

Indra

Definitional Essay

Theosophy Trust

Indra is the Vedic lord of the firmament, associated with thunder, rain and the leadership of the celestial host. In Theosophical interpretation, this divine figure also expresses the splendour and ambiguity of intelligence. H.P. Blavatsky relates *Indra* to *Mahat*, cosmic mind, and to the human principle *Manas* in its dual aspect: receptive to *Buddhi*, spiritual discernment, or drawn into personal desire. His victories and reversals become a way of studying how power is directed. The question is whether intelligence serves awakening or defends its own authority.

The first caution is that *Indra* appears in different strata of tradition. In the *Rig Veda*, *Indra* is one of the highest and greatest of the gods, and his *Soma-drinking* is allegorical of his spiritual nature. In later Puranic accounts, he is often degraded into a more anthropomorphic figure: sensual, anxious, fearful of ascetics, and morally compromised. Theosophy asks the student not to flatten these layers. *Indra's* fall from celestial grandeur into exoteric ambivalence is itself instructive. It shows how luminous intelligence becomes distorted when drawn downward into egotism and desire.

H.P. Blavatsky gives the central key: *Indra* is in reality the cosmic principle *Mahat* and, in the human constitution, the fifth principle, *Manas*, in its dual aspect. He is the principle of intelligence in manifestation, and in the human being he is the thinking power that may either rise toward *Buddhi* or be dragged downward by *Kama*.

Professor Iyer's treatment of *Mahat* helps give this doctrine its proper altitude. *Mahat* is cosmic Mind, the manvantaric activity directing the Fohatic process through which Akashic ideation becomes the prototypes of the astral and physical cosmos. If *Indra* is read through this Mahatic light, he is not merely a warrior. He is the organizing intelligence that battles chaos, releases blocked life, and leads the host of luminous powers.

Yet in the human being, *Mahat* is reflected as *Manas*, and *Manas* is dual. Professor Iyer's teaching on the solar and lunar poles of *Manas* is relevant here. When *Manas* turns upward, *Kama* may be transformed and become a divine fire capable of sacrifice. When *Kama* overcomes and enslaves *Manas*, love becomes violent, cunning, sentimental, possessive, or self-deceptive. *Indra's* dual aspect is precisely this: mind joined to *Buddhi* or mind dragged by desire.

This makes *Indra* psychologically useful. The student can recognize an *Indra-force* within: bright, energetic, courageous, quick to strike, capable of organization and leadership, able to oppose obstruction. But the same force may become proud, reactive, fearful of being surpassed, anxious

before another's spiritual strength, and inclined to send distractions against the ascetic will. *Indra* reveals the ambiguity of intelligence when it has not become transparent to wisdom.

The battle with *Vritra* is the most familiar symbolic act of *Indra*. *Vritra* is the serpent of drought, the obstruction that holds back the waters. *Indra*, as *Vritra-han*, breaks the obstruction with thunder and lightning and releases the rain. Cosmically this is life overcoming arrest and intelligence opening blocked channels. Psychologically, *Vritra* is the coiled inertia that blocks the flow of truth, compassion, energy, and insight.

Every human being knows *Vritra* in some form: drought of imagination, sympathy, courage, or spiritual aspiration. There are inward serpents of resentment, fear, possessiveness, or rigid opinion that hold the waters of life captive. The higher *Indra* is the power of mind that can strike these obstructions, not with cruelty, but with decisive illumination. The thunderbolt is discrimination sharpened by spiritual will.

But the same thunderbolt may be misused. In the story of *Diti* and the *Maruts*, *Indra* divides the embryo destined to conquer him. H.P. Blavatsky reads this as an allegory. *Diti* is linked with *Aditi* and the *Buddhi* of *Akasha*, representing divine aspiration toward deliverance from *Maya*. The coming child allegorizes the divine and steady will of the *yogi*, determined to resist temptation and destroy the passions within the earthly personality. The degraded *Indra* tries to prevent this birth.

Here the symbolism becomes inwardly exact. The mind, when proud and self-protective, fears the very spiritual will that could liberate it. It senses that a higher power is forming within the soul, a will that will no longer obey sensory fascination or vanity. Instead of serving that birth, the lower *Indra-force* tries to fragment it. This is the mind using its brilliance to evade transformation.

The *Maruts* enrich the picture. In the *Vedas* they are storm-gods, friends and allies of *Indra*. In H.P. Blavatsky's occult interpretation they have several meanings: passions that storm in the ascetic candidate, occult potencies hidden in the lower aspects of *Akasha*, and actual conscious beings of a cosmic and psychic nature. A symbol may be psychological, cosmic, and ontological at once.

As passions, the *Maruts* are the storm-field of the aspirant. They are not inert vices but energies. If governed by the lower *Indra*, they become scattered forces of agitation. If brought into relation with spiritual will, they can be transmuted into courage, clarity, devotion, and service.

Indra's degradation through *Ahamkara* is one of the most important warnings. H.P. Blavatsky says that *Indra*, once one of the greatest gods, becomes degraded in the *Kali Yuga* through the spread of *Ahamkara* and ignorance. The danger is not intelligence itself; the danger is intelligence

appropriated by separative selfhood. When *Manas* says “I” in isolation from *Buddhi*, the luminous ruler becomes anxious sovereign of a shrinking realm.

This warning belongs to ordinary life. Intelligence can become proud. Quickness can become impatience. Strength can become domination. Clarity can become contempt. Leadership can become self-importance. Even spiritual knowledge can become a thunderbolt used to strike others rather than illumine oneself. *Indra* teaches that the brightest powers of mind are not safe until humbled before *Buddhi* and joined to compassion.

Drawing a Larger Circle of Conception changes the way this strength is used. A capable organizer may see a flaw in a colleague’s plan and feel the pleasure of exposing it. The wider inquiry includes the work itself, the colleague’s opportunity to learn and the confidence of everyone affected. A precise question may release understanding more effectively than a public defeat. The thunderbolt then becomes a symbol of illumination: it breaks an obstruction while leaving room for another person to act with dignity. Leadership retains its courage and gains a more generous purpose.

Indra also teaches stewardship of mental power. Thought, attention, language, leadership, and intellectual skill are not private possessions. They are entrusted energies. Human Solidarity requires not the weakening of intelligence, but its consecration. Universal Brotherhood is not sentiment opposed to force; it is force governed by compassion.

The full transformation of *Indra* is the education of *Manas*. Mind identifies with its own brilliance and mistakes movement for mastery. Then it meets obstruction and learns courage. Then it meets desire and learns danger. Then it meets *Buddhi* and learns humility. Finally, it discovers that true greatness lies not in ruling for itself, but in becoming a servant of wisdom.

To understand *Indra* is to study the splendour and danger of mind. The higher *Indra* releases the waters; the lower *Indra* fears the birth of the *yogi*’s will. The higher *Indra* is *Mahat* reflected through *Manas* toward *Buddhi*; the lower *Indra* is *Manas* entangled in *Kama*. In the end, *Indra* is a call to redeem force. When *Manas* turns toward *Buddhi*, the old god of the firmament becomes a guardian of the inner sky, and the mind becomes a luminous power in the service of awakening.

Glossary

Adept — A person who has attained mastery of occult knowledge; the word alone does not establish the moral use of that mastery.

Aditi — The Vedic Mother of the gods; a symbol of the boundless matrix of manifestation.

Ahamkara — The making of an “I”; egoism or identification with separative selfhood in the interpretation used here.

Ahi-Vritra — The obstructing serpent or dragon of the Vedic allegory, overcome by *Indra*.

Akasha — The subtle spiritual substance or medium of manifestation, distinguished from ordinary physical space and from the lower astral light.

Aryanism — The historical source’s term for the ancient Indian tradition associated with the *Vedas*; its use here conveys no claim of human superiority.

Ascetic — One devoted to spiritual self-discipline and restraint; asceticism is the related practice.

Astral — Pertaining to a subtle order of substance or experience; the astral vehicle is distinguished from the visible physical body.

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.

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

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

Daityas — Offspring of *Diti* and a class of *Asuras* in Hindu mythological accounts.

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.

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

Diti — A divine mother figure and mother of the *Maruts*; Blavatsky interprets her in relation to *Aditi* and the aspirant’s spiritual striving.

Drawing a Larger Circle of Conception — Widening understanding to include more relationships, consequences and the needs of others.

Ego — The enduring spiritual individuality in the relevant Theosophical usage; distinguish this from the changing personality and from ordinary vanity.

Egoism and egotism — Terms whose meanings vary by context. Egoism can name I-am-I consciousness; egotism commonly means self-importance, though the historical quotations also use it in a higher spiritual sense.

Exoteric — Outward, public or conventional in expression; distinguished from an esoteric interpretation.

Firmament — The vault or expanse of the heavens; used in a traditional description of *Indra*.

Fohatic — Pertaining to *Fohat*, the dynamic connecting power in cosmic manifestation.

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

Ideation — The activity or formation of thought; cosmic ideation is considered as a spiritual source of manifested order.

Indra — The Vedic lord of the firmament and chief of a celestial host; interpreted by Blavatsky through cosmic mind and the twofold direction of human *Manas*.

Jishnu — Victorious; a name used of *Indra* as leader of the celestial host.

Kali Yuga — The dark or difficult age within the Hindu fourfold cycle of *yugas*.

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

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

Maha-Yogi — Great *yogi*; a title used of *Shiva* in the quotation.

Mahat — Cosmic mind or universal intelligence, considered as the source of archetypal ideation within manifestation.

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.

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

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

Maruts — The Vedic storm-gods associated with *Indra*; Blavatsky gives several occult interpretations, including passions and powers of Nature.

Maya — Illusion or conditioned appearance; the tendency to take the relative as final reality.

Nagas — Serpent beings in Indian sacred symbolism; *naga* is the singular.

Nirmanakaya — A spiritual vesture, and by extension a being, associated with compassionate service.

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

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

Ontological — Concerning the nature or order of being.

Pantheon — The divine figures of a particular religious or mythological tradition considered together.

Par excellence — Pre-eminently or above others of a comparable kind.

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

Profligate — Recklessly self-indulgent or morally unrestrained.

Psychic — Pertaining to subtle or psychological modes of experience; its level and relation to spiritual intelligence depend upon context.

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

Rig Veda — A foundational collection of Vedic hymns, including hymns to divine powers and hymns concerning cosmic origins.

Shiva — A divine figure of transformation; also written *Siva*, and associated with *Rudra* and the *Kumaras* in the sources.

Sidereal — Pertaining to the stars or heavens; sidereally is the adverb.

Soma — The sacred plant and libation of Vedic ritual, also a symbol of spiritual inspiration and transformation in the cited interpretation.

Sthula Sarira — The gross physical body; the cited passage applies the bodily analogy to the lower, terrestrial atmosphere.

Sura-dhipa — Chief of the gods; a title of *Indra* in the quotation.

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

Vayu — The wind deity; in the cited cosmic triad, spiritual air.

Vedas — Ancient Indian sacred texts associated with spiritual knowledge and revelation.

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

Vritra — The obstructing dragon or serpent defeated by *Indra*, associated with the withholding and release of the waters. *Vritri* is a variant spelling in the cited passage.

Vritra-han — Slayer of *Vritra*; a title of *Indra* in the myth of the released waters.

Yogin — A practitioner of yoga; *yogi* is an alternative form, and *yogins* or *yogis* the plural.

Yuga — An age or period within a larger cycle of time.

Quotes for Meditation and Self Study

1. H.P. Blavatsky — *The Secret Doctrine*, Vol. II, p. 378.

“Read the account about *Indra* (*Vayu*) in the *Rig-Veda*, the occult volume *par excellence* of Aryanism, and then compare it with the same in the *Purânas* — the exoteric version thereof, and the purposely garbled account of the true Wisdom religion. In the *Rig Veda* *Indra* is the highest and greatest of the Gods, and his *Soma-drinking* is allegorical of his highly spiritual nature. In the *Purânas* *Indra* becomes a profligate, and a regular drunkard on the *Soma* juice, in the terrestrial way.”

Meditation thought: Compare the layers of a sacred figure before reducing its meaning to a single story.

2. H.P. Blavatsky — *The Secret Doctrine*, Vol. II, p. 378.

“He is the conqueror of all the ‘enemies of the gods’ — the *Daityas*, *Nâgas* (Serpents), *Asuras*, all the Serpent-gods, and of *Vritri*, the Cosmic Serpent. *Indra* is the St. Michael of the Hindu Pantheon — the chief of the militant Host.”

Meditation thought: Courage serves a spiritual purpose when it protects the conditions for learning and growth.

3. H.P. Blavatsky — *The Secret Doctrine*, Vol. II, p. 384.

“In India the Dragon story is repeated in one of its forms in the battles of *Indra* with *Vritra*. In the *Vedas* this *Ahi-Vritra* is referred to as the Demon of Drought, the terrible hot Wind. *Indra* is shown to be constantly at war with him; and with the help of his thunder and lightning the god compels *Ahi-Vritra* to pour down in rain on Earth, and then slays him. Hence, *Indra* is called the *Vritra-Han* or ‘the slayer of *Vritra*,’ as Michael is called the Conqueror and ‘Slayer of the Dragon.’”

Meditation thought: The release of the waters can suggest the release of sympathy where fear has closed the heart.

4. H.P. Blavatsky — *The Secret Doctrine*, Vol. II, p. 613.

“In the Rig and other *Vedas*, the *Maruts* are represented as the storm gods and the friends and allies of *Indra*; they are the ‘Sons of heaven and of earth.’ This led to an allegory that makes them the children of *Siva*, the great patron of the *Yogis*, ‘the *Maha-Yogi*, the great ascetic, in whom is centred the highest perfection of austere penance and abstract meditation, by which the most unlimited powers are obtained, marvels and miracles are worked, the highest spiritual knowledge is acquired, and union with the great spirit of the universe is eventually gained.’”

Meditation thought: The storm image holds powers that must be understood in their different functions and relations.

5. H.P. Blavatsky — *The Secret Doctrine*, Vol. II, pp. 613–614.

“*Diti*, being *Aditi*, unless the contrary is proven to us, *Aditi*, we say, or *Akâsa* in her highest form, is the Egyptian seven-fold heaven. Every true Occultist will understand what this means. *Diti*, we repeat, is the sixth principle of metaphysical nature, the *Buddhi* of *Akâsa*. *Diti*, the mother of the *Maruts*, is one of her terrestrial forms, made to represent, at one and the same time, the divine Soul in the ascetic, and the divine aspirations of mystic Humanity toward deliverance from the webs of *Maya*, and final bliss in consequence.”

Meditation thought: Consider the aspiration for freedom that can remain alive beneath the turbulence of desire.

6. H.P. Blavatsky — *The Secret Doctrine*, Vol. II, p. 614.

“*Indra*, now degraded, because of the *Kali Yuga*, when such aspirations are no more general but have become abnormal through a general spread of *Ahamkara* (the feeling of Egotism, Self, or I-am-ness) and ignorance — was, in the beginning, one of the greatest gods of the Hindu Pantheon, as the *Rig Veda* shows. *Sura-dhipa*, ‘the chief of the gods,’ has fallen down from *Jishnu*, ‘the leader of the celestial host,’ — the Hindu St. Michael — to an opponent of asceticism, the enemy of every holy aspiration.”

Meditation thought: The desire to defend personal importance can diminish even a brilliant intelligence.

7. H.P. Blavatsky — *The Secret Doctrine*, Vol. II, p. 614.

“Therefore, *Indra*, now characterized as ‘the god of the firmament, the personified atmosphere’ — is in reality the cosmic principle *Mahat*, and the fifth human — *Manas* in its dual aspect: as connected with *Buddhi*; and as allowing himself to be dragged down by his *Kama-principle* (the body of passions and desires).”

Meditation thought: The direction of mind matters: can its strength become receptive to spiritual discernment?

8. H.P. Blavatsky — *The Secret Doctrine*, Vol. II, p. 614.

“It is in this latter character that he seeks, to save himself from destruction, to destroy the coming ‘babe’ destined to conquer him: — the babe, of course, allegorizing the divine and steady will of the *Yogi* — determined to resist all such temptations, and thus destroy the passions within his earthly personality.”

Meditation thought: Notice the ways in which an old attachment resists the formation of a steadier purpose.

9. H.P. Blavatsky — *The Secret Doctrine*, Vol. II, p. 615.

“The *Maruts* represent (a) the passions that storm and rage within every candidate’s breast, when preparing for an ascetic life — this mystically; (b) the occult potencies concealed in the manifold aspects of *Akâsa*’s lower principles — her body, or *sthula sarira*, representing the terrestrial, lower, atmosphere of every inhabited globe — this mystically and sidereally; (c) actual conscious Existences, Beings of a cosmic and psychic nature.”

Meditation thought: A symbol can speak of psychological forces and cosmic agencies without making those meanings identical.

10. H.P. Blavatsky — *The Secret Doctrine*, Vol. II, p. 615.

“At the same time ‘*Maruts*’ is, in occult parlance, one of the names given to those egos of great Adepts who have passed away, and who are known also as *Nirmanakayas*; of those Egos for whom — since they are beyond illusion — there is no *Devachan*, and who, having either voluntarily renounced it for the good of mankind, or not yet reached Nirvana, remain invisible on earth.”

Meditation thought: The same sacred name may have meanings at different levels; patient study preserves their distinctions.

11. R.N. Iyer — “Mahat, Manu and the Avatar”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. I, p. 372.

“Behind every manifested system of worlds, at the basis of every solar universe, is the manvantaric activity of the cosmic mind directing the Fohatic process whereby Akashic ideation is translated into the concrete prototypes of the astral and physical cosmos. It is through *Mahat* that the highest independent intelligences, one with the Unmanifest *Logos*, become the *Manus*, the guiding spirits of thinking humanity.”

Meditation thought: Order and intelligence are contemplated here as prior to their visible expressions.

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

“When *kama* in man overcomes and enslaves *Manas*, love becomes violent and cunning, or a mere form of sentimental wish-fulfilment. In the former case, it tears the individual to pieces. It becomes a volcanic and tempestuous force, an explosion of all the passions pent up in man; it knows neither law nor restraint and its pressure drives the deepest undercurrents of the animal nature in man to the surface.”

Meditation thought: Examine how desire can recruit intelligence to justify what the heart already wants.