

Fourth Root Race

Definitional Essay

Theosophy Trust

The Fourth Root Race is the Atlantean humanity-cycle in the evolutionary cosmology of Theosophy. It belongs to the Fourth Round on this globe and follows the Third or Lemurian Root Race. H.P. Blavatsky and Professor Iyer associate it with the development of differentiated faculties, the growing power of desire-linked mind, and a consequential misuse of spiritual capacities. Its study concerns the relationship between increased power and moral responsibility within the tradition's esoteric account of humanity.

The term carries historical difficulties that should be acknowledged. The older literature combines cosmological stages with racial classifications and hierarchical descriptions of peoples. Calling the doctrine wholly nonracial would conceal that record. Its Root Races nevertheless operate on scales very different from present ethnic identities. The subject should be studied without turning an imagined ancient category into a judgment upon a living person. Universal Brotherhood requires that human dignity remain independent of such classifications.

A fitting governing image is a lamp placed in the hands of someone learning to use it. Light makes more activity possible, but the purpose of the bearer determines much of its effect. The Fourth Root Race presents, in the Theosophical narrative, a tremendous enlargement of capacities whose wise use was not assured. The image directs attention from fascination with lost powers toward the responsibility that accompanies any faculty becoming more effective.

Atlantis in this account is much more than the small island associated with Plato's narrative. Professor Iyer describes a vast continental history with successive phases and fragments. He also explains that the classification of continents follows the evolutionary order of the races within the doctrine, rather than the order inferred from present land forms. Its dates and geography are claims of esoteric history. They should be identified as such, rather than offered as established archaeology or used to fill gaps in evidence with certainty.

A further distinction is essential: the Fourth Root Race is not the Fourth Round itself. The Round is the larger planetary cycle; a Root Race is a major phase of humanity within the development of a globe. Professor Iyer also distinguishes the experiences attributed to the Third Round from those attributed to the Third Root Race in the present Round. Care with these scales prevents a suggestive symbol from becoming a confused chronology. The meaning depends upon the relations, not merely upon repeated numbers.

Within this structure, the awakening of self-conscious mind precedes the Fourth Root Race. The Atlantean period intensifies its exercise in relation to increasingly differentiated experience. Professor Iyer describes a quickening of *Kama-Manas*: mind associated with desire, comparison and the world of separate objects. Such development makes discrimination and practical activity more precise. It also creates opportunities for the thinker to identify too completely with an instrument, a possession or a personal aim.

The teaching of the Third Eye brings the difficulty into focus. In the sources, this eye signifies an ancient organ and faculty of spiritual perception, whose history includes both natural changes and deterioration connected with human misuse. The subject belongs to the authors' occult anthropology. Its practical point is not that a reader should try to force an unusual perception. It is that the quality of knowing cannot be separated from the moral use of what is known.

Professor Iyer carefully distinguishes inevitable changes in the human constitution from avoidable degradation. Differentiation and embodiment are part of the evolutionary account; the appropriation of spiritual power for a separate self is another matter. Confusing the two would make wrongdoing seem compulsory or make all limitation appear blameworthy. The distinction allows a more humane discipline. One can accept the conditions within which learning occurs while taking responsibility for choices made within them.

Consider a researcher entrusted with information about a community. The ability to gather, compare and present that information gives considerable influence. It can clarify needs and support a useful decision; it can also expose people unnecessarily or make them instruments of the researcher's reputation. The lamp has become brighter. What matters is the purpose directing it and the care with which its effects are considered. Increased knowledge calls for a more exact conscience, including the willingness to hear those affected by its use.

The analogy does not prove an Atlantean history. It shows why the moral question in that history remains intelligible. A person need not possess an extraordinary faculty to misuse a real one. Eloquence, expertise, memory and social influence already provide ample occasions for self-examination. Professor Iyer gives the example of someone displaying a spiritual teaching to impress a neighbour. A teaching received for service can quietly become material for vanity unless the motive is noticed and corrected.

This invites a disciplined use of speech. Before repeating an impressive explanation, a student can ask whether it answers the actual question and whether its terms have been understood. Sometimes a simpler statement is more helpful. Sometimes the truthful response is to acknowledge uncertainty and return to the source. Such restraint does not diminish intelligence. It allows intelligence to remain in relation with truth, instead of making the listener's admiration the measure of success.

Drawing a Larger Circle of Conception joins the individual choice to a collective inheritance. Knowledge, customs and habits of authority persist through institutions and relationships. We enter conditions shaped by others and contribute to what later people will receive. In the Theosophical account, karma extends this continuity through much wider cycles. Its present application is to care about consequences beyond an immediate reward, and to help repair a harmful pattern without claiming to know every cause behind it.

Human Solidarity gives the study of past error its proper direction. The point is not to imagine oneself among the innocent while assigning the burden to others. Nor is it to make every person equally guilty of every wrong. It is to recognize a shared field of consequences in which each person has some capacity to help. Professor Iyer's account retains hope through compassion, which can reawaken latent *Buddhi* and make spiritual discernment more active in ordinary human relations.

Recovery therefore means more than regaining a faculty. An awakened perception would need a corresponding steadiness of motive and a willingness to serve. The quiet disciplines of truthfulness, concentration and kindness prepare a quality of life in which greater understanding could be used well. An apology, a correction to misleading information, or the fair acknowledgment of another person's contribution may be a more useful beginning than speculation about hidden powers. The faculty already present asks to be employed responsibly.

This also gives a reason to read slowly. A dramatic image may seize the imagination before its qualifications have been understood. Returning to the surrounding passage can disclose a distinction between natural development and moral choice, or between a cosmic cycle and a smaller human phase. Careful study then becomes part of the very responsibility the doctrine seeks to awaken.

The lamp returns us to the essential question. What becomes visible through knowledge, and whose good directs the hand that carries it? The Fourth Root Race, read with historical candour and doctrinal care, offers a meditation on power entrusted to unfinished beings. Its inward value appears when the study makes a person less eager to display, more willing to learn and more considerate in action. The light then begins to serve a wider purpose, illuminating the next step without claiming to possess the whole path.

Glossary

Anthropology — The study of humanity; occult or esoteric anthropology here means the Theosophical account of human origins and development.

Atlantis — The continent or continental complex associated with the Fourth Root Race in Theosophical esoteric history; Atlantean means pertaining to it.

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

Centrifugal and centripetal — Directed away from a centre and toward a centre respectively; used in the quotation for complementary tendencies in evolution.

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; Buddhic 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.

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.

Golden, Silver, Bronze and Iron Ages — Traditional names for successive qualities of a human cycle; the quotation relates their succession to cyclic law.

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

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

Kama-Manas — Mind associated with personal desire; also written *kama manas* or *Kama Manas* in the sources.

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.

Lemurian — Pertaining to the Third Root Race and its associated continent in Theosophical esoteric history.

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

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

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

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

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

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.

Stanzas of Dzyan — The archaic stanzas presented and interpreted in *The Secret Doctrine*.

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

Synthesis — An integration that relates valid insights within a larger understanding while preserving necessary distinctions.

Third Eye — An organ and faculty of spiritual perception described in Theosophical occult anthropology; the account distinguishes natural changes from moral misuse.

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

Vesture — A sheath, vehicle or instrument through which consciousness acts; vestures is the plural.

Quotes for Meditation and Self Study

1. R.N. Iyer — “Evolution and Consciousness”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. I, p. 126.

“Next we have the Fourth Continent, now called Atlantis, the first 'historical' land, which together with the Fourth Race, passed through markedly different phases. Following the era of the Fourth Root Race, a period as long as five million years, the Fifth Root Race, to which present humanity belongs, began a million years ago with its First Sub-Race in ancient India. Atlantis was originally much vaster than the last large fragment which disappeared about 850,000 years ago.”

Meditation thought: Read the chronology as part of the author’s esoteric account and keep interpretation distinct from established history.

2. R.N. Iyer — “Evolution and Consciousness”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. I, p. 126.

“The classification of the Continents follows the order of evolution of the Races, not the geological appearance of the Continents. Nor do the present configurations of land masses indicate the past relations of Races.”

Meditation thought: Attend to the author’s categories before drawing conclusions from a familiar map.

3. R.N. Iyer — “Involution”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. I, pp. 255–256.

“This paradigmatic and dominant mode of cognition characterized the entire Third Root Race and extended into the early periods of the Fourth Root Race. The gradual differentiation and subsequent fragmentation of spiritual perception into the present set of five senses all occurred during the present Fourth Round. This is of critical importance in comprehending the relationship between mental or self-conscious Manasic evolution and the development of the physical vestures.”

Meditation thought: Consider how the differentiation of faculties can bring greater precision while also requiring a more conscious synthesis.

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

“Just as the nascent mentality of mankind eclipsed primordial spirituality in the Third Round, so too in the present Round, during the Fourth Root Race, there was a tremendous heightening of mental development focussed upon increasingly differentiated planes of existence. This allowed for a quickening of *kama manas* in relation to the world of objects and subjects, of comparison and contrast.”

Meditation thought: Notice the usefulness of comparison, and the point at which it begins to obscure the person or thing before you.

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

“As a result, there was also a corresponding decline in the intuitive faculties of self-conscious human beings, and a corresponding weakening of the centres of spiritual perception. Whilst this process represents the natural descent of spirituality into materiality, the identification with form over essence poses the central challenge to the dawning powers of noetic Manasic intelligence.”

Meditation thought: Ask whether a striking appearance is drawing attention away from an underlying truth.

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

“Yet during the Fourth Root Race, and accompanying the natural development of mental and spiritual powers, many classes of souls misused these powers chiefly in the service of the egotistical self. Consequently, disappearance and atrophy befell the eye of spiritual wisdom. In the chilling statement of the *Stanzas of Dzyan*, ‘The Third Eye closed.’”

Meditation thought: Reflect on the responsibility accompanying any increase in power or knowledge.

7. R.N. Iyer — “Spiritual Perception”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. III, p. 140.

“During the enormous cycles of human evolution upon earth, there has been an alternation of longer and shorter periods of relative obscurity of the spiritual faculties of humanity. Some of these phases were intensified by human errors and avoidable tragedies. These became overlapping factors in succeeding cycles of obscurity and clarity in the human vestures, resulting from the centrifugal and centripetal forces behind evolution. The actual condition and constitution of human vestures in any epoch is the product of complex causes.”

Meditation thought: Resist a single explanation for a complex condition. Patient understanding makes correction more humane.

8. R.N. Iyer — “Spiritual Perception”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. III, p. 140.

“Mature wisdom calls for a strong sense of moral responsibility for the collective consequences of past conduct as well as active cooperation with the inexorable cycles of Nature. These include the familiar cycle of birth and death, the slow succession of the Golden, Silver, Bronze and Iron Ages, the emergence and disappearance of continents and also the myriad vicissitudes in the alteration and refinement of human vestures. The original awakening, subsequent atrophy and future recovery of the Third Eye is a moral saga illustrating the interweaving of cyclic necessity and moral responsibility.”

Meditation thought: Distinguish what must be worked with from what can be changed through a responsible choice.

9. R.N. Iyer — “The Eye of Shiva”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. III, p. 210.

“It is for this reason that H.P. Blavatsky took such pains to explain the distinction between the natural psycho-physical changes affecting the relationship of the early races to the Third Eye and the unnatural degradation of the spiritual principles in man in the later portions of the Fourth Race. The former is a natural and inevitable part of the process of evolution, but the latter was not.”

Meditation thought: Do not confuse a necessary limitation with an avoidable misuse of freedom.

10. R.N. Iyer — “The Eye of Shiva”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. III, p. 210.

“To understand the heavy Karma of the latter portion of the Fourth Root Race, one must set aside the spell of fascination with the venal forms of iniquity and seek a philosophic understanding of the sprouting of spiritual evil. Suppose that one has received potent spiritual Teachings, and that one uses them to show off to one's neighbour. This is a dangerous step even if it seems innocuous; it can rapidly lead to using the Teachings on behalf of one's separative self, when in fact one received the teachings only for the sake of service to others.”

Meditation thought: Before sharing a teaching, ask whether your purpose is to help someone understand or to make yourself impressive.

11. 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 the possibility of renewed understanding encourage one act of compassion within reach.

12. 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: Regard the study of humanity's past as a reason to deepen present fellowship and responsibility.