

Devachan

Definitional Essay

Theosophy Trust

Devachan is the Theosophical name for a state of spiritual rest and fulfilment between successive earthly lives. It concerns the enduring human Ego after its separation from the lower principles associated with the life just ended. The teaching describes a subjective condition in which noble affections and aspirations find an ideal completion. Its meaning belongs within the larger doctrine of reincarnation: the soul withdraws from embodied experience, assimilates its spiritual fruit, and eventually returns to the continuing work of human evolution.

H.P. Blavatsky's *The Theosophical Glossary* calls *Devachan* the dwelling of the gods, while defining it as an intermediate state rather than a geographical place. The distinction is essential. A place suggests shared surroundings that can be inspected from outside; a state concerns the manner in which consciousness experiences its world. The imagery of heaven helps convey happiness and release from suffering, but it should not turn the teaching into a description of another material country populated by unchanged earthly personalities.

In *The Key to Theosophy*, Blavatsky relates the experience to the best qualities of the personality that has passed away. Love, mercy and aspiration toward the good, true and beautiful cling to the enduring Ego. During the Devachanic interval, that Ego becomes an ideal reflection of its recent human life. The state is therefore shaped by what has been cultivated. Its spiritual fulfilment has continuity with earthly experience, even though the limitations and sorrows of that experience no longer govern consciousness there.

This helps explain the teaching's use of dream language. A dream can be inwardly convincing without corresponding to events in a shared physical environment. *Devachan* is described as a happy and idealized continuation of the soul's aspirations, yet its significance is deeper than the dismissal implied by calling something merely imaginary. The affection is spiritually meaningful, and the assimilation belongs to the soul's development. At the same time, the state remains conditioned and subjective; it is not presented as unrestricted knowledge of reality.

Blavatsky explicitly distinguishes *Devachan* from omniscience. The Ego is, for the interval, related to the memory and noble aspirations of its latest incarnation. A love of music, poetry or other ideal pursuits can unfold within that subjective continuity. This does not mean that the departed person acquires every fact or observes everything occurring on earth. The teaching of release from sorrow would be contradicted by imagining an uninterrupted surveillance of the pain and difficulties of those left behind.

The question touches grief and therefore asks for gentleness. The doctrine can offer a contemplative image of a loved one released from suffering, but it should not be used to dictate how another person must mourn. Loss has its own immediate human needs: companionship, practical help, remembrance and time. A metaphysical explanation becomes more humane when it supports those needs. We can hold a spiritual hope while making room for the sorrow and uncertainty that a bereaved person actually experiences.

Love, in this account, belongs to a deeper continuity than physical proximity. That does not require treating every impression of a departed person as a message or a verified encounter. *The Key to Theosophy* makes careful distinctions about post-mortem consciousness and spiritual communication. *Devachan* itself is a state of absorption in ideal fulfilment. The value of a cherished bond can be honoured through memory and conduct without turning the bond into a claim that the deceased must remain available to our requests.

Professor Iyer gives the subject a wider horizon in “Shiva and Self-Regeneration.” He invites the mind to include all human souls, embodied and disembodied, rather than restricting humanity to those presently visible. The exercise enlarges our conception of a common pilgrimage. *Devachan* belongs within that circulation of lives, whose durations and conditions vary. The sources speak in terms of long intervals, but their figures are not a schedule by which a student can calculate the next incarnation of a particular person.

Human Solidarity consequently reaches beyond the boundaries of the present generation. Those who have died, those now living and those yet to be born belong within a larger field of responsibility and learning. A useful inheritance can be preserved for people we shall never meet. An act of care can honour a departed life without attempting to recover its presence. The teaching gives a spiritual setting to these connections, while their immediate ethical force can be recognized in the ordinary work of remembrance and stewardship.

Drawing a Larger Circle of Conception may begin with a family sorting the possessions of someone who has died. Alongside personal keepsakes are tools, books and unfinished acts of generosity. The question of what to preserve can include what others might use and what intention can be carried forward. There is room for affection as well as practical judgment. The example does not reveal the departed soul's state; it shows how a wider view can help grief find an expression in responsible care.

Devachan also changes the way we consider unrealized aspirations. A life may contain a sincere love of beauty, knowledge or service whose outward fulfilment was limited by circumstance. Professor Iyer's “The Aquarian Tide” describes dreams of goodwill and creativity being elaborated after death, with effects upon the causal body and future lives. The doctrine gives

those aspirations a longer significance. It does not make present action unnecessary. What we genuinely value can be nourished now through the effort and attention available to us.

The relation between aspiration and conduct deserves honesty. Imagining a generous life is easier than making a difficult promise dependable. Yet imagination can help guide effort when it remains connected to responsibility. A person unable to undertake a large project may still study, encourage another worker, or complete a modest part. Such contributions give the ideal a living root. The future is approached through what is cultivated in the present, including the willingness to accept limitations without making them the measure of all possibility.

Devachan must also be distinguished from nirvana and from the ideal of conscious spiritual liberation. In Professor Iyer's "The Three Fires," the temporary absence of the lower, self-centered mind permits higher powers of perception to become active. This is meaningful, but it differs from deliberately transforming consciousness while awake and embodied. The distinction preserves the depth of spiritual training. Rest can be restorative without being final attainment, and a beautiful interval can belong within a pilgrimage that still calls for learning and renewed service.

Meditation offers a modest preparation through attention to what we feed in thought. Professor Iyer emphasizes the authenticity of an attempt more than its duration. A brief, sincere contemplation of goodwill can be followed by an action that gives the intention substance. We need not claim access to after-death states to examine the quality of present consciousness. The work begins where we can learn: in the care of an affection, the patient development of a faculty, and the correction of a selfish motive.

Devachan thus presents rest as part of an enduring spiritual education. Its promise concerns the fulfilment and assimilation of what was noblest in a life, held within the larger rhythm of return. The teaching asks for discrimination about its meaning and tenderness in its human application. We can contemplate a continuity beyond death while becoming more faithful to the living. What love leaves unfinished may still guide our hands toward a useful act, and what the soul aspires to become can begin to shape the day.

Glossary

Absolute — Unconditioned Reality, beyond the distinctions and limitations of manifestation.

Architectonics — The ordered structure and relations of a system; in the quotation, the developing structure of thought concerning an ideal.

Atma-Buddhi-Manas — The higher human triad: universal Spirit, spiritual soul and the enduring self-conscious thinker.

Causal body — The enduring spiritual vehicle considered in relation to *Buddhi* and higher *Manas*; the term has different technical uses in different systems.

Devachan — The subjective state of spiritual rest and ideal fulfilment between earthly lives. Devachanic means pertaining to it; a *Devachanee* is a being experiencing that state.

Efflorescence — A flowering or unfolding; used of the noblest qualities gathered from a human life.

Ego — The enduring self-conscious thinker in the higher Theosophical usage; distinguish this from egoism, preoccupation with a separate personal self.

Human Solidarity — The common dignity and interdependence of human beings, expressed through responsibility for one another's welfare.

Incarnation — The embodiment of an enduring principle or individuality in a particular life.

Kama — Desire; the principle associated with attraction, appetite and personal craving.

Kama Rupa — The desire-form associated with the lower personal principles and the post-mortem separation described in the teaching.

Kamaloka — The post-mortem sphere or state connected with the lower personal principles, distinguished from *Devachan*.

Karana Sarira — Causal body; also written *karana sharira*. Blavatsky distinguishes exoteric and esoteric applications; Professor Iyer emphasizes the enduring vesture and ground of soul-memory.

Karma — The continuity of action and consequence; karmic law links responsibility with the wider order of life.

Manas — The self-conscious thinking principle; higher *Manas* is the enduring human thinker, while lower *Manas* is associated with personal desire.

Manifestation — The emergence or expression of differentiated worlds and beings; the manifest is considered in relation to an unmanifest spiritual ground.

Metaphysical — Concerning fundamental principles of reality and being, beyond a description limited to sensory phenomena.

Monad — An enduring spiritual unit; in the human constitution commonly *Atma-Buddhi*, considered through its evolutionary pilgrimage.

Nirvana — Spiritual liberation beyond the limitations of ordinary conditioned consciousness; distinguished from the temporary Devachanic state.

Omniscience — Knowledge of all things; explicitly distinguished in the sources from the conditioned experience of *Devachan*.

Per se — Latin for in itself; used to distinguish a being's intrinsic nature from a particular conditioned expression.

Personality — The temporary identity, memories and instruments associated with one human life.

Post-mortem — After death; used of the states and processes considered between incarnations.

Reincarnation — The return of the enduring human individuality to embodied life for further experience and learning under karma.

Shiva — A divine figure associated with transformation and regeneration; in Professor Iyer's exposition, an image of profound spiritual consciousness.

Subjective — Belonging to a state of consciousness or inward experience; not by itself a claim that the experience lacks spiritual significance.

Transcendental — Exceeding the conditions of ordinary sense experience; the particular meaning depends on the context.

Quotes for Meditation and Self Study

1. H.P. Blavatsky — *The Theosophical Glossary*, p. 102, "Devachan".

"*Devachan* (Sk.). The 'dwelling of the gods'. A state intermediate between two earth-lives, into which the EGO (*Atmâ-Buddhi-Manas*, or the Trinity made One) enters, after its separation from *Kâma Rupa*, and the disintegration of the lower principles on earth."

Meditation thought: Contemplate an interval of spiritual rest within a longer pilgrimage. Rest and renewed responsibility can belong to one continuous education.

2. H.P. Blavatsky — *The Key to Theosophy*, p. 83.

"During every Devachanic period the Ego, omniscient as it is *per se*, clothes itself, so to say, with the reflection of the 'personality' that was. I have just told you that the ideal efflorescence of all the abstract, therefore undying and eternal qualities or attributes, such as love and mercy, the love of the good, the true and the beautiful, that ever spoke in the heart of the living 'personality,' clung after death to the Ego, and therefore followed it to *Devachan*. For the time being, then, the Ego becomes the ideal reflection of the human being it was when last on earth, and that is not omniscient. Were it that, it would never be in the state we call *Devachan* at all."

Meditation thought: Consider how the best qualities of a life may retain their meaning beyond the circumstances that first called them forth.

3. H.P. Blavatsky — *The Key to Theosophy*, pp. 83–84.

“As to the ordinary mortal, his bliss in it is complete. It is an absolute oblivion of all that gave it pain or sorrow in the past incarnation, and even oblivion of the fact that such things as pain or sorrow exist at all. The *Devachanee* lives its intermediate cycle between two incarnations surrounded by everything it had aspired to in vain, and in the companionship of everyone it loved on earth. It has reached the fulfilment of all its soul-yearnings. And thus it lives throughout long centuries an existence of unalloyed happiness, which is the reward for its sufferings in earth-life. In short, it bathes in a sea of uninterrupted felicity spanned only by events of still greater felicity in degree.”

Meditation thought: Let the teaching of fulfilled aspiration soften the urge to measure a departed life only by its unfinished outward tasks.

4. H.P. Blavatsky — *The Key to Theosophy*, p. 88.

“In one sense, we can acquire more knowledge; that is, we can develop further any faculty which we loved and strove after during life, provided it is concerned with abstract and ideal things, such as music, painting, poetry, etc., since *Devachan* is merely an idealized and subjective continuation of earth-life.”

Meditation thought: Give time to a love of beauty or truth that asks for no applause. Such cultivation has value in the life of the soul.

5. H.P. Blavatsky — *The Key to Theosophy*, p. 88.

“Because, as I told you, the Ego is, so to say, wedded to the memory of its last incarnation. Thus, if you think over what I have said, and string all the facts together, you will realize that the Devachanic state is not one of omniscience, but a transcendental continuation of the personal life just terminated. It is the rest of the soul from the toils of life.”

Meditation thought: Distinguish a healing interval from final enlightenment. A wider perspective can honour both the need for rest and the work still to come.

6. R.N. Iyer — “Eros and Kamadeva”, *The Gupta Vidyā*, Vol. I, p. 399.

“He who loves his fellow men lives on earth in a heavenly condition, but as long as his philanthropy and altruism are purely personal, his only reward is a long *devachan*, a prolonged and beautiful dream, an illusory condition that brings the soul no nearer to its true quest, the love of the SELF of all amidst the conditions of earthly life.”

Meditation thought: Consider how an affection can become less anxious and possessive while remaining warm and faithful.

7. R.N. Iyer — “Eros and Kamadeva”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. I, p. 399.

“Finite, personal love is not bad in itself but it is frustrating and useless to the human soul unless it can gradually purify and make more impersonal and unselfish the force of *kama* in its material manifestations through the incarnated personality. Only thus can love be transformed from a violent and divisive tendency in human relationships into a non-violent, unifying power that produces strength and peace.”

Meditation thought: Let one familiar bond teach a kindness that can reach someone outside your immediate circle.

8. R.N. Iyer — “Shiva and Self-Regeneration”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. II, p. 115.

“Genuine training in this direction can begin with the exercise of thinking outward through a series of concentric and expanding circles. It is not easy to expand one's horizon to include all visible human beings on earth today, much less to include all human beings. Yet to understand the heart of humanity, one must enlarge one's vision to encompass all human souls that are disembodied. This includes all those who died in recent centuries, leaving their shells in *kamaloka*, as well as all those who died earlier and who are in various stages of *devachan*, ranging from hundreds to thousands of years in duration, and who wake up at different times and come as babies onto the earthly scene, becoming involved in different parts of the world, in different families, as puzzled strangers. To think consciously of all human souls in this enigmatic way is to bring one's mind closer to the perspective of Shiva, for Shiva sees all humanity at once.”

Meditation thought: Extend your sense of humanity to those who have died and those yet to be born. Let that larger family inform a present responsibility.

9. R.N. Iyer — “The Three Fires”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. III, p. 388.

“It is no wonder that most human beings have some intense experience of higher conscious activity only in deep sleep or in *devachan*. In the latter condition, it is solely the presence of the solar element of *Manas* that makes it a positive state of perception for the disembodied monad. In deep sleep and *devachan*, the involuntary absence of the ego-centred lunar *manas* permits the activation of these higher powers of perception.”

Meditation thought: Reflect on the difference between restless personal thought and the quieter activity of the higher mind.

10. R.N. Iyer — “The Aquarian Tide”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. III, p. 29.

“First of all, one is intensifying through devotion to the ideal the architectonics of one's thought with regard to the ideal. This will be elaborated in *devachan* after death in the celestial condition of dreams of goodwill and creativity which can cut grooves in the *karana sharira*, the causal body, and affect lives to come.”

Meditation thought: Nourish a dream of goodwill through a useful action. The outward step gives sincerity to the inward aspiration.

11. R.N. Iyer — “Withdrawal and Return”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. III, p. 218.

“Transmitting ideals to children and pupils through example and through precept is both beneficent and constructive. Their capacity for credible ideals increases with practice, and, as attention is focussed upon the possibilities of the future, it continues to develop. Naturally, ideals recede as they are approached, but they are nonetheless essential; they provide directions, if not destinations, and propel the individual ever forwards. As long as there are ideals, pointing to the imaginative possibilities of the foreseeable future, one can appreciate the salutary lessons of karma without becoming overburdened by collective memories of failure.”

Meditation thought: Offer another person a credible possibility for the future. A patient example can carry an ideal farther than exhortation.

12. R.N. Iyer — “The Aquarian Tide”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. III, p. 29.

“Again, the length of meaningful meditation is less important than the authenticity of the attempt. The more one can calmly accept the limits of one's abilities, the more those limits will expand. Here as everywhere the greater one's application the greater one's results.”

Meditation thought: Choose an honest interval of reflection suited to your present capacity. Give it care, then let its influence enter the day.