

Anasakti

Definitional Essay

Theosophy Trust

Anasakti means nonattachment, understood in Professor Iyer's teaching as the freedom that makes selfless action possible. It concerns the inward claim we place upon what we do: the demand that a result secure our importance, reward our virtue, or conform entirely to our wishes. The work itself may require wholehearted attention. What begins to loosen is the possessive insistence that its fruit must belong to us. An open hand can still be a capable hand. It can prepare, support, repair and offer without closing upon everything it touches.

In "Manasadharma," Professor Iyer joins *anasakti* with *yajna*, sacrifice. He presents the capacity for selfless action as inherent in every human being, although often obscured by attachment to name and form. His emphasis is social as well as inward: the exercise of this capacity helps hold human society together. Wherever someone gives patient attention to a task that others depend upon, without making personal recognition its price, an elementary expression of this possibility appears. Its mature spiritual meaning reaches much further, but its direction can already be recognized in ordinary fidelity.

The distinction between action and attachment is essential. A person may appear inactive while continually rehearsing grievances, possible rewards and imagined triumphs. Another may be intensely occupied while remaining relatively free of the need to advertise the self. Outward busyness and inward bondage are therefore different questions. *Anasakti* asks about the centre from which activity proceeds. Is the work organized around the needs of the situation, or around the picture of ourselves we hope to obtain from it? The question is useful because mixed motives can be noticed and gradually clarified.

This clarification does not remove responsibility for consequences. To abandon concern for who might be harmed, whether a promise can be kept, or whether a method is suitable would diminish the intelligence of action. HPB insists in *The Key to Theosophy* that self-sacrifice requires discrimination and justice. The relinquishment concerns our appropriation of the fruit; careful foresight still belongs to our duty. We may plan with precision, seek advice and change an ineffective approach, while acknowledging that the outcome depends upon causes beyond our command. Effort can be complete without claiming omnipotence. Accountability belongs to this freedom: when an action causes harm, the willingness to acknowledge it and make an appropriate repair is part of releasing self-concern. Nonattachment makes correction easier because the personal image has less to defend.

Consider someone preparing a useful piece of work for a community. The task begins with generous intent, yet gradually the mind becomes occupied with whose name will appear first and whether others will acknowledge the labour. Nothing visibly dramatic has happened, but attention has moved away from the work and towards its reflection in the personal image. *Anasakti* becomes practical at that very point. The worker can restore the actual need to the centre, give proper credit to companions, and finish the responsibility carefully. Recognition may come or fail to come; the value of the contribution need not depend upon it.

Professor Iyer connects this freedom with the spiritual will. In his account, a living ideal is more than an agreeable abstraction: it can call forth courage and organize the energies of a life. *Manas*, the thinking principle, becomes a concentrating instrument for the wider sympathies of *Buddhi*, spiritual discernment. The personality is then increasingly employed in the service of something more enduring than its changing satisfactions. This is a Theosophical account of inward transformation, not a claim that repeating a noble phrase automatically purifies motive. An ideal has to become effective in our choices.

Human Solidarity enters here through the very nature of the act. Other people cease to be merely an audience before whom our goodness is displayed. Their actual circumstances, hopes and difficulties become part of what we attend to. A contribution can support another person's independence rather than bind that person to gratitude. We can also receive help without feeling that our worth has been diminished. The recognition of a common spiritual life allows giving and receiving to become forms of participation, each carrying its own responsibilities and opportunities for generosity.

Drawing a Larger Circle of Conception changes the measure of success. A discussion that does not establish our preferred solution may still improve a shared decision. Work handed to another person may continue more fruitfully under that person's care. A thoughtful effort may benefit someone we will never meet. When the circle includes such possibilities, the personal verdict of success or failure becomes less absolute. This does not make disappointment unreal. It gives disappointment a wider setting, so that a wounded expectation need not cancel the willingness to serve or conceal what experience can teach.

Anasakti is closely related to *vairagya*, dispassionate detachment. Professor Iyer explicitly distinguishes genuine detachment from apathy, disgust and passive indifference. The kinship lies in freedom from compulsive attraction and repulsion. The particular emphasis of *anasakti* is especially clear in action: one gives oneself to a worthy undertaking while surrendering its use as a private guarantee of fulfilment. *Asteya*, non-stealing, and *aparigraha*, non-possession, support this discipline by questioning other forms of appropriation. They belong together, but each brings a different aspect of the possessive movement into view.

There is also a subtle attachment to being the one who is unattached. A person may begin to cherish an image of unusual serenity, or silently compare personal sacrifices with those of companions. Then renunciation itself has become another possession. This need not occasion harsh self-judgement. It calls for renewed honesty and perhaps a little inward humour. The mind has found an elegant costume for an old demand. Recognizing the costume makes another choice possible: to return quietly to the work, allow others their dignity, and relinquish the need to supervise our own spiritual reputation.

The discipline matures through repeated occasions rather than a single declaration. One may begin with a modest, definite responsibility and carry it out without extracting an unnecessary reward. Afterwards, reflection can distinguish what was done well from what requires correction. The result becomes instruction instead of a final judgement upon the person. Professor Iyer's account leaves room for mistakes in the acquisition of practical wisdom. Such mistakes do not become desirable, but their lessons can be received without allowing either pride or discouragement to halt the next useful effort.

HPB's *The Voice of the Silence* brings tranquillity and activity into a single image: the body may be active while the soul remains clear like a mountain lake. The significance is inward poise amidst responsibility. A quiet hour and a demanding hour need not belong to unrelated lives. The understanding cultivated in reflection can inform the tone of a difficult conversation, the care taken over an unfinished duty, or the willingness to cooperate when personal preference would separate us. Contemplation acquires substance through what it makes possible in conduct.

Anasakti thus opens a generous relationship with time. We inherit work we did not begin and contribute to purposes we may not see completed. To offer the best available effort without imprisoning it in the demand for personal return is already to participate more freely. The hand remains open because the task belongs to a wider life. It can release what has been given, learn from what has happened, and become available again. In that availability, selfless action acquires its quiet joy, and the welfare of others becomes a more natural concern of the heart.

Glossary

Absolute — Unconditioned reality, beyond the attributes and limitations of manifested existence.

Akasha — The subtle spiritual substance of space in Theosophical teaching; also written *Akasa*.

Akashic — Pertaining to *Akasha*, the subtle spiritual substance of space in the Theosophical account.

Anasakti — Nonattachment, especially freedom from possessive attachment to the fruits of action; associated by Professor Iyer with selfless service.

Aparigraha — Non-possession or non-possessiveness; the restraint of the tendency to acquire and hold for the separate self.

Appropriation — Taking or claiming for oneself; its ethical meaning includes the misuse of another's property, contribution, trust or attention.

Asteya — Non-stealing; refraining from theft and misappropriation, including their subtler forms in thought and feeling.

Atman — The universal spiritual Self in Theosophy; also written *Atma*.

Buddhi — The spiritual soul or vehicle of *Atman* in Theosophy, associated with intuitive discernment and the illumination of mind.

Contemplative — Pertaining to sustained, reflective or meditative attention directed towards meaning and spiritual understanding.

Discernment — The capacity to distinguish accurately; in spiritual contexts, insight into what is true and enduring.

Drawing a Larger Circle of Conception — Widening understanding to include relevant relationships, causes and responsibilities outside an immediate personal view.

Esoteric — Pertaining to an inward or deeper teaching whose understanding requires preparation and enquiry.

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

Human Solidarity — Recognition of shared human dignity and interdependence, made active through thoughtful responsibility and care.

Manas — The thinking principle in Theosophy; mind capable of orientation towards desire or towards spiritual discernment.

Nirvana — Spiritual emancipation or liberation; its precise philosophical meaning depends upon the tradition and context.

Personality — The temporary personal constitution, roles and memories of an embodied life, distinguished in Theosophy from spiritual individuality.

Probity — Integrity and moral uprightness.

Spiritual will — The power of self-conscious direction towards a worthy spiritual ideal, distinguished from merely personal insistence.

Upanishadic — Pertaining to the Upanishads, Indian sacred texts concerned with spiritual reality and Self-knowledge.

Vairagya — Dispassionate detachment; clear freedom from compulsive attraction and aversion, accompanying persistent practice.

Vesture — A body or instrument through which consciousness is expressed; vestures is the plural.

Yagna — Sacrifice or offering; also written *yajna*, associated here with selfless service and nonviolent cooperation.

Quotes for Meditation and Self Study

1. R.N. Iyer, "Manasadharma," *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. I, p. 357.

"The fundamental presupposition of *Gupta Vidya* is that every human being has an innate capacity for selfless action and sacrifice, *anasakti* and *yajna*. Ordinarily, this capacity lies dormant, obscured and unfocussed due to lives of habitual attachment to name and form. Yet, it is the continuous exercise of this capacity that holds together the fabric of human society."

Meditation thought: Selfless action is presented as a human capacity that sustains shared life. Its cultivation begins by recognizing a possibility already implicit in our responsibilities.

2. R.N. Iyer, "Manasadharma," *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. I, p. 357.

"Throughout history heroic men and women committed to the service of the spiritually, morally and materially impoverished learnt how to release the Akashic energies implicit in human solidarity. By becoming fearless and selfless, they called forth the strength of the ideal from all those around them. This fearlessness is the prerogative of the immortal soul. It is the identifying mark of those who have merged their being with an ideal, thus gaining the strength that belongs to the ideal and blessing all their actions with its elevating influence."

Meditation thought: An ideal becomes effective when it awakens courage and service. The inward release from personal reward can give an ordinary action a wider strength.

3. R.N. Iyer, "Manasadharma," *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. I, p. 358.

"The master key to the release of the spiritual will is the recognition that one's immediate duty is supremely important. To it must be brought all one's energies. Because so many human beings have never really learnt to be whole-hearted or single-minded, they find that they have to act through vestures which are fragmented."

Meditation thought: Wholehearted attention belongs to the duty itself. Releasing attachment does not diminish effort; it allows the available energies to be gathered around what needs doing.

4. R.N. Iyer, "Manasadharma," *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. I, p. 358.

"This all-inclusive resourcefulness in the service of ideals is a characteristic of the *Atman* focussed through Buddhist intuition, sympathy and compassion in the concentrating lens of *Manas*. Once this true basis of ideals is touched, it becomes a potent force in the realm of action, lending immense meaning and richness, dignity and significance, to each and every day and to each responsibility, however modest."

Meditation thought: Spiritual understanding receives a practical test in modest responsibilities. The worth of a task need not depend upon its visibility or its power to enhance reputation.

5. R.N. Iyer, "Manasadharma," *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. I, p. 362.

"Rooted in *anasakti* and *yajna*, ever doing the utmost and the best that one can do, one can use every situation with benevolence and integrity in the service of universal good. Out of one's accumulated experience one may acquire what Gautama Buddha called 'skilful means'. Mistakes are an essential ingredient in gaining the kind of practical wisdom that applies to all the planetary forces. Long before an ordinary human being is ready to engage in this practical training, he must acquire through self-effort the requisite moral qualifications."

Meditation thought: The passage joins nonattachment with benevolence, integrity and learning from mistakes. Experience becomes useful when the wish to serve is stronger than the wish to defend an image.

6. R.N. Iyer, "Gandhian Trusteeship," *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. III, p. 337.

"But when we attain the sacred mental posture of the trustee who regards all possessions as held in trust for the good of all, we can progressively approach the high spiritual state of mental renunciation. We can, in the Upanishadic phrase, 'renounce and enjoy'. It is only when we voluntarily relinquish our unnatural claims and consecrate ourselves to a higher purpose that we can freely enjoy what we have. Thus, self-satisfaction is a natural outcome of a generous perspective and a greater purity of heart. It is truly a function of the harmonious cultivation of our spiritual, mental and material resources. In Gandhian terms, guilt-free enjoyment is inseparable from ethical probity. The real issue, then, is not how much or how little we possess in the way of property or talent, but the reasons and motives behind their allocations and uses."

Meditation thought: Renunciation changes the relation to what is held and enjoyed. Resources can be appreciated more freely when their use is directed by a generous purpose.

7. R.N. Iyer, “*Samadhi Pada*,” *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. III, p. 272.

“*Vairagya* cannot be merely passive disinterest in the content of experience any more than sleep can substitute for wakeful serenity. It is true detachment whilst being fully aware of the relative significance of objects, and this element of self-conscious maintenance of calm detachment is exactly what makes it real *vairagya*.”

Meditation thought: Clear detachment remains awake to the relative significance of things. It supports attentive participation while loosening the compulsion to be governed by every attraction or disappointment.

8. R.N. Iyer, “The Seven Deadly Sins,” *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. I, p. 343.

“This willingness to take an incremental view of moral growth while holding to the exacting universality of truth and nonviolence as twin moral absolutes is the Gandhian key to progressive self-transformation rooted in self-transcendence. In this way, one avoids the Scylla of self-righteousness and the Charybdis of despair. No attainment can exhaust the potentiality of truth and non-violence. Hence, every realized good must point beyond itself. No failing can divest truth and non-violence of their vital relevance to the future. Hence, every misdeed must also point beyond itself. By holding to the possibility of progressive growth, and thereby recognizing the possibility of moral regression, one can avoid the static smugness of those who are too confident of their salvation, as well as the stagnant inertia of those who are too assured of their damnation. Either extreme extinguishes initiative.”

Meditation thought: An exacting ideal can coexist with gradual growth. Neither an achievement nor a failure has to become the final definition of the person who is learning.

9. H.P. Blavatsky, *The Key to Theosophy*, “On Self-Sacrifice,” p. 136.

“We say, however, that self-sacrifice has to be performed with discrimination; and such a self-abandonment, if made without justice, or blindly, regardless of subsequent results, may often prove not only made in vain, but harmful. One of the fundamental rules of Theosophy is, justice to oneself —viewed as a unit of collective humanity, not as a personal self-justice, not more but not less than to others; unless, indeed, by the sacrifice of the one self we can benefit the many.”

Meditation thought: HPB makes discrimination integral to sacrifice. Thoughtful concern for consequences and justice protects nonattachment from being confused with careless abandonment.

10. H.P. Blavatsky, *The Key to Theosophy*, "On Self-Sacrifice," p. 137.

"The first of the Theosophical duties is to do one's duty by all men, and especially by those to whom one's specific responsibilities are due, because one has either voluntarily undertaken them, such as marriage ties, or because one's destiny has allied one to them; I mean those we owe to parents or next of kin."

Meditation thought: Specific obligations remain part of spiritual responsibility. A universal aspiration acquires credibility through faithful care for those whose lives are especially connected with ours.

11. H.P. Blavatsky, *The Key to Theosophy*, "On Self-Sacrifice," p. 138.

"Our duty is to sow seeds broadcast for the future, and see they are good; not to stop to enquire why we should do so, and how and wherefore we are obliged to lose our time, since those who will reap the harvest in days to come will never be ourselves."

Meditation thought: Work may bear fruit beyond the span of personal recognition. The quality of the seed matters even when another generation receives the harvest.

12. H.P. Blavatsky, *The Voice of the Silence*, Fragment II, p. 24.

"Shalt thou abstain from action? Not so shall gain thy soul her freedom. To reach Nirvana one must reach Self-Knowledge, and Self-Knowledge is of loving deeds the child. Have patience, Candidate, as one who fears no failure, courts no success. Fix thy Soul's gaze upon the star whose ray thou art, the flaming star that shines within the lightless depths of ever-being, the boundless fields of the Unknown."

Meditation thought: Patience and loving action are held together. Freedom from courting success leaves the heart available for the next useful deed, without demanding that service become a private reward.