

Divine Darkness

Definitional Essay

Theosophy Trust

Divine Darkness names the unmanifest plenitude from which the light, life and intelligence of a universe emerge. In Theosophical teaching, darkness here signifies a reality beyond the distinctions through which ordinary consciousness knows its world. It is neither evil nor mere absence. No particular thing can define it, yet every possibility of manifestation is rooted in it. The expression invites the student to consider how the unseen can be inexhaustibly fertile, and how the limits of perception need not be the limits of reality.

In “Mahat, Manu and the Avatar,” Professor Raghavan Iyer approaches this mystery through the great night of non-manifestation, *Maha Pralaya*. Universal Mind is then described as having no differentiated activity, because the *Ah-Hi*, the spiritual intelligences that contain and reflect Divine Thought, have not emerged into their cosmic functions. What remains is the permanent possibility of mental action, unrestricted by any particular plane. Divine Thought must therefore be understood without imagining a gigantic human thinker privately planning a future world.

The distinction between the Absolute and its manifestations remains essential. *Parabrahman* is beyond attributes, relations and change. The Unmanifested *Logos* belongs to the metaphysical account of the emergence of a cosmos; it must not simply be substituted for the Absolute. Likewise, cosmic latency and activity are periodic, while their ultimate ground is unconditioned. Terms such as night, dawn and awakening help thought approach these relationships, but cannot make timeless reality into an event occurring at an earlier hour on a cosmic clock.

Helena Petrovna Blavatsky begins the Proem of *The Secret Doctrine* with an immaculate disk upon a dark ground, followed by the appearance of a central point. The point signifies the dawn of differentiation. Elsewhere she explains the germ in the Mundane Egg as matter in its abstract sense, refusing to confine that germ to a single location in space. The imagery leads from undivided possibility towards manifestation without suggesting that the boundless has become a small object inside something larger.

Professor Iyer similarly warns against making the awakening of the three *Logoi* into a fixed diagram or temporal sequence. Their emergence is contemplated through the passage from midnight to dawn. *Mahat*, cosmic Mind, is the third *Logos* in this account, the intelligent basis of a manifested universe. Time and space as conditions of that universe belong to its unfolding. The language of radiation and reflection preserves an inward continuity while acknowledging distinctions that a merely mechanical account of creation would obscure.

Divine Darkness thus contains the promise of light without being physical darkness awaiting illumination from outside. In “Kalahansa and Kalachakra,” Iyer pictures the hidden, colourless Light appearing through seven primordial rays, like a rainbow bridge. The many colours express a unity which their distinctions cannot exhaust. *Daiviprakriti*, the Light of the *Logos*, belongs to this metaphysical vision. Its radiance must not be reduced to visible light, just as references to primordial energy do not describe an ordinary electrical current.

The same care applies to consciousness. To say that Universal Mind was unmanifest is not to attribute sleepiness, ignorance or personal unconsciousness to the ultimate ground of being. Human waking and sleeping offer correspondences, but an analogy cannot erase the difference of scale and meaning. The teaching asks us to loosen familiar categories sufficiently to consider a potentiality that precedes the division into knower and known. It does not invite us to pretend that we have enclosed that potentiality in a definition.

This restraint has a direct bearing on meditation. In “Transcendence and Transformation,” Iyer speaks of relinquishing the mind’s habit of finitizing, its tendency to impose limits upon whatever it considers. He distinguishes the Soundless Sound, the unutterable *Logos*, from sound partially expressed and symbolized by the sacred syllable *AUM*. A spoken symbol can orient attention towards its inward source; repetition alone cannot abolish the distinction between the expression and that which it expresses. Reverence deepens when this distinction remains alive.

For the student, the movement of *Manas* towards *Buddhi* involves a corresponding education of attention. Thought learns to serve spiritual discernment instead of continually defending its own constructions. One can begin by noticing how quickly an experience becomes an opinion, and an opinion a possession. A quiet willingness to reconsider is already a loosening of that enclosure. Such work requires alertness and discrimination. An empty interval in ordinary thinking is not, by itself, realization of Divine Darkness or evidence of spiritual attainment.

In “Deity in Action,” the discipline of negation is joined explicitly to the compassion of the spiritual heart. False conceptions of a separate self are relinquished so that a more universal awareness may become operative. This gives contemplation an ethical direction. To withdraw from a possessive idea of oneself should increase sensitivity to other beings. If abstraction leaves one indifferent to suffering, its purpose has been missed. The inward sanctuary is honoured through the quality of life that issues from it.

An ordinary conversation can offer a modest field for this practice. Someone speaks sharply, and we prepare our reply before understanding the hurt beneath the words. If we pause, listen and allow our first judgment to soften, another possibility may appear. This pause is not a miniature cosmic *pralaya*. It is an occasion to practise the openness that the teaching encourages:

refusing to make our present interpretation the measure of another person's whole being. Patience allows an unrecognized good to find expression.

The image of hidden light also gives substance to hope. In "Light, Love and Hope," Iyer relates love to the boundless potential from which manifested life arises. The suggestion is deeper than confidence that circumstances will soon improve. A being's current limitations do not exhaust the spiritual possibilities rooted in the One Life. Such hope can persist through disappointment while remaining attentive to facts. It supports patient effort, repeated self-correction and the encouragement of others, without requiring a flattering picture of ourselves.

Universal Brotherhood follows naturally from this perspective. If beings share an ultimate ground, their differences cannot justify metaphysical isolation or indifference. Unity must become more exact in conduct: a truthful word, a fair judgment, work performed conscientiously, assistance offered without a demand for recognition. These actions neither capture the Infinite nor confer a special spiritual identity upon their doer. They make room for a less possessive use of thought and will, through which the welfare of others can matter more steadily.

Divine Darkness therefore calls for both philosophical precision and humility of heart. Its cosmic meaning concerns unmanifest plenitude and the emergence of differentiated life; its contemplative bearing asks us to release the assumption that reality ends where familiar thinking ends. These meanings illuminate one another without becoming interchangeable. We need not claim an exalted experience to let the teaching improve our attention. The practice can begin wherever an old reaction yields to a clearer perception, or self-concern gives way to useful care.

The darkness of this teaching shelters the possibility of every dawn. To dwell upon it thoughtfully is to learn respect for what has not yet found expression, in Nature, in another human being, and in oneself. That respect should strengthen our willingness to act, even when results are slow or hidden. The student returns from contemplation with a simple task: to bring greater clarity, patience and compassion to the life already entrusted to us.

Glossary

Absolute — The unconditioned reality beyond attributes, relations and limitation; not a separate being within the universe.

Ah-Hi — Spiritual intelligences that contain and reflect Divine Thought and participate in the unfolding of cosmic ideation.

AUM — Sacred syllable symbolizing the expressed Word; distinguished here from the unutterable Soundless Sound.

Buddhi — The spiritual principle associated with intuitive discernment; that towards which *Manas* may consciously turn.

Daiviprakriti — The Light of the *Logos*, the spiritual radiance underlying manifestation; not merely physical light.

Divine Darkness — Unmanifest plenitude beyond differentiated perception; the hidden ground of the light, life and intelligence of a cosmos.

Fons et origo — Latin for source and origin; used in the rainbow passage for the primordial basis of manifested multiplicity.

Gupta Vidya — The secret or esoteric wisdom; also the name of the collection of Professor Iyer's writings cited here.

Hypostasis — An underlying reality or aspect. In the first quotation, the three concern consciousness, duration and space, considered without their ordinary limitations.

Logos; Logoi — The Word or its cosmic expression; *Logoi* is the plural. The three *Logoi* indicate distinct aspects in the emergence of a universe.

Maha Pralaya — The great dissolution or night of non-manifestation; the cosmic latency discussed in relation to the renewal of a solar universe.

Mahat — Cosmic Mind; the third *Logos* in the account followed here, underlying and directing manifested cosmic order.

Manas — The thinking principle in the human being, capable of turning towards spiritual discernment or remaining attached to limited constructions.

Manvantaric — Pertaining to a period of manifested cosmic activity, in contrast to *pralaya* or dissolution.

Monas — Greek term for unity or the One; used by Iyer for the Pythagorean cosmic principle in his discussion of the Unmanifest *Logos*.

Mundane Egg — The World Egg, a symbol of cosmic potentiality and manifestation; mundane here means pertaining to the world.

Narayana — A designation of the Unmanifest *Logos* in the account quoted from "Mahat, Manu and the Avatar."

Noumenon; noumenal — An underlying intelligible reality, distinguished from its phenomenal appearance; noumenal is the corresponding adjective.

One Life — The universal life in which all beings participate, providing a metaphysical basis for solidarity and responsibility.

Parabrahman — The Absolute, beyond all limiting attributes and relations; not interchangeable with a particular *Logos*.

Pralaya — Dissolution or a period of cosmic latency, understood in relation to a corresponding period of manifestation.

Soundless Sound — The unutterable, unmanifested Word; distinguished from any audible utterance or partially expressed symbol.

Svayambhuva Anupadaka — Self-existent and parentless; terms used in the quoted account to characterize the Unmanifest *Logos*.

Universal Mind; Divine Thought — Terms for the universal ground of intelligence and ideation; they must not be reduced to a human thinking process.

Vajrasattva — The Diamond Soul; invoked in “Deity in Action” in connection with the compassion mirrored in the spiritual heart.

Quotes for Meditation and Self Study

1. R.N. Iyer — “Mahat, Manu and the Avatar”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. I, p. 372.

“Though these three *hypostases* of the Absolute are inconceivable to the finite mind, one may rise, through intuitive intimations, towards that ultimate ground of manifestation which is beyond all boundaries, prior to all beginnings and endings. To do so is to penetrate towards the fathomless Night of non-manifestation, the virtually immeasurable *Maha Pralaya* after the dissolution of the entire solar universe. This is the Divine Darkness wherein Universal Mind ‘was not’, because there were no *Ah-Hi* to contain and reflect the infinite Divine Thought.”

Meditation thought: Let the absence of familiar boundaries become an invitation to humility. The passage points towards what finite thought cannot contain; it does not ask us to replace that mystery with an enlarged image of ourselves.

2. R.N. Iyer — “Mahat, Manu and the Avatar”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. I, p. 372.

“Within the fundamental substratum of Universal Mind there is neither differentiated consciousness nor the activity of ideation, there are no universes nor any terms of reference, but only the abstract permanent possibility of mental action uncircumscribed by any plane of existence. From this pure potentiality one must pass through Logoic radiation and reflection from the proemally unmanifest ideation of the Universal Mind to its invisible, though unmanifest, embodied potency – *Mahat*, the cosmic Mind.”

Meditation thought: Consider the difference between an expressed thought and the possibility of thought. The distinction can loosen the assumption that what is presently active or visible exhausts what is real.

3. R.N. Iyer — “Mahat, Manu and the Avatar”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. I, p. 373.

“The dawn of manifestation cannot be thought of in terms of any fixed schema, any multi-dimensional map in space or any series of points of temporal succession; it is something that can only be sensed in deep meditation. The awakening of the three *Logoi* is coeval with the analogical seventh eternity of *Maha Pralaya*, and it is only with the completion of this process that manvantaric time and space, under the aegis of *Mahat*, may be said to exist.”

Meditation thought: Allow the image of dawn to remain supple. It offers a way of contemplating emergence without turning the *Logoi* into objects arranged upon a timetable that already presupposes a manifested universe.

4. R.N. Iyer — “Mahat, Manu and the Avatar”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. I, p. 373.

“*Narayana* is the Unmanifest *Logos*, which, like the Pythagorean cosmic *Monas*, radiates only to retire into the Divine Darkness. It is the Three-in-One which gives rise to the primordial seven *Logoi*, the highest *Ah-Hi*. It is the self-existent and parentless – *Svayambhuva Anupadaka*; it partakes of no differentiation in space or time, but belongs entirely to the undifferentiated noumenal abstract plane of cause.”

Meditation thought: Attend to the distinctions within unity. The Unmanifest *Logos* belongs to the account of cosmic emergence, while the Absolute cannot be confined within that account as one more differentiated principle.

5. R.N. Iyer — “Deity in Action”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. I, p. 33.

“This can be countered by a vigorous dialectic of continual negation, such as that taught by Nagarjuna. It ever demands the voiding of all false conceptions, entities and selves, coupled with the ready willingness to enter the Supreme Void, the Divine Darkness, wherein is hidden the ineffable light that is nameless and formless, signless and shadowless. That light of the *Logos*, *Daiviprakriti*, is best worshipped in the silence of the secret sanctuary of the spiritual heart, which mirrors the compassion of the *vajrasattva*, the Diamond Soul.”

Meditation thought: Read “This” in the light of Iyer’s preceding criticism of separative selfhood. Negation clears false conceptions, while compassion gives the practice its direction. Let inward quiet make another being’s needs easier to hear.

6. R.N. Iyer — “Cognition, Breath and Speech”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. I, p. 74.

“In the compelling mystical dialogue between Pymander and Hermes, the personified Thought Divine delivers a magnificent affirmation of the descent of the fiery power of Universal Thought from the Divine Darkness to give light and life to an intelligent and intelligible cosmos. The Divine Pymander speaks as the Dragon of light, fire and flame – the resplendent Word sprung from the primal germ of thought that lies beyond being and non-being alike.”

Meditation thought: Contemplate an intelligent cosmos whose visible forms express a deeper order. The image of the Word invites reverence for thought and speech, including the small contributions we make to the shared atmosphere of life.

7. R.N. Iyer — “Light, Love and Hope”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. I, p. 402.

“The metaphysical mantram ‘Light is Life and both are electricity’ intimates a profound insight that is realized only at the highest levels of meditation. Empty the mind of all objects and subjects, all contrasts and contours, in a world of names and forms and colours, and one can plunge into absolute Divine Darkness. Once in this realm of pure potential, one may apprehend the hidden *noumenon* of matter, that ultimate substance or primordial substratum which is the sum-total of all possible objects of perception by all possible beings.”

Meditation thought: These are metaphysical correspondences, not a description of household electricity or a mechanical meditation technique. Let the passage widen inquiry while preserving discrimination between spiritual symbolism and physical explanation.

8. R.N. Iyer — “Light, Love and Hope”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. I, p. 402.

“In that Divine Darkness, the realm of boundless potential where no one thing exists, love is like the Light that is hidden in the Darkness. That Light is the origin of all that is latent, of all that will ever emerge and persist, all that will depart from form and yet remain as immaculate rays.”

Meditation thought: What changes when another person’s present difficulty is seen alongside the possibility of growth? Hidden light offers a ground for patient encouragement, without requiring us to overlook facts or excuse harmful conduct.

9. R.N. Iyer — “Light, Love and Hope”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. I, p. 402.

“Out of this Divine Darkness – out of this potential Light, latent Life and hidden energy – there is a coming into manifestation. There is a process of radiation and emanation in which myriad sparks fly. There is a coalescence of the initial primordial ray of light-energy and the latent life-currents which releases pulsations, radiations and currents that flow forth in every direction.”

Meditation thought: Follow the movement from latency towards expression. Then consider, by analogy, how a benevolent intention may become a word or deed. Its value grows when the intention finds a useful, concrete form.

10. R.N. Iyer — “Kalahansa and Kalachakra”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. II, p. 397.

“The Ineffable Light hidden in Divine Darkness in boundless space becomes, in the dawn of differentiation, the rainbow bridge which displays the one colourless Light of the Spiritual Sun in its beatific dance with seven veils, suggesting the seven primordial rays in splendid unison as the *fons et origo* of the dazzling and incalculable multiplicity of manifestation.”

Meditation thought: Hold unity and variety together. The colours need not disappear for their common source to be remembered. In human relationships, this can encourage solidarity that respects differences without making them barriers to care.

11. R.N. Iyer — “Transcendence and Transformation”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. III, p. 352.

“It is impossible for the mind to reach the plane of *Mahat* or the universal mind until it is willing to forego its addiction to finitizing tendencies. Put more mystically, one must learn to recognize the fundamental difference between the Soundless Sound, the unutterable unmanifested Sound or *Logos*, and that which is partially uttered or revealed and is sometimes characterized by the sacred syllable *AUM*.”

Meditation thought: Notice a moment when thought insists that its present formulation is final. A willingness to reconsider can honour the distinction between a symbol and its source, preparing the mind for deeper spiritual discernment.

12. H.P. Blavatsky — *The Secret Doctrine*, Vol. I, p. 57.

“The ray of the ‘Ever Darkness’ becomes, as it is emitted, a ray of effulgent light or life, and flashes into the ‘Germ’ — the point in the Mundane Egg, represented by matter in its abstract sense. But the term ‘Point’ must not be understood as applying to any particular point in Space, for a germ exists in the centre of every atom, and these collectively form ‘the Germ;’ or rather, as no atom can be made visible to our physical eye, the collectivity of these (if the term can be applied to something which is boundless and infinite) forms the *noumenon* of eternal and indestructible matter.”

Meditation thought: The germ is not confined to one privileged location. Let this image deepen reverence for the living whole, and let that reverence become attentive care for the particular beings and responsibilities nearest to us.