

Eros

Definitional Essay

Theosophy Trust

Eros is the creative power of love in the Greek symbolic language examined by Theosophy. Its deepest meaning reaches beyond a particular attachment toward the impulse that joins, gives life and seeks unity. H.P. Blavatsky distinguishes archaic *Eros*, associated with the emergence of a cosmos, from the later figure of winged Cupid. Professor Iyer carries that distinction into the human heart, asking how the energy called love can become truthful, less possessive and increasingly devoted to the welfare of beings.

The governing image is a flame. It can illuminate a room, warm another person or consume what it touches. Its intensity alone does not determine its value; direction and use matter. Human affection likewise contains possibilities that cannot be judged merely by the strength of feeling. A person may feel deeply and still misunderstand the beloved, demand obedience or defend a comforting falsehood. The study of *Eros* invites discrimination within love, so that its warmth can become more faithful to its source.

In *The Secret Doctrine*, *Eros* appears in an archaic cosmogonic triad and is compared with *Fohat*. The comparison concerns creative potentiality and the activity through which manifested forms are brought into relation. Before manifestation, this power is considered philosophically; within manifestation, it becomes active in the differentiation and combination of forms. These are metaphysical teachings, not descriptions of a measurable emotion or a physical force that can simply be equated with attraction between bodies.

This distinction changes the scale of the word desire. In ordinary speech, desire often means wanting an object or an experience. In the cosmological use, it points toward the emergence of relation itself, the impulse through which latent possibilities become expressed. Professor Iyer places Greek *Eros* beside the Vedic *Kamadeva* to illuminate this larger meaning. The present essay follows the question carried by *Eros* into human experience: how can a personal affection participate more consciously in a universal power of union?

Professor Iyer begins “Eros and Kamadeva” with the difficulty of trusting a word so readily used for contrary purposes. Selfish attachment can adopt the language of devotion. A wish to control may describe itself as protection. The test must therefore reach beyond a declaration of love to the consequences of its exercise. Does the relationship permit truth? Does it strengthen the capacity to act freely and responsibly? Does its warmth extend concern, or require everyone outside it to become unimportant?

Such questions should not make affection timid or suspicious. Professor Iyer expressly rejects the conclusion that personal love must be eliminated. Withdrawal into concern for one's own spiritual salvation would reproduce the very separateness the teaching seeks to overcome. Affection provides real occasions for generosity, constancy and self-knowledge. It becomes a path when the wish for another's good grows stronger than the demand that the other satisfy every expectation. The flame is tended by learning what love requires in the actual circumstances.

Consider a parent whose adult child chooses work in a distant place. Affection may first speak through fear and the wish to keep familiar arrangements intact. A more considered response can acknowledge that grief while making room for the child's judgment. Practical questions about the work remain appropriate; emotional pressure need not become the method of asking them. The parent's care acquires a freer form when it helps the child prepare responsibly, even though the choice alters the parent's own life.

The example does not divide love into a perfectly pure part and a wholly worthless part. Motives are often mixed. Honest recognition of that mixture makes growth possible. One can admit the wish to be needed while choosing not to use it as a claim upon another person. An affection can remain personal in its history and tenderness while becoming less exclusive in its purpose. Universality begins within a particular relation when the welfare of the other becomes real in its own right.

Theosophical psychology locates this work in the relation of *Manas*, mind, to *Kama*, desire, and *Buddhi*, spiritual discernment. Mind absorbed in craving can invent persuasive reasons for possession. Mind turned toward *Buddhi* becomes more capable of seeing a whole situation and responding with compassion. Professor Iyer draws upon Blavatsky's symbolism of lunar and solar aspects of mind to describe these directions. They are aids to self-observation, not labels with which to condemn the people one finds difficult.

Truthfulness is indispensable because love needs to know what it is serving. A friendship may reach a point where reassurance would conceal a serious mistake. A candid conversation, offered without humiliation, can be kinder than agreement. Here the flame gives light as well as warmth. The friend's task is to speak accurately, listen to the reply and remain available for the work of correction. Affection becomes stronger when it can bear reality without turning disappointment into rejection.

Drawing a Larger Circle of Conception carries this education beyond the nearest bond. A person learns generosity through loving someone, then discovers that similar needs exist in unfamiliar lives. The outward movement need not weaken intimate duties. It can make them less

possessive and give them a place within a broader concern. To care for a child, for example, can deepen attention to the conditions in which other children grow, learn and find protection.

Human Solidarity thus enters through the very energy that once seemed exclusively private. In Professor Iyer's account, true love expresses cosmic and human interdependence. An act performed for one person has consequences within a wider field. The student begins to consider whether loyalty is being made an excuse for unfairness, or whether a cherished bond can encourage a more generous participation in common life. Love becomes more coherent when its methods honour the dignity it claims to cherish.

There is a contemplative discipline in this movement. One can recall an affection without rehearsing demands, attend to gratitude, and consider what the other person presently needs. Such reflection is not a technique for obtaining a desired response. It helps distinguish the enduring intention to care from the changing emotions that accompany it. The measure of its value lies in the next conversation, the kept promise, the respectful silence or the practical help that follows.

Professor Iyer describes a love marked by inward depth and quiet fidelity. Its creative character appears in sharing, sacrifice and duty well done. The word sacrifice here need not imply dramatic suffering; it can mean relinquishing vanity, haste or the insistence on having one's own way. Energy released from those demands becomes available for a common good. The capacity to love then grows through use, as a flame can kindle another light without treating that light as its possession.

Beauty can assist this education when admiration becomes attention rather than acquisition. A landscape, a work of art or an act of courage may awaken a love of excellence that asks for no possession. The experience invites the mind to consider what it recognizes and why it wishes to remain faithful to it.

Eros leaves a demanding but humane possibility before the student. The longing for union can be educated through truth, discernment and compassion. Its personal beginnings need not be despised, and its universal meaning need not remain remote. Each affection offers a place to practise a little more freedom and a little more fidelity. Tended in this way, the flame can help others see and grow, while teaching the one who carries it how to love with a wider heart.

Glossary

Ancient of Days — A biblical and Kabbalistic designation compared with creative spiritual principles in Blavatsky's cosmogony.

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

Buddhi — Spiritual intuition or wisdom; Buddhist means pertaining to this higher discernment.

Chaos — Primordial Space or an undifferentiated condition in the cited cosmogony; not merely disorder in the ordinary sense.

Cosmogony — An account of the origin and unfolding of the cosmos; cosmogonic means pertaining to such an account.

Cosmology — An account or study of the order, constitution and development of the universe.

Cupid — The later personification of love distinguished from archaic cosmic *Eros* in Blavatsky's comparison.

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 *Dhyani Chohans* or *Dhyani-Chohans*. *Dhyani* and *Dhyanis* are related general forms.

Differentiation — The emergence of distinct forms, functions or levels from a less divided condition.

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

Drawing a Larger Circle of Conception — Enlarging the field of thought to include wider relationships, consequences and the welfare of others.

En-Soph — The Boundless or Infinite in Kabalistic terminology; also written Ain Soph.

Eros — The Greek figure of love, interpreted cosmologically as a primordial creative power and ethically through the education of human affection.

Fohat — The dynamic relation between cosmic ideation and substance, described through several levels of potentiality and manifestation.

Gæa — Gaia, Earth in Greek myth; named in Blavatsky's comparison of cosmogonic triads.

Human Solidarity — The shared dignity and interdependence of human beings, expressed through responsibility for the welfare of others.

Kabalistic — Pertaining to the Kabala, a Jewish mystical tradition whose symbolism Blavatsky compares with other cosmogonies.

Kama — Desire; it can designate a cosmic creative impulse or personal craving, according to context. Kamic means pertaining to desire.

Kamadeva — The divine figure of desire and love; in the Vedic interpretation used here, associated with creative compassion and universal good.

Kriyashakti — The creative power of thought and will; in the spiritual teaching its highest expression is inseparable from selflessness and universal good. Also written *Kriyasakti*.

Latent — Present as a possibility or capacity that has not yet become active or manifest.

Logos — The divine Word or formative spiritual principle; *Logoi* is the plural and Logoic the adjective.

Lunar and solar mind — Symbolic expressions for the lower, desire-associated and higher, spiritually receptive aspects of *Manas*.

Manas — The principle of self-conscious mind and moral choice; Manasic means pertaining to it.

Manifestation — The expression of differentiated existence from a subtler or unmanifest condition.

Metaphysics — Inquiry into the fundamental nature and principles of reality; metaphysical means pertaining to that inquiry.

Occult — Hidden; in this context, concerning the spiritual philosophy of unseen causes and levels of existence.

Personality — The temporary identity, habits and instruments associated with a particular life, distinguished from enduring spiritual individuality.

Phenomenal — Pertaining to manifested appearances or experienced forms; phenomena is the related plural noun.

Platonic — Pertaining to Plato's philosophy; Platonists develop or interpret that tradition, including its teachings on forms, soul and the Good.

Puranas — Traditional Hindu texts concerning cosmology, sacred history and divine figures; Puranic means pertaining to them.

Self-Knowledge — Knowledge of the spiritual Self, joined in practice to examination of motive and conduct.

Shekinah — Divine presence in Jewish mystical usage; a term in Blavatsky's comparison of cosmogonic principles.

Transmutation — A change in the quality and direction of human powers, so that thought and impulse become more capable of spiritual expression.

Triad — A group of three related principles or powers.

Vedic — Pertaining to the Vedas, the early sacred texts of Hindu tradition.

χαῖvo — The Greek term printed in Blavatsky's cosmogonic comparison and glossed there as void or Space.

Quotes for Meditation and Self Study

1. R.N. Iyer — “Eros and Kamadeva”, *The Gupta Vidyā*, Vol. I, p. 397.

“On the other hand, when selfish, personal love, often based on passing passion, wears the mask of selfless, impersonal, dispassionate and immortal love, it is far more difficult for deluded victims to discern the true from the false, the everlasting from the ephemeral. Earthly love is indeed an alluring and deceptive shadow, and sometimes a perversion, of ethereal love. Just as untruth invariably requires some form of violence for its instrument, so too blind and selfish love, which contains the seeds of violence and even hatred, is based upon untruth and uses it to further its immediate ends.”

Meditation thought: Ask whether affection makes room for truth, especially when the truth unsettles a preferred story.

2. H.P. Blavatsky — *The Secret Doctrine*, Vol. I, p. 109.

“As in the oldest Grecian Cosmogony, differing widely from the later mythology, *Eros* is the third person in the primeval trinity: Chaos, *Gæa*, *Eros*: answering to the Kabalistic *En-Soph* (for Chaos is Space, *χαῖvo*, ‘void’) the Boundless All, *Shekinah* and the Ancient of Days, or the Holy Ghost; so *Fohat* is one thing in the yet unmanifested Universe and another in the phenomenal and Cosmic World.”

Meditation thought: Contemplate desire as a cosmological symbol before reducing it to a familiar personal feeling.

3. H.P. Blavatsky — *The Secret Doctrine*, Vol. I, p. 109.

“In the latter, he is that Occult, electric, vital power, which, under the Will of the Creative *Logos*, unites and brings together all forms, giving them the first impulse which becomes in time law.”

Meditation thought: Reflect on the difference between a potential and its expression within a world of forms.

4. R.N. Iyer — “Eros and Kamadeva”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. I, p. 397.

“The universal aspect of Love was embodied in the Puranic conception of *Brahmā*'s 'Will' or desire to create, and it was affirmed in Phoenician cosmogony as the doctrine that desire is the principle of creation.”

Meditation thought: Let different sacred vocabularies invite comparison of meanings, with patience for their differences.

5. R.N. Iyer — “Eros and Kamadeva”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. I, p. 398.

“True love is a creative force that emanates from the One *Logos* and its expression is under the universal law of cosmic and human interdependence.”

Meditation thought: Consider the people indirectly affected by an apparently private choice made in the name of love.

6. R.N. Iyer — “Eros and Kamadeva”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. I, p. 398.

“True love can never be a divisive force but always has a universally beneficent and unifying effect. It leads in the end to that love of wisdom, the worship of the *Logos*, which has been extolled by the Platonists and the great mystics of all ages.”

Meditation thought: Notice whether a bond increases your capacity to care beyond its immediate circle.

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

“Does this mean that there is no place for the human affections and for the affinities between kindred souls and that we must eliminate every element of personal love? Certainly not, for this can only lead to pure egotism or to spiritual selfishness and the quest for personal salvation.”

Meditation thought: Allow warmth and spiritual aspiration to belong together. Ordinary affection can be a field of learning.

8. 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: Choose one way of caring that strengthens another person without asking to own the result.

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

“In *The Secret Doctrine* H.P. Blavatsky gives the key to the transmutation of finite love when she repeats the ancient teaching that *Manas* is dual – lunar in the lower, solar in its upper portion. It is attracted in its higher aspect towards *Buddhi*, the seat of true love and real compassion, but in its lower aspect it descends into and listens to the voice of its animal soul, full of selfish and sensual desires.”

Meditation thought: Observe the direction of thought when affection is frustrated. A pause may allow discernment to enter.

10. R.N. Iyer — “Eros and Kamadeva”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. I, p. 400.

“Such love can only arise when *kama* is under the influence, even if intermittently, of a *Manas* that tends upwards to *Buddhi*. This love is silent rather than clamorous in its expression, marked by inward depth rather than by outward display. The silences of love lie in wait for us, night and day, at our threshold, and those who have loved deeply in this way come to learn many secrets that are unknown to others, the secrets of sharing and sacrifice and duty well done.”

Meditation thought: Remember a quiet act of love whose value did not depend upon display or acknowledgment.

11. R.N. Iyer — “Eros and Kamadeva”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. I, p. 400.

“Love is the drive towards the unity of the separated, and separation presupposes an original unity. The restlessness in love is only a dim reflection of the divine discontent of the soul, but it could act as a barrier to the union of the soul with nature if it is channelled merely through personal and material forms of expression.”

Meditation thought: Let a feeling of separation become an invitation to understand, rather than a demand to possess.

12. R.N. Iyer — “Eros and Kamadeva”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. I, p. 400.

“The active and creative element in love is the urge of the human soul to participate in the work of cosmic and human evolution, a form of *Kriyashakti* which enables man to emulate the solar gods, the divine host of creative intelligences known as *Dhyani Buddhas* or *Dhyani Chohans*.”

Meditation thought: Give love a useful form through an act that assists the growth and freedom of another.