

Fifth Root Race

Definitional Essay

Theosophy Trust

The Fifth Root Race names the present major humanity-cycle in the evolutionary cosmology of Theosophy. Within H.P. Blavatsky's scheme, it belongs to the Fourth Round and follows the Atlantean or Fourth Root Race. Its characteristic task concerns the development and moral education of *Manas*, self-conscious mind. Professor Iyer interprets this stage through the possibilities of concentration, responsible choice and spiritual discernment. The term describes a place within an esoteric account of human evolution; it does not establish a person's worth.

The historical vocabulary needs candid attention. The older texts call this cycle Aryan and also apply racial and hierarchical classifications to peoples. It would therefore be inaccurate to present the doctrine as wholly untouched by racial thinking. At the same time, its enormous cycles cannot simply be substituted for present ethnic identities. A responsible reading distinguishes the authors' cosmological claims from a warrant for ranking living people, and brings the discussion into relation with the Theosophical principle of Universal Brotherhood.

Blavatsky's governing image is a tree. A Root Race is compared to the main stem, its Sub-Races to larger limbs, and further divisions to branches and shoots. She also emphasizes that these divisions overlap and become entangled. The image must be read as an aid within her system, rather than as a biological family tree established by observation. Its inward usefulness lies in directing attention toward continuity, shared roots and the inadequacy of treating human groups as sealed compartments.

A Round and a Root Race are different scales of the teaching. A Round belongs to the pilgrimage through a planetary chain; the Root Races describe successive major phases of humanity on a globe. Their subdivisions indicate further differentiations within those phases. The Fifth Root Race therefore does not mean the fifth Round. Nor does its association with mind imply that self-consciousness first appeared only in this cycle. The Theosophical narrative places the awakening of *Manas* earlier and considers its present education a continuing responsibility.

Professor Iyer describes a quickening of mental awareness in the Fifth Root Race, particularly the power of apprehension through meditation. This quickening gives the doctrine its practical urgency. A person who can reflect can examine a motive, anticipate consequences and choose among possible actions. Yet the possession of these powers does not ensure their wise employment. The same mind can make an accurate distinction or manufacture a prejudice, imagine a useful invention or devise a more effective means of exploitation.

The distinction between *Manas* and *Buddhi* clarifies the task. *Manas* provides self-conscious thought; *Buddhi* signifies spiritual discernment and the capacity for a more universal understanding. When mind becomes absorbed in *Kama*, personal desire, its ingenuity can reinforce separateness. When it becomes receptive to *Buddhi*, discrimination can serve compassion. The aim is an education of intelligence. It asks thought to become clearer and more responsible, while retaining the willingness to learn from what does not fit an established opinion.

Consider a class in which one student readily understands a difficult problem and another needs more time. Intellectual quickness can become a source of impatience or a resource for teaching. If the first student learns to explain without humiliation, both participants gain something: one receives help, while the other discovers gaps concealed by easy fluency. A faculty becomes more mature through its use for another person's understanding. The example gives a modest human form to the larger question of how awakened mind is to serve.

The tree image allows room for uneven development. Branches do not all unfold in the same way or at the same moment. Likewise, an individual may be skilled in calculation and inexperienced in listening, capable of courage and still vulnerable to vanity. The doctrine becomes harmful if it encourages someone to assign fixed spiritual positions to neighbours. Its more useful demand is inward: to recognize a capacity already available, identify its present misuse and cultivate a more generous direction for it.

Professor Iyer relates the Fifth Root Race to the karmic inheritance of the Fourth. In that account, earlier misuse of spiritual and mental powers continues to affect the human field. These claims belong to the tradition's esoteric history. Their ethical application does not require a person to imagine particular ancient crimes or assign them to others. It asks whether present knowledge is used with conscience, whether concentrated attention serves a worthy purpose, and whether power is held answerable to the lives it affects.

The discipline of concentration is especially relevant. Fragmented attention can prevent even a sincere intention from becoming effective. A student may begin with one passage, read it carefully, understand its terms and return to it without haste. The purpose is not to accumulate the appearance of learning. It is to allow understanding to become stable enough to influence conduct. Professor Iyer's emphasis on meditation joins intellectual development to the education of motive, so that a sharper mind may also become a kinder one.

Drawing a Larger Circle of Conception brings the future into this work. A civilization transmits more than buildings and instruments; it passes on habits of attention, standards of truthfulness and expectations about how people should treat one another. A teacher who encourages honest questions helps prepare that inheritance. So does a worker who shares knowledge instead of

guarding it as private advantage. The future receives something of the quality of mind being cultivated in present relationships.

Human Solidarity supplies the measure. A claim to advancement has little spiritual value if it increases contempt. Professor Iyer sees compassion as capable of reawakening latent *Buddhi*, and insists that the human condition remains open to hope. This makes service a form of participation in evolution. Greater understanding should enlarge patience and usefulness. Where someone struggles, the appropriate response is to discover what would help, while respecting the person's freedom and responsibility.

The symbolism of five gives another perspective. Professor Iyer links the five-pointed star with the present human task and the relation between spiritual and physical poles. Such symbolism is a language of correspondence, not an invitation to guess a person's attainment from a number. It asks the student to bring the available faculties into order. Thought, feeling and action should become increasingly coherent around a purpose that extends beyond personal success.

His account of movement toward a future Sub-Race emphasizes the spiritual refinement of intelligence. This should not become a claim that a selected contemporary group owns the future. A more faithful practical response is to cultivate the qualities the teaching commends: concentration, empathy, mental clarity and devotion to truth. The seed of a humane civilization is present wherever those qualities acquire dependable expression. Its growth is assisted by actions whose value may exceed what their author can presently see.

The chronology likewise requires proportion. Blavatsky presents enormous periods and explicitly cautions that the divisions overlap. Numerical detail should not eclipse the question of conduct. A reader can study the internal structure carefully while remaining clear about the status of its claims and the limits of personal knowledge.

The living tree remains a fitting image for the close. Its branches can suggest difference without abolishing a common root, and growth without a demand that every life assume the same form. The Fifth Root Race becomes inwardly useful when its study deepens responsibility for the powers of mind. A little more truthfulness in thought, generosity in teaching and patience in service can give the vast idea of human evolution a modest, credible expression today.

Glossary

Aryan — A historical term applied to the Fifth Root Race in Theosophical literature, which also uses it in racial classifications. These classifications provide no warrant for ranking the worth of living peoples.

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

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

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

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.

Ego — In these spiritual passages, the enduring self-conscious individuality; its meaning differs from ordinary selfishness or vanity.

Esoteric — Inward or hidden in meaning; an esoteric history or cosmology is a claim within the spiritual tradition.

Fifth Root Race — The present major humanity-cycle in Theosophical cosmology, associated with the education of self-conscious mind within the Fourth Round.

Fourth Root Race — The Atlantean humanity-cycle in Theosophical cosmology, preceding the Fifth Root Race within the Fourth Round.

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

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

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

Karma — The continuity of action, cause and consequence; karmic law connects moral responsibility with the wider order of life.

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

Life-atoms — The living constituents of human and natural vestures in Theosophical teaching, considered in relation to formative and spiritual influences.

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

Manvantara — A period of manifested activity; manvantaric means pertaining to it.

Metempsychosis — The passage of soul through successive embodiments; metempsychoses is the plural used in the quotation.

Noetic — Pertaining to higher spiritual intelligence and self-conscious discernment.

Planetary chain — The related series of globes through which the Theosophical evolutionary pilgrimage is described.

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

Reincarnation — The return of the enduring individuality through successive lives within the Theosophical account of evolution.

Root Race — A major humanity-cycle within Theosophical cosmology. The older literature also connects the term with racial classifications; these do not establish human worth.

Round — A major evolutionary circuit through a planetary chain in Theosophical teaching; distinct from a Root Race on a globe.

Sub-Race — A subdivision of a Root Race within the Theosophical cyclic scheme; its use belongs to that historical vocabulary.

Universal Brotherhood — The spiritual kinship of beings, expressed ethically through care extending beyond personal or sectarian boundaries.

Quotes for Meditation and Self Study

1. H.P. Blavatsky — *The Secret Doctrine*, Vol. II, p. 434.

“1. There are seven Rounds in every *manvantara*; this one is the Fourth, and we are in the Fifth Root-Race, at present. 2. Each Root-Race has seven sub-races. 3. Each sub-race has, in its turn, seven ramifications, which may be called Branch or ‘Family’ races. 4. The little tribes, shoots, and offshoots of the last-named are countless and depend on Karmic action.”

Meditation thought: Read a cyclic scheme with attention to its own terms and with humility about what a diagram can establish.

2. H.P. Blavatsky — *The Secret Doctrine*, Vol. II, p. 434.

“It is also here attempted to express in figures — but only within approximate limits, for the sake of comparison — the duration of time through which it is possible to definitely distinguish one division from another. It would only lead to hopeless confusion if any attempt were made to give accurate dates to a few; for the Races, Sub-Races, etc., etc., down to their smallest ramifications, overlap and are entangled with each other until it is nearly impossible to separate them.”

Meditation thought: Let overlapping branches challenge the habit of dividing people into fixed and isolated categories.

3. R.N. Iyer — “Involution”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. I, p. 256.

“Since the beginning of the Fifth Root Race over a million years ago, the powers of mental awareness and self-consciousness — particularly the power of mental apprehension through meditation — have quickened. When human beings through meditation become capable of gaining control over the power of thought and of directing thought-forms, *Manas* is heightened.”

Meditation thought: Consider self-conscious thought as a responsibility to be exercised carefully, rather than a possession to display.

4. R.N. Iyer — “Involution”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. I, pp. 256–257.

“Owing to the karma of the Fourth Root Race, the humanity of the present Fifth Sub-Race of the Fifth Root Race has experienced considerable difficulty maintaining itself in pace with the forefront of human evolution. Contrary to the natural degree of progress at this point in the manvantaric scheme, many are unable to control their emotional nature and continue falling back into a relative state of mental obscurity through assigning an excessive sense of reality to the separative self and the world of sensory objects.”

Meditation thought: Notice where attachment to a self-image interferes with the work of learning.

5. R.N. Iyer — “Involution”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. I, p. 257.

“Through the overdeveloped principle of kamic desire, and an undernourished resistance to those conflicts that erode the power of mental concentration, humanity has sunk to the nadir of its spiritual development. Through fragmentation of consciousness, through inability to stay still, through inability to concentrate, to engage in self-transcendence and to learn, vast numbers of human beings have become needlessly handicapped both morally and spiritually.”

Meditation thought: Give one task undivided attention. A modest recovery of concentration can support a more considered response.

6. R.N. Iyer — “Involution”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. I, p. 257.

“And through their compassion they will constantly reawaken the latent *Buddhi*, a spiritual love in human beings for fellow men and women. It has always been, and it always will be, possible to arouse the latent sense of empathy for other human beings; thus it will always be possible to arouse reflected *Buddhi*. And thus spiritual perception can be heightened and the lost eye awakened. The present karmic condition of humanity is serious, but it is by no means desperate.”

Meditation thought: Let compassion keep hope practical: whose difficulty can you meet with patient attention today?

7. R.N. Iyer — “Involution”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. I, p. 257.

“This capacity for buoyancy and ascent, inherent in human nature, reflects the primordial spirituality of the human race. This works continuously but can become intensified and deliberate only through conscious resolve.”

Meditation thought: Choose a small resolution that gives a generous aspiration a place in your daily life.

8. R.N. Iyer — “Involution”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. I, p. 257.

“Whatever his or her limitations, everyone can reach out through admiration to those who extend the horizon of human potential, and everyone can shatter walls of separateness and loneliness which otherwise loom like a gloomy curse. So long as the forces of unity are greater than the forces of disunity, so long as the forces of light are potentially greater than those of darkness, so long as the forces of love are more potent than those of hate, there is hope for humanity.”

Meditation thought: Receive encouragement from another person’s example without turning it into comparison or discouragement.

9. R.N. Iyer — “The Scope of Self-Consciousness”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. I, p. 278.

“The full significance of the five-pointed star only emerges when it is inscribed within the six-pointed star, but this cannot be understood unless one has first mastered the five. This is the point at which human beings must begin, for humanity is now in the Fifth Sub-Race of the Fifth Root Race of the Fourth Round. Through incarnation and the lessons of karma, one must come to comprehend all that is implicit in five, as well as in five doubled, which yields ten, the perfect number.”

Meditation thought: Contemplate human potential as a call to cultivate responsibility in yourself and dignity in your relations.

10. R.N. Iyer — “Integration and Recurrence”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. III, pp. 163–164.

“In the Fifth Root Race, going from the Fifth Sub-Race to the Sixth Sub-Race, this process is giving birth to a profound spiritual sensitization of intelligence through the elevation of life-atoms.”

Meditation thought: Think of a future civilization as depending partly upon the quality of attention and care cultivated now.

11. R.N. Iyer — “Evolution and Consciousness”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. I, p. 127.

“Every human being has the same evolutionary task as every other human being who ever lived, lives now or will live in the future. In this pilgrimage there are ancient guidelines in cutting through the clutter of detail and getting to the core of noetic consciousness.”

Meditation thought: Hold the shared human task in mind when differences of circumstance threaten to become barriers to concern.

12. H.P. Blavatsky — *The Secret Doctrine*, Vol. I, p. 17.

“The pivotal doctrine of the Esoteric philosophy admits no privileges or special gifts in man, save those won by his own Ego through personal effort and merit throughout a long series of metempsychoses and reincarnations.”

Meditation thought: Measure aspiration by effort and responsibility, never by a supposed inherited spiritual entitlement.