

Brotherhood of Bodhisattvas

Definitional Essay

Theosophy Trust

The Brotherhood of Bodhisattvas, in Professor Iyer's Theosophical teaching, is the fellowship of awakened beings who preserve spiritual wisdom and work for the welfare of humanity. Bodhisattva names a being whose awakening is inseparable from compassion; Brotherhood emphasizes a shared responsibility sustained across generations and civilizations. The phrase concerns the custodianship of wisdom and the possibility of help under law. It should direct aspiration toward universal service rather than curiosity about membership in a hidden order.

Professor Iyer places this fellowship within the larger pilgrimage of consciousness. In "The Life-Giving Stream," he relates the Brotherhood to exalted states of cognition and describes its members as beings who function on unseen planes of ideation. His account includes sanctuaries, but he immediately distinguishes approach to the Brotherhood from physical nearness. A journey on a map cannot establish the inward relation he is discussing. Universality of spirit, freedom from sectarian fixation and devotion to human welfare are the qualities he emphasizes.

This is a teaching about spiritually realized beings, not merely a poetic way of saying that good ideas endure. At the same time, fidelity to its meaning requires distinguishing the doctrine from a personal claim to special access. Nothing in the term grants a student authority over another person's conscience. Reverence for the sages should make us more careful in speech and more willing to examine our motives. Claims of privilege can divert attention from the very qualities through which the source describes approach.

The Bodhisattvic character of the fellowship is decisive. In *The Voice of the Silence*, the Buddhas of Compassion renounce a final consummation in order to remain helpful to humanity, as karma permits. Knowledge reaches its deepest ethical significance in this willingness to serve. The Brotherhood is therefore understood through a union of wisdom and compassion. Its members' work cannot be reduced to emotional rescue, arbitrary intervention or the fulfilment of the personal wishes of those who admire them.

Professor Iyer's "Creative Emanation" makes the relation to law explicit. The wise work with Nature through knowledge of forces that ordinarily escape our understanding. Their selfless responsibility does not cancel another being's freedom. This distinction protects both aspiration and judgment. If we imagine help as an exemption from consequences, we become less responsible. If we understand it as support for awakening and intelligent effort, gratitude can make us more capable of meeting what our own actions require.

The governing image is a living custodianship. A keeper of precious records protects more than the physical pages. Meanings must be understood, remembered and made available when they can serve. In “Order in Chaos,” Professor Iyer describes the Brotherhood as preserving what is essential in the human inheritance. The work concerns wisdom made living through consciousness. A library can hold words while their significance is neglected; a true custodian preserves the capacity to understand and use what those words transmit.

There is an accessible counterpart in human life. Imagine someone teaching a younger generation a difficult skill that might otherwise be lost. The teacher remembers methods, corrects inaccuracies and explains why details matter. Faithfulness does not require contempt for the learner’s questions. It requires sufficient understanding to distinguish a useful adaptation from a change that destroys the practice. Patience and precision belong together because the purpose is that another person should become capable of carrying the knowledge onward.

In this example, the teacher may have to give up being indispensable. Successful instruction produces someone who can work independently and perhaps discover improvements the teacher did not foresee. That can expose a subtle possessiveness. Does one love the work, or the position of being its only competent representative? The Brotherhood ideal directs this question toward the purpose of knowledge. What is entrusted to us should become more available to life, even when our own importance diminishes.

Drawing a Larger Circle of Conception extends custodianship beyond a single school or culture. Professor Iyer invites the individual to recover a share in humanity’s commonwealth through the best of its religions, arts, languages and learning. Such study calls for discrimination. A larger circle does not make every assertion equally true; it asks us to understand a contribution before dismissing it because its language is unfamiliar. The student can become both more exact about differences and more generous toward the sources from which understanding may come.

Human Solidarity follows from this wider responsibility. The wisdom preserved is for the human family, not a possession of a favoured race, nation or circle of admirers. We can begin by making our own learning less exclusionary: explaining without condescension, acknowledging what others have contributed, and refusing to use spiritual vocabulary as a test of social belonging. A fellowship devoted to universal good is poorly honoured by habits that turn newcomers into outsiders before they have had a chance to inquire.

The teaching also gives companionship without relieving us of effort. Professor Iyer describes the powers of thought, learning and meditation as spiritual possibilities of the human being. Help from wiser beings does not replace their development. We must still study, notice a recurring error, keep a useful promise and repair the harm of a careless word. An inward sense

that wisdom is preserved somewhere can steady such work, but it should never become a reason to postpone the task we can already see.

Nor should uncertainty about unseen realities make the ethical meaning inaccessible. A reader can understand what this doctrine asks of knowledge and motive without pretending to have verified an occult relationship. The practical questions remain searching. Does admiration for wisdom make us more teachable? Does belief in compassion make our own conduct more considerate? Are we becoming freer from the need to be exceptional? These questions test the use we make of the teaching, rather than claiming to test the existence of the sages themselves.

Preserving a teaching also includes preserving accurate attribution. A memorable interpretation should not be placed in an author's mouth merely because it seems faithful to the general idea. Words have histories and contexts, and a careful student protects them. This may appear a small duty beside the doctrine of a spiritual Brotherhood, but it belongs directly to custodianship. Truth is better served by an honest distinction between quotation and commentary than by a beautiful sentence carrying an authority it has not earned.

The possibility of repeated failure belongs within that inquiry. A student may sincerely wish to serve and still become jealous, impatient or discouraged. The appropriate response is to recognize the lapse and return to the work with greater honesty. A tradition concerned with the pilgrimage of humanity gives effort a long horizon. Patient continuity can accomplish what a burst of enthusiasm cannot, especially when the task is the education of motive and the preservation of trust.

The Brotherhood of Bodhisattvas thus invites reverence expressed as responsibility. Its living custodianship joins deep knowledge to an enduring concern for beings. We approach its meaning when we protect truth without becoming harsh, share understanding without seeking dependence, and leave something useful for those who come after us. The hidden fellowship need not become a subject of personal display. It can remain a quiet encouragement to make the portion of human inheritance entrusted to our care clearer, kinder and more available.

Glossary

Abnegation — Relinquishment or renunciation; used in the quotation for giving up exclusively personal criteria of achievement.

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

Adventitious — External or incidental; the quoted passage distinguishes such aids from inward guidance.

Alaya — The universal soul or ground; in the quoted passage, associated with eternal harmony.

Arhat — A being who has attained an advanced stage of spiritual realization; *Arhats* is the plural. Blavatsky uses the term in her explanation of the compassionate vestures.

Attribute — A quality assigned to something; in these essays, any predicate that would limit the Absolute if applied literally.

Bhagavad Gita — The Song of the Lord; the dialogue of *Krishna* and *Arjuna*, central to the teachings of action, knowledge, and devotion.

Bodhisattva — A being on the path of awakening and compassion. The sources distinguish human, metaphysical and hierarchical uses of the term.

Brotherhood of Bodhisattvas — In Professor Iyer's Theosophical teaching, the fellowship of awakened beings devoted to preserving wisdom and helping humanity.

Buddha — An awakened one; the title refers here particularly to Gautama and, more broadly, to perfected spiritual wisdom.

Cognition — The act or power of knowing; a cognizer or cogniser is one who knows.

Consummation — Completion or fulfillment; here, the culmination of spiritual development.

Custodianship — The responsibility of preserving something entrusted to one's care and making its value available to others.

Dharmakaya — The Truth-Body; in Blavatsky's cited account, formless realization beyond attributes and earthly relations.

Dhyani Buddha — A contemplative or celestial Buddha in Theosophical cosmology; the expression has a metaphysical rather than ordinary personal meaning.

Drawing a Larger Circle of Conception — Widening the frame of understanding to include more relations, perspectives, and responsibilities.

Ego — A center of self-reference; personal appropriation is distinguished from the higher or spiritual Ego in the cited passages.

Emanation — An expression or unfolding from a source, used in the metaphysical accounts of life and consciousness.

Good Law — The law or path of righteousness in *The Voice of the Silence*, toward which the compassionate beings are said to guide humanity.

Human Solidarity — Shared human dignity and interdependence, expressed through considerate responsibility for others.

Ideation — The activity or formative power of thought; in the sources, also the spiritual patterns underlying manifestation.

Initiation — A deepening of spiritual knowledge and corresponding capacities, distinguished from an outward ceremony alone.

Karma — Action and the law of causation through which intentions and deeds have consequences.

Kriyashakti — The power of creative thought and will; the quoted Theosophical account relates it to exalted acts of spiritual generation.

Kwan Yin — The figure of compassion called the Mother of Mercy and Knowledge; also the Divine Voice in the Theosophical symbolism discussed here.

Mahatma — Great Soul; in this Theosophical usage, an Adept of the highest order, joining spiritual mastery to moral elevation.

Manushi Buddha — A human or terrestrial Buddha, distinguished in the sources from a celestial *Dhyani Buddha*.

Motive — The inward purpose of an act, distinct from its outward appearance or the praise it receives.

Nirmanakaya — A transformed vesture; in Blavatsky's esoteric account, the condition retained by an Adept who remains available to help humanity after renouncing final nirvanic fruition.

Nirvana — Spiritual liberation; the quoted teaching considers its relation to *samsara* and the continuing practice of compassion.

Plane — A level or mode of being or consciousness; not necessarily a location in physical space.

Primordial — Belonging to the earliest or underlying level of manifestation in the metaphysical account.

Samadhi — Meditative absorption; a discipline with gradations culminating in spiritual cognition.

Sectarian — Confined by exclusive allegiance to one group or school; sectarianism is the related noun.

Self-Governed Sage — A spiritually disciplined wise being; the quotation distinguishes inward essence from external appearances.

Self-luminous — Shining or knowing through its own light; Professor Iyer applies the expression to the spiritual beings described in "The Life-Giving Stream".

Shantideva — The Buddhist teacher named in Professor Iyer's discussion of bodhisattva ordination and the universal pledge.

Third Root Race — A stage of humanity in Theosophical cosmology; a doctrinal category in the quoted account, not a modern ethnic classification.

Quotes for Meditation and Self Study

1. R.N. Iyer, "The Life-Giving Stream", *The Gupta Vidya*, Volume II, p. 29.

"If *samadhi* and nirvana are exalted states of consciousness, evidently the Brotherhood of Bodhisattvas, the Society of Sages, the Lodge of *Mahatmas* continuously resides on this cosmic plane of supreme cognition. These self-luminous beings are everywhere and nowhere, with three main sanctuaries on this globe: one beyond the Himalayas, which has existed from the most ancient times; another in the Near East, which also goes back far beyond recorded history; and the third in South America. Yet, while there are these secret centres of initiation, access to the Brotherhood has nothing to do with physical nearness or distance. *Mahatmas* are essentially beings who ceaselessly function on unseen planes of ideation mirroring universal states of consciousness. Any individual anywhere who is universal in spirit, unsectarian in attitude, free from fixation upon place or time, who is truly devoted to universal good and human welfare, may come into the radius of influence of the Brotherhood of Bodhisattvas and their accredited agents in the world."

Meditation thought: The source locates approach in universality of spirit. Consider the motives that make learning possible rather than imagining physical proximity as a substitute for inward preparation.

2. R.N. Iyer, "The Life-Giving Stream", *The Gupta Vidya*, Volume II, p. 30.

"Owing to the fall of all religions through false claims and creedal dogmas, true seekers everywhere today are longing to find the pristine source of Divine Wisdom, pure and unsullied. Naturally, even among such earnest seekers there is the ever-present danger of materialization. This can be minimized through close attention to the critical distinction made in the *Bhagavad Gita* between the external attributes and the immaterial essence of the Self-Governed Sage. Those who have eyes will always be able to see and will also be able to know how to come closer to the Trans-Himalayan Brotherhood, which is not to be found by external means. It has monasteries and schools and systems of initiation in secret sanctuaries which cannot be readily discovered by travel and exploration. Even the individual seeker who is able, by undertaking a pilgrimage, to come closer to the Brotherhood, is led on by the intuition of the heart, by inner guidance, and not by maps or any adventitious aids."

Meditation thought: An inward relation is distinguished from travel and discovery. Reverence becomes useful when it strengthens sincerity and discrimination in the life already before us.

3. R.N. Iyer, "Creative Emanation", *The Gupta Vidya*, Volume I, p. 184.

"It is no different in regard to the far more awesome powers of invisible Nature which operate under laws that are extraordinarily difficult to grasp, but which are known and mastered by wise beings who belong to the Brotherhood of Bodhisattvas. For them there are no miracles: there is only Law. Through self-conscious thought, will and imagination, they fuse wisdom and compassion in focussing universal, selfless desires. Their love streams forth abundantly in every direction to every being alive. They are effortlessly capable of handling the vastitude of creative possibilities of the cosmos. They always work with Nature and never against it because they have gained complete mastery over the creative will as well as the massive burden of cosmic responsibility."

Meditation thought: Compassionate power works with law. Help is more responsible when it respects consequences and another person's agency rather than promising an exemption from learning.

4. R.N. Iyer, "Order in Chaos", *The Gupta Vidya*, Volume I, p. 189.

"The Brotherhood of Bodhisattvas does this constantly. They are the guardians of records of all that is quintessential to the human family over millions of years. They are the preservers of primordial truths."

Meditation thought: Custodianship preserves meanings through living understanding. Accuracy in a small act of teaching belongs to the same ethical direction as reverence for a great inheritance.

5. R.N. Iyer, "The Dawning of Wisdom", *The Gupta Vidya*, Volume II, p. 59.

"The Theosophical Movement, under the guidance of the Brotherhood of Bodhisattvas, offers every human being the golden opportunity to develop the devotional heart and to engage in the meditation of the abstract mind that is capable of lighting the fire of self-consciousness. The Bodhisattvas ceaselessly sacrifice so that every soul may make the effort to come out of the cold gloom of sick egotistic fear for its own salvation, become free from obsession with the shadow caused by self-hatred, and enter the light of the Spiritual Sun."

Meditation thought: The opportunity to awaken is offered to every human being. Let gratitude for teaching reduce exclusion and encourage the patient sharing of what can be understood.

6. R.N. Iyer, "The Pledge of Kwan Yin", *The Gupta Vidya*, Volume II, pp. 162–163.

"To be able to take one's place in the glorious company of Bodhisattvas is not to assume that one can, purely on one's own, fulfil this exalted aim. But once one has truly affirmed it, no other aim has any comparable significance. This recognition would be critical to a timely taking of the mighty vow of the Buddha, the sacred pledge of Kwan Yin, the Bodhisattva ordination of Shantideva. Timeliness in this sense would mean that one simply cannot imagine an alternative."

Meditation thought: A universal vow changes the measure of importance. It asks that personal success be considered within the wider welfare to which the commitment is directed.

7. R.N. Iyer, "The Pledge of Kwan Yin", *The Gupta Vidya*, Volume II, p. 163.

"It is the immemorial teaching that the pristine seed of enlightenment, however small, may germinate far in the future into a flowering tree of wisdom, a mighty trunk of enlightenment. Inherent to the pure seed is a potency that represents the complete disavowal of considerations of success and failure for oneself, separate from the whole world. There is a fundamental abnegation of all the earthly criteria of happiness, power and achievement. For the immortal soul, the pledge could never be premature."

Meditation thought: The seed carries a long horizon of growth. An honest effort need not be dismissed because its fruits cannot yet be seen or claimed.

8. R.N. Iyer, "The Eye of Shiva", *The Gupta Vidya*, Volume III, p. 209.

"Through an enlarged conception of the spiritual birthright of reincarnating egos, it can be shown that the plentiful exercise of the sovereign powers of thought, learning and meditation are secured for every human being by the moral order of the cosmos. Whilst they may be ignorantly denied or discouraged in corrupt societies, they are fully encouraged and actively fostered by the Brotherhood of Bodhisattvas. There is nothing in the constitution of human nature to prevent a person from meditating at any time, nor need one travel to or live in any cloistered shelter to exercise freely these prerogatives."

Meditation thought: Thought and meditation are treated as human possibilities. Honour that dignity by encouraging inquiry without making access to learning depend upon status or belonging.

9. R.N. Iyer, "The Verbum", *The Gupta Vidya*, Volume III, p. 192.

"In these worlds there are those who, by self-conscious awareness of what is seminal, can receive the reverberation of the keynote and become capable of benefiting by its translation into uses that may be exemplary and helpful to other beings. There would be no survival for the human race over eighteen million years but for the continuous compassion of the Brotherhood of Bodhisattvas."

Meditation thought: Professor Iyer places human continuity within a field of compassion. Read the claim in its doctrinal setting and consider the responsibility that such assistance would deepen.

10. R.N. Iyer, "Kriyashakti", *The Gupta Vidya*, Volume III, p. 203.

"The gestation and emanation of a new nucleus of *Mahatmas* and Adepts set apart for the coming races of humanity arose out of the original meditation of the highest divine beings in the Third Root Race. This is *Kriyashakti* in its most exalted sense. It is intimately connected with the mysteries of initiation, whereby a Bodhisattva can, out of the light of the *Dhyani Buddha* which is within himself, project a *Manushi Buddha* and a *Nirmanakaya*. It is also possible, through *Kriyashakti*, to project a certain type of human being which becomes a model and a redemptive saviour for races to come."

Meditation thought: The passage concerns an exalted account of spiritual generation. Its scale calls for reverent study rather than an imaginative claim to possess the powers described.

11. H.P. Blavatsky, "The Seven Portals", *The Voice of the Silence*, p. 52.

"Compassion is no attribute. It is the LAW of LAWS — eternal Harmony, *Alaya's SELF*; a shoreless universal essence, the light of everlasting Right, and fitness of all things, the law of love eternal. The more thou dost become at one with it, thy being melted in its BEING, the more thy Soul unites with that which IS, the more thou wilt become COMPASSION ABSOLUTE."

Meditation thought: Compassion is presented as universal law. A wider conception of harmony asks how one's own thoughts and actions may cease to obstruct the welfare of others.

12. H.P. Blavatsky, "The Seven Portals", explanatory note, *The Voice of the Silence*, p. 53.

"This same popular reverence calls "Buddhas of Compassion" those Bodhisattvas who, having reached the rank of an *Arhat* (i.e., having completed the fourth or seventh Path), refuse to pass into the Nirvanic state or "don the *Dharmakaya* robe and cross to the other shore," as it would then become beyond their power to assist men even so little as Karma permits. They prefer to remain invisibly (in Spirit, so to speak) in the world, and contribute toward man's salvation by influencing them to follow the Good Law, i.e., lead them on the Path of Righteousness."

Meditation thought: The helping beings remain as karma permits. This qualification preserves the learner's responsibility and keeps admiration for unseen help from becoming a wish to evade consequences.