

Dhyani-chohans

Definitional Essay

Theosophy Trust

Dhyani-chohans are the conscious intelligences through which cosmic law is expressed in the Theosophical account of a living universe. The name is associated with the Lords of Meditation, while H.P. Blavatsky's *The Theosophical Glossary* gives *Dhyani Chohans* as the Lords of Light. These related expressions emphasize spiritual intelligence and contemplation. They refer to many orders of being and function, not to a single personality ruling creation. The doctrine asks us to conceive order in Nature as inseparable from consciousness at levels far beyond ordinary perception.

In the Proem to *The Secret Doctrine*, Blavatsky describes a sevenfold hierarchy of conscious divine powers. They guide manifestation and embody what we recognize as laws of Nature. *Dhyani Chohans* is the generic name, while particular groups have their own designations. The distinction between the general name and its applications is necessary from the beginning. A passage about the highest intelligences cannot automatically be applied without qualification to every order included under the same broad terminology.

Professor Iyer makes this point explicit in "Mahat, Manu and the Avatar." Sacred terms can function like symbols in an abstract formula, with their meaning depending upon the level and context of the discussion. *Ah-Hi*, *Dhyani* and *Manu* belong to such a vocabulary. The student is asked to follow analogy and correspondence carefully, holding unity together with differentiation. The purpose is understanding relationships across different planes, rather than assembling an inflexible list whose apparent neatness conceals the complexity of the teaching.

The *Ah-Hi* are described in *The Secret Doctrine* as collective hosts through which universal thought and will become manifest. Blavatsky distinguishes them from personifications of natural forces in the merely figurative sense. Within her account, they are intelligent agencies. This is a metaphysical teaching about Nature, not an identification of invisible beings established by ordinary sensory observation. Its study requires attention to the principles and arguments through which the larger philosophy understands consciousness, substance and the unfolding of worlds.

The language of hierarchy also needs discrimination. Here it concerns differences of function, scope and conscious capacity within an ordered whole. It does not confer social privilege upon human groups or justify unquestioning obedience to a person claiming spiritual authority. Professor Iyer describes each order as having a precise range of action within cosmic law. The

idea of coordination is central. A greater capacity entails a wider responsibility within the whole, while the universal spiritual ground remains beyond every particular office or manifestation.

In his opening exposition of *Gupta Vidya*, Professor Iyer speaks of living streams of intelligences associated with the planes of manifestation. The many religious names include angels, *Devas*, *Dhyani* Buddhas and *Elohim*. Comparison can help disclose a recurring intuition of conscious order. It should also preserve the distinctive meanings of those names within their own settings. Theosophical correspondence does not require pretending that every tradition gives an identical account or that translation removes all important differences.

D.K. Mavalankar, in “Unity and Differentiation,” describes the *Dhyani Chohans* as the immediate artificers of worlds and the aggregate cosmic intelligence. He also places them within cosmic evolution. This qualification prevents the highest manifested intelligence from being confused with the Absolute. However vast the consciousness contemplated, it is still considered in relation to manifestation. The unconditioned ground of reality cannot be reduced to a very powerful being among other beings, magnified beyond human scale but retaining a personal will like our own.

The distinction bears directly upon the idea of law. A conscious cosmos need not imply arbitrary interventions by celestial rulers. Blavatsky's account presents intelligences embodying and transmitting order, while Professor Iyer speaks of cosmic law guiding every atom on every plane. Their framework joins intelligence and regularity. The student should therefore seek relationships and conditions rather than use unseen agencies to explain whatever is puzzling. A metaphysical conception becomes more fruitful when it strengthens inquiry and proportion instead of replacing them with convenient assertions.

The human being has a place within this order as a microcosm. In “Aquarian Civilization,” Professor Iyer describes the orders of life as represented within human nature. Our principles are related to the wider cosmos, and even the capacities that are imperfectly used have a spiritual ancestry. This gives self-study a larger meaning. Thought, desire and action are entrusted powers within a shared life. Their present disorder does not exhaust their possibilities, but their transformation requires conscious responsibility for how they are employed.

Human Solidarity follows from this common participation. No person creates the underlying powers of intelligence, life and awareness by private effort. We learn through capacities and conditions that connect us with others and with Nature. Recognition of a greater whole should consequently increase respect for every contribution that sustains a common undertaking. A quiet worker's accurate observation, a caregiver's patience, or a student's honest question may be essential to work whose visible credit tends to gather around a few names.

Consider the restoration of a damaged watershed. Knowledge of soil, plants, water and the needs of nearby residents must be brought into relation. Each contributor has a scope of competence, and the work suffers when one viewpoint claims to contain the whole. This provides a limited analogy for coordinated functions within a living order. It does not prove the doctrine of cosmic hierarchies. Its practical lesson is that participation requires accurate knowledge of one's task, receptivity to other knowledge, and care for the consequences shared by all.

Drawing a Larger Circle of Conception helps the participants include the seasons ahead and the lives that cannot attend their meetings. The larger view changes what counts as success. A quick visible improvement may need reconsideration if it damages conditions elsewhere. This movement from a whole toward its particulars resembles the direction Professor Iyer commends in the Hermetic method. An expansive conception earns its value by making the treatment of a particular place more intelligent, patient and responsible.

Meditation belongs to the doctrine through a similar movement of attention. The title *Lords of Meditation* suggests ordered ideation, a consciousness centred upon a deeper unity. For the beginner, it offers an ideal of steadiness rather than a claim to companionship with exalted beings. One can contemplate a universal principle, observe the mind's dispersal, and return without agitation. The subsequent quality of work matters: clearer attention should help us notice an error, fulfil a duty, or understand another person's contribution more accurately.

Such practice also disciplines spiritual language. It is easy to speak of vast hierarchies while overlooking the immediate dependence of one's own life upon others. Gratitude restores scale. The sources invite wonder at the interior architecture of Nature, but wonder can remain truthful by acknowledging how much is unknown. We can study a difficult passage without forcing an answer, compare related terms without erasing their context, and keep the ethical purpose of understanding present throughout the inquiry.

Dhyani-chohans finally names a vision of conscious order in which the many serve a unity that exceeds them. The doctrine retains its cosmic depth while asking something exact of the human learner: use the powers entrusted to you with discernment. No grand claim is needed to begin that work. A thought made more accurate, a contribution properly acknowledged, or a responsibility faithfully carried can give an expansive teaching a modest expression. Through such care, contemplation returns to the world as a more intelligent participation in its life.

Glossary

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

Ah-Hi — Primordial hosts of spiritual intelligences through which universal thought is manifested; their application depends upon the plane discussed.

Archetypal — Pertaining to a formative pattern or principle underlying particular expressions.

Army of the Voice — A symbolic name for the hosts through which divine thought is expressed in differentiated manifestation.

Artificer — A maker or shaper; Mavalankar applies the term to intelligences participating in the formation of worlds.

Asuras — Orders of beings within Hindu and Theosophical cosmology; *daityas* and *danavas* are associated classes. Their meaning depends on context and is not exhausted by the word demons.

Atman — Universal Spirit or Self; the spiritual ground common to beings, distinguished from a person's temporary identity.

Avatar — A divine descent or incarnation; in the definition used here, an exalted being's voluntary embodiment beyond the necessity of ordinary rebirth. *Avatâra* is the Sanskrit form.

Brahma — The creative deity in Hindu cosmological symbolism; distinguish *Brahma* from *Brahman*, the universal spiritual Reality.

Correspondence — A meaningful relation between different orders or levels; an instrument of analogy that requires attention to context.

Cosmogony — An account of the origin and unfolding of the cosmos.

Demiurgic Mind — The intelligence shaping manifested worlds; distinguished from the unconditioned Absolute.

Devas — Shining or celestial beings; *devatas* is a related form. Their functions and spiritual levels vary with context.

Dharma — Law, duty or the sustaining order of life; its practical meaning includes the responsibilities appropriate to a situation.

Dhyana Yoga — The discipline of meditation or contemplative absorption.

Dhyani Buddhas — Meditative or celestial Buddhas associated in Theosophy with spiritual prototypes and the higher principles of human nature.

Dhyani-chohans — Orders of spiritual intelligences through which cosmic law is expressed; also written *Dhyan Chohans* or *Dhyan-Chohans*. *Dhyani* and *Dhyanis* are related general forms.

Discernment — The capacity to distinguish what is true, fitting and spiritually significant; Buddhist discernment transcends personal preference.

Elementals — Orders of lives or forces associated with the elements and the formation and activity of Nature.

Elohim — A Hebrew plural designation used in Theosophical comparison for creative or formative intelligences.

Great Chain of Being — The continuous ordering of levels of life and consciousness, linking the highest and lowest through intermediate relations.

Gupta Vidya — Hidden or sacred wisdom; also the title of Professor Iyer's collected Theosophical writings.

Hermes — The divine messenger and teacher in Greek and Hermetic symbolism; Hermes-Mercury joins Greek and Roman names for this figure.

Hermetic method — A method of understanding through unity, analogy and correspondence, proceeding from universal principles toward their particular expressions.

Hierarchy — An ordered series of functions and levels of consciousness; in this teaching, differences of scope within a living whole.

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

Ideation — The formation or activity of thought, considered spiritually as well as psychologically.

Individuality — The enduring spiritual identity distinguished from the temporary personality of a particular life.

Ishvara — The Lord or manifested divine principle; also written *Ishwara*, *Iswara* or *Eswara* in the sources.

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

Kama-Manas — Mind associated with desire; also written *kama manas* in the cited passage.

Kosmos — The universe considered as an ordered whole.

Life-atoms — Lives understood as participating in the constitution and activity of embodied beings, extending the ethical significance of how their vehicles are used.

Logos — The principle of divine expression or ideation; its application varies with the level of manifestation. *Logoi* is the plural, and *Logoi*c means pertaining to it.

Mahat — Cosmic intelligence or cosmic mind, understood in relation to universal ideation.

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.

Manu — A name for a spiritual progenitor or guiding intelligence associated with humanity and cosmic cycles; its scope varies by context.

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

Microcosm — A smaller expression or reflection of the whole; the human being considered in relation to the universal macrocosm.

Noumenal — Pertaining to the underlying spiritual or intelligible reality of an appearance, distinguished from the phenomenal.

Occult — Hidden from ordinary perception; in this context, concerning deeper laws of consciousness and Nature.

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

Pitris — Fathers or progenitors; orders associated with the formation of human vehicles in Theosophical cosmology.

Planes — Levels or orders of consciousness and substance within the Theosophical account of manifestation.

Primordial — Belonging to an original or pre-differentiated condition.

Rta — Cosmic order or law; also written *rta*, the term identifies the law transmitted by the hierarchies in Professor Iyer's passage.

Septenary — Sevenfold; used of the principles and hierarchies in the Theosophical account.

Spiritual Sun — A contemplative image of the universal source of spiritual illumination, distinguished from a physical object inside the body.

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

Vehicle — A principle or medium through which another principle can be expressed; *Buddhi* is the spiritual vehicle of *Atman*.

Verbum — Latin for Word; used of divine expression or the *Logos*.

Wisdom-Religion — The perennial spiritual wisdom presented in Theosophy as the common inheritance underlying diverse traditions.

Yoga — Spiritual discipline directed toward integration and realization; a *yogi* or *yogin* is a practitioner.

Quotes for Meditation and Self Study

1. H.P. Blavatsky — *The Theosophical Glossary*, p. 104, “Dhyan Chohans”.

“*Dhyan Chohans* (Sk). Lit., ‘The Lords of Light’. The highest gods, answering to the Roman Catholic Archangels. The divine Intelligences charged with the supervision of Kosmos.”

Meditation thought: Contemplate intelligence as intrinsic to the order of Nature. Allow wonder to deepen the care with which you attend to the world.

2. H.P. Blavatsky — *The Secret Doctrine*, Vol. I, pp. 21–22.

“Stanza IV. shows the differentiation of the ‘Germ’ of the Universe into the septenary hierarchy of conscious Divine Powers, who are the active manifestations of the One Supreme Energy. They are the framers, shapers, and ultimately the creators of all the manifested Universe, in the only sense in which the name ‘Creator’ is intelligible; they inform and guide it; they are the intelligent Beings who adjust and control evolution, embodying in themselves those manifestations of the one law, which we know as ‘The Laws of Nature.’ Generically, they are known as the *Dhyan Chohans*, though each of the various groups has its own designation in *the Secret Doctrine*.”

Meditation thought: Consider a unity expressed through many distinct functions. Difference can serve a common life without becoming division.

3. H.P. Blavatsky — *The Secret Doctrine*, Vol. I, p. 38.

“The *Ah-hi* (*Dhyan-Chohans*) are the collective hosts of spiritual beings — the Angelic Hosts of Christianity, the *Elohim* and ‘Messengers’ of the Jews — who are the vehicle for the manifestation of the divine or universal thought and will. They are the Intelligent Forces that give to and enact in Nature her ‘laws,’ while themselves acting according to laws imposed upon them in a similar manner by still higher Powers; but they are not ‘the personifications’ of the powers of Nature, as erroneously thought.”

Meditation thought: Reflect on the distinction between conscious cooperation with law and the exercise of arbitrary power.

4. H.P. Blavatsky — *The Secret Doctrine*, Vol. I, p. 38.

“This hierarchy of spiritual Beings, through which the Universal Mind comes into action, is like an army — a ‘Host,’ truly — by means of which the fighting power of a nation manifests itself, and which is composed of army corps, divisions, brigades, regiments, and so forth, each with its separate individuality or life, and its limited freedom of action and limited responsibilities; each contained in a larger individuality, to which its own interests are subservient, and each containing lesser individualities in itself.”

Meditation thought: Use the image of an ordered host to consider coordination and responsibility. Let its scale invite humility about what remains unknown.

5. R.N. Iyer — “The Gupta Vidya”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. I, p. 8.

“The seven planes of manifestation may be seen as condensations of rarefied matter and also as living streams of intelligences – primordial rays proceeding from an invisible Spiritual Sun. All modes of activity in the Universe are internally guided by powers and potencies arrayed in an almost endless series of hierarchies, each with its exact function and precise scope of action. They are called *Dhyani Chohans* in Tibetan cosmogony and bear many other titles in the rich panoply of religious traditions – Angels, *Devas*, *Dhyani* Buddhas, Gods, *Elohim*, etc. All these are transmitting agents of cosmic Law (*rta*) which guides the evolution of each atom on every plane in space, the hierarchies varying enormously in their respective degrees of creative consciousness and monadic intelligence.”

Meditation thought: Look for the relation between a function and its proper scope. A shared task flourishes when each contribution is understood and honoured.

6. R.N. Iyer — “The Gupta Vidya”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. I, p. 8.

“As an aggregate, this immense host of forces forms the manifesting *Verbum* of an unmanifest Presence, constituting simultaneously the active Mind of the cosmos and its immutable Law. The idea of myriad hierarchies of intelligences animating visible Nature is a vital key to understanding all true mysticism. Many flashes of intuitive perception reveal multitudes of radiant beings elaborating the interior architecture of matter. Great mystics show a reverential recognition of the *Logos* or *Verbum*, the Army of the Voice, operating behind the screen of surface events as the noumenal cause of natural phenomena.”

Meditation thought: Attend to an ordinary natural pattern and let it prompt inquiry into the relations that make its appearance possible.

7. D.K. Mavalankar — “Unity and Differentiation”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. I, p. 448.

“The *Dhyani Chohans*, who represent the aggregate cosmic intelligence, are the immediate artificers of the worlds, and are thus identical with *Isvara* or the Demiurgic Mind. But their consciousness and intelligence, pertaining as they do to the sixth and the seventh states of matter, are such as we cannot cognize, so long as we prefer to remain in our isolation and do not transfer our individuality to the sixth and the seventh principles. As artificers of the worlds, they are the primary principle of the Universe, although they are at the same time the result of Cosmic Evolution.”

Meditation thought: Hold spiritual greatness within the wider process of evolution. The highest conceivable intelligence need not be the unconditioned Absolute.

8. D.K. Mavalankar — “Unity and Differentiation”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. I, p. 449.

“In the economy of Nature, everything is right in its place, and to ignore a certain plane is just as illogical as to overestimate it. True knowledge consists in a right sense of discrimination: to be able to perceive what phenomenon performs what function, and how to utilize it for human progress and happiness. Both the objective and subjective standpoints, as much as the inductive and deductive methods, are therefore essential for the attainment of true knowledge which is true power.”

Meditation thought: Ask what a thing does, where its action belongs, and how understanding it can benefit others.

9. R.N. Iyer — “Aquarian Civilization”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. III, p. 37.

“To understand the work of Hermes at a more fundamental level in relation to civilization, one must begin to generate a conception of the cosmic hierarchies in Nature and in Man which unites the spiritual with the physical, and both of these with the moral and the political. This fundamental recognition of the relationship of the celestial and the terrestrial must be forged through a living link in the psychological realm. That link is Man. Only through the rediscovery within human nature of all orders of being from the gods to the elementals can there be a recovery of the continuity of the Great Chain of Being from the highest to the lowest. All hierarchies – from the *Dhyanis* through the *danavas* and *daityas*, to the *devas* or gods, the *devatas* and elementals – are represented within the individual human being. The five middle principles of human nature, leaving out of consideration the *Atman* and the physical body, are the direct gift and transmitted essence of the six-fold *Dhyani* Buddhas. That is why even *kama manas* is in essence sacred. It is lent to human beings to show them how to connect and how to discriminate.”

Meditation thought: Contemplate the human being as a meeting place of many orders of life. That thought can awaken both reverence and responsibility for their use.

10. R.N. Iyer — “Mahat, Manu and the Avatar”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. I, p. 375.

“When thinking of *Mahat* in terms of the seven *Logoi*, the highest *Ah-Hi* or *Dhyanis*, one must try to understand the use of generic terms – like *Ah-Hi*, *Dhyani*, *Manu* and others – which characterize the entire teaching of the Wisdom-Religion. These terms are like the x's and y's of a complex abstract formula. Whether one puts a capital X or a small x depends upon the level and context being described. Whilst this may seem confusing to the neophyte, the inherent complexity and unity in diversity of manifestation require it. All occult teaching depends upon analogy and correspondence, the serene conviction that what applies in the small also applies in the large, that what is concretely true in the small circle has its archetypal origins in the boundless circle of eternity.”

Meditation thought: Read a sacred term in its context before fixing its meaning. Careful comparison protects the freedom to learn.

11. R.N. Iyer — “The Fires of Creation”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. III, p. 375.

“Through *Dhyana Yoga*, the supreme absorption of thought into its inmost self, *Brahmā* proceeds to construct the manifold orders of beings ranging from the highest *Asuras* to the varied denizens of the differentiated worlds – Gods, *Pitris* and Mankind. These four orders of beings are essentially correlated with the seven Hierarchies, each of which has its own creative role and distinct modality in the invisible and visible worlds, and all of which are integrally present in the sevenfold constitution of man.”

Meditation thought: Consider meditation as participation in a larger order of meaning. Let the thought invite steadier attention rather than a claim to special status.

12. R.N. Iyer — “Mahat, Manu and the Avatar”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. I, p. 379.

“Even to begin to contemplate these ideas is to transform one's view of reality, displacing much that one had thought important, whilst discovering the relevance of much that one had previously neglected. A greater attentiveness and skillfulness is brought to the performance of dharma, because there is a desire to discharge all obligations to life-atoms, to the elementals of fire, air, water and earth. This may be done through what is called cooking, what is called doing accounts, or what is called earning a living, but these are only words borrowed from a materialistic tongue. All human action involves ideation and has implicit reference to the abiding possibility of lighting up minds and hearts. The inherent function of ideation is to awaken and deepen insight.”

Meditation thought: Let an expansive conception improve one modest piece of work. The movement from universal idea to particular care is itself a form of learning.