an opportunity to either bless or curse life-atoms.”

Meditation thought: Consider outbreathing as an occasion for goodwill. The practical emphasis is upon benevolent motive and responsibility for what one contributes to the shared atmosphere.

9. R.N. Iyer — “Self-Magnetization”, Theosophy Trust.

“Then it will wear away the old tendencies until they fall away, and a refreshed class of life-atoms will become a permanent component of one’s vestures.”

Meditation thought: This quote gives hope for self-regeneration. Persistent self-correction can renew the subtle life-atoms through which consciousness works.

10. R.N. Iyer — “Continuity of Consciousness”, Theosophy Trust.

“In the context of such a regenerative discipline, the radical difference between psychic action — which works at the level of the molecular and the structural — and noetic action — which works at the level of the atomic — is vital.”

Meditation thought: Here atomic and molecular name a metaphysical correspondence. The regenerative discipline seeks a change in the inward source of action.

11. R.N. Iyer — “Gods, Monads and Atoms”, Theosophy Trust.

“. . . all atoms have an indwelling essence which is unmodified and unconditioned, which partakes of the limitless light of the one source ...”

Meditation thought: The atom’s indwelling essence points beyond its changing appearance to the common source of life. Contemplate the unity that sustains distinct beings.

12. H. P. Blavatsky — *The Secret Doctrine*, Vol. I, p. 261.

“Each particle — whether you call it organic or inorganic — is a life. Every atom and molecule in the Universe is both life-giving and death-giving to that form, inasmuch as it builds by aggregation universes and the ephemeral vehicles ready to receive the transmigrating soul, and as eternally destroys and changes the forms and expels those souls from their temporary abodes.”

Meditation thought: Every particle participates in the living processes that build and dissolve forms. Reverence for life includes an understanding of change and renewal.