

Jivatman

Definitional Essay

Theosophy Trust

Jivatman, also appearing as *Jivatma*, joins the ideas of life and Spirit. In the usage of *The Theosophical Glossary* and Professor Iyer's "Jiva and Self-Generation," it points toward universal life in relation to its spiritual origin and to the divine presence in the human heart. The emphasis is wider than an isolated individual soul or a person's physical vitality. This essay follows that Theosophical usage, in which cosmos, spiritual individuality and the unfolding of a living form are contemplated together.

H.P. Blavatsky's *Theosophical Glossary* gives *Jivatma* as the one universal life generally, and also the divine Spirit in man. Professor Iyer uses *Jivatman* in "Jiva and Self-Generation," where he says that the term suggests the whole universe in a single word. This makes *Jivatman* a synthetic term. It asks the mind to think life, Spirit, universe and human heart together.

Jiva can mean life, life-essence, individual soul, the Monad or *Atma-Buddhi*, depending on the plane of use. But *Jiva* must be distinguished from *prana*. *Prana* is outbreathing, vital current or life-fluid in manifestation; *Jiva* is life *per se*. *Jivatman* points to the highest meaning of life, life illumined by *Atman*.

This distinction matters because the teaching asks a question beyond the description of an organism's functions. Biological processes can be studied in their own right, while the philosophical inquiry concerns life as a universal principle. Theosophy regards Nature as alive throughout, with intelligence latent at many levels. This is its metaphysical standpoint, from which the relation between consciousness and its changing forms is explored. The account should be understood at that level rather than treated as an alternative description of a laboratory observation.

Yet *Jivatman* is not simply the fact that everything lives. It is life spiritually understood. Professor Iyer distinguishes even the highest *Jiva* from the highest Atmic light connected with the seventh principle, likened to a ray or beam of the Central Spiritual Sun. Vitality is not Spirit; psychic intensity is not *Atman*. *Jivatman* does not erase hierarchy; it illumines life by Spirit.

The solar image is central. H.P. Blavatsky speaks of the Sun as the heart of the solar system, with waves of life-essence circulating through the great body of the system. Professor Iyer uses this to show continuity between the Central Spiritual Sun, the solar heart and the pulsations of life in beings. Life is sacred circulation, not isolated possession.

Professor Iyer says the mystery of *Jivatman* encompasses the mystery of the cosmos, the Ego, and the embryo. The cosmos is the field of universal life; the Ego is the spiritual individuality capable of self-conscious participation; the embryo is the miracle through which life gathers form from hidden interior guidance. *Jivatman* helps hold these mysteries together.

Within this account, the distinctively human opportunity lies in self-conscious participation. Life is present throughout Nature, while *Manas* makes possible deliberate reflection upon motive, duty and consequence. The language of *Jiva* becoming complete in humanity concerns that spiritual constitution and responsibility. It provides no measure of the worth of particular people by their abilities. The gift of reflection calls for care toward other beings, including those whose needs cannot be expressed in familiar words.

The human being is thus entrusted with a conscious share in the life-current. Theosophical teaching relates thoughts, feelings and motives to life-atoms and subtle atmospheres. Its ethical implication is attentiveness to the lives within one's influence. What is cultivated inwardly enters the manner of speech and action, making the quality of attention consequential for others.

The ordinary phrase "my life" becomes questionable. Life is not owned. The body is composed of countless lives; breath belongs to planetary and solar circulation; thought moves in subtle fields; the heart is sustained by a life-current older than personality. *Jivatman* shifts consciousness from "my life" to "the One Life moving through this field of responsibility."

Professor Iyer gives a practical direction. To release the higher *Jiva*, one must become calm and quiet, capable of sitting in stillness while remaining wide awake and receptive. One must attune to the Spiritual Sun, the sacred planets, the elements and *Aether-Akasha*. This is concentrated receptivity, the opposite of restless willfulness.

Silence is essential. The lower mind wants apparatus, projects, confirmations and signs. Professor Iyer says all apparatus must go. One must simply reflect, beginning with a seed-thought or sacred mantram. Spiritual energy is released through adoration, not self-assertion.

This corrects the modern cult of self-making. *Jivatman* is released through reverence, inward prostration, devotion, humility, receptivity and gratitude. The highest life is not seized; it is received and released. One becomes less a claimant and more a channel.

Professor Iyer describes *Jivatman* as a powerful motor of spiritual energy tapped by *yogins* through vows upheld over lifetimes of meditation. A vow is not a mood; it is a current of directed being. When upheld through meditation and purified motive, it becomes a spiritual conductor. The life-current responds to fidelity.

The ordinary search for renewed energy can become an inquiry into how attention is spent. A person may notice the weariness of rehearsing an injury long after a conversation has ended. The spiritual discipline here concerns collectedness and the willingness to release an unhelpful preoccupation. It does not make fatigue or illness a verdict upon character. Reverence for life includes kindness toward a tired body and respect for the different conditions under which people carry their responsibilities.

Compassion is central. Professor Iyer links *Jivatman* with the *Kwan-Yin Pledge*. The highest life is not private vitality; it is spiritual life-energy and spiritual will made available through mercy, renunciation and service. The more one lives for the welfare of beings, the more one aligns with the current that sustains beings.

This gives *Jivatman* its relation to Human Solidarity. If life is one, then the life in another is not alien to oneself. To injure another disturbs the common life-field. To help another cooperates with the One Life moving through many forms. Universal Brotherhood is therefore the doctrine lived: all beings are beads on one life-thread.

Drawing a Larger Circle of Conception begins when “my life” is considered through the lives that sustain it. A meal brings together soil, plants, water, human labour and many acts of care. Remembering those relationships can change the manner of receiving it and the responsibility taken for what remains. Gratitude becomes more than a mood when it reduces waste, notices another person’s need or supports the work that makes nourishment possible. The universal principle acquires an intelligible point of contact in a shared daily necessity.

A vow gives that recognition continuity. Its value lies in the faithfulness with which it guides attention when enthusiasm has faded. Someone who undertakes to listen more carefully may discover how quickly the mind prepares its own reply. Returning to the vow can make space for a meaning that would otherwise be missed. This modest act does not claim to demonstrate an occult power. It shows how an idea can enter the quality of a life and make its participation more conscious.

Jivatman also changes one’s relation to the body and speech. The body is not to be despised, because it is composed of living centers and sustained by cosmic life. But it is not the source of life. It is a temporary temple made of lives. Speech also carries life-force. Words can drain or heal, scatter or strengthen. The question becomes: what quality of life am I sending through my words?

Jivatman, finally, is not a concept to possess. It is a living relation to be purified and lived. To understand it is to know that life is sacred because it is rooted in Spirit. To live it is to guard the

life-current in thought, breath, speech, body, relationship and service, letting the life entrusted to us become more transparent to the Light from which it came.

Glossary

Absolute — The unconditioned Reality, beyond the limitations and distinctions of manifested existence.

Aether-Akasha — The subtle universal medium considered through the spiritual account of life, consciousness and manifestation.

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

Atma-Buddhi — Universal Spirit considered in relation to *Buddhi*, its spiritual vehicle; commonly called the human Monad.

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

Bija sutra — A seed formulation or concise spiritual theme used for contemplation in the quoted teaching.

Consubstantial — Of one underlying substance or essential nature; used in the quoted metaphysical account.

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

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.

Hierarchy — An ordering of functions or levels in the Theosophical account of life and consciousness.

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.

Individuality — The enduring spiritual Ego in Theosophical usage, distinguished from the temporary personality of a particular life.

Jiva — Life; in the quoted glossary, life as the Absolute and also the Monad or *Atma-Buddhi*. Its level of application depends on context.

Jivatman — Universal life considered through its spiritual origin and divine presence in the human being; *Jivatma* is the spelling in the quoted glossary.

Kwan-Yin Pledge — The pledge of compassionate service associated with *Kwan-Yin*, the figure of mercy.

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.

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

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.

Microcosm and macrocosm — The smaller and larger orders considered through correspondence; especially the human being and the cosmos.

Monad — An indivisible spiritual unit; in the human constitution, the spiritual ground commonly described as *Atma-Buddhi*. *Monadic* means pertaining to it.

Mysteries — Sacred spiritual teachings and disciplines, distinguished in the essays from the ceremonies that symbolize them.

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

One Life — The universal unity of life underlying the diversity of beings in Theosophical teaching.

Per se — Latin for in itself; used to distinguish a being's intrinsic nature from a particular conditioned expression.

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

Prana — Life-energy; in the quoted teaching, the current associated with the organism and its astral vehicle.

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

Spiritual Sun — A symbol of spiritual illumination and its source, distinguished from a physical object within the human body.

Tapas — Spiritual discipline or austerity; in the cited passages, the sustained effort associated with renunciation and inward purification.

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

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

Quotes for Meditation and Self Study

1. H.P. Blavatsky — *The Theosophical Glossary*, p. 168, “Jiva”.

“*Jiva* (Sk.). Life, as the Absolute; the Monad also or ‘*Atma-Buddhi*’.”

Meditation thought: Contemplate life as a spiritual unity before considering its many manifested functions.

2. H.P. Blavatsky — *The Theosophical Glossary*, p. 168, “Jivatma”.

“*Jivatma* (Sk.). The ONE universal life, generally; but also the divine Spirit in Man.”

Meditation thought: The universal and the inward belong together in this compact definition.

3. R.N. Iyer — “Jiva and Self-Generation”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. I, p. 206.

“Universal Life at the macrocosmic level must be understood on its own – independent of function, independent of manifestation and independent of form.”

Meditation thought: Can thought approach life without immediately identifying it with a particular organism or use?

4. R.N. Iyer — “Jiva and Self-Generation”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. I, p. 204.

“The mystery of the one Ego was intimated by Plato, who said that the human soul was a compound of the same and the other. This is the mystery of that which is different from, yet consubstantial with, that which it reflects. This mystery poses a profound challenge to one's deepest sense of 'I-am-I' consciousness.”

Meditation thought: Individual consciousness is contemplated in relation to the greater life it reflects.

5. R.N. Iyer — “Jiva and Self-Generation”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. I, p. 205.

“Since Deity, Man and Nature are philosophically inseparable, one cannot comprehend the origin of the cosmos, the origin of humanity or the birth of a single baby independently of each other. One needs to regain a sense of wonder that something so infinitesimally small as an initial germinal cell can give rise to a full-grown human being.”

Meditation thought: Let wonder enlarge inquiry into both the cosmos and the development of a single life.

6. R.N. Iyer — “Jiva and Self-Generation”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. I, p. 209.

“It is that which vitalizes, brings to birth and releases the spiritual will. It is that which lights up the creative energy of the higher imagination and that which belongs to the power of ideation and intention. It is that power of the human monad capable of impressing desire with a form and with an intelligence. It is that life which is given by the power of ideas, and hence it is connected over the long process of history with what is called education.”

Meditation thought: Education can help latent powers of reflection and responsible choice become active.

7. R.N. Iyer — “Jiva and Self-Generation”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. I, p. 210.

“Only when one becomes a man of silence, a man of meditation capable of remaining still and wide awake while abstracted from even the subtlest sensations, can one come any closer to experiencing what *The Voice of the Silence* calls ALL-THOUGHT. Only by mastering the mind can one intelligently guide through the fifth principle, or *Manas*, the second principle of the universal soul, the vital force in Nature which circulates through man.”

Meditation thought: The teaching connects spiritual receptivity with collected attention and mastery of the mind.

8. R.N. Iyer — “Jiva and Self-Generation”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. I, p. 210.

“To intuit and assimilate their presence in oneself, one must learn to sit in the silence of one's own meditation, without projects or pencils, pens or tape recorders, icons or insignia. All apparatus must go. One must simply reflect, beginning with a *bija sutra*, a sacred mantram.”

Meditation thought: Consider the inward simplicity of meditation and the willingness to lay aside self-display.

9. R.N. Iyer — “Jiva and Self-Generation”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. I, pp. 210–211.

“It is in this sense that *Jiva* is complete only in man. And yet even this *Jiva* is independent of the highest Atmic light connected with the seventh principle, which may be likened to one of the rays or beams of the Central Spiritual Sun. The ultimate spiritual origin of life is intimated in the cryptic code language called Sanskrit by *Jivatman*, which suggests the whole of the universe in a single word.”

Meditation thought: Distinguish even the highest manifested life from its spiritual origin.

10. R.N. Iyer — “Jiva and Self-Generation”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. I, p. 211.

“The mystery of the *Jivatman* encompasses the mystery of the cosmos, the Ego and the embryo. It is the most powerful motor of spiritual energy, tapped by *yogins* through the power of vows upheld intact over lifetimes of meditation.”

Meditation thought: A vow gives continuity to aspiration beyond the enthusiasm of a passing moment.

11. R.N. Iyer — “Jiva and Self-Generation”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. I, p. 211.

“It is the essence of immortal life which may be drawn upon through penance, through *tapas*, through true repentance and through compassion. It is the living essence of the *Kwan-Yin Pledge*, one with the spiritual life-energy and spiritual will, the spiritual plasm of occult cosmology.”

Meditation thought: Compassion gives the search for spiritual life an inclusive and self-forgetful purpose.

12. R.N. Iyer — “Jiva and Self-Generation”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. I, p. 211.

“It is the fluid in *Akasha*, the very energy that circulates in the highest beings in manifestation, released through renunciation and devotion, sacrifice and meditation. It is, in essence, immortal life in spirit, the mystical *Logos* permeating the cosmos, and the divine Presence in every human heart.”

Meditation thought: The life contemplated in the cosmos is also to be honoured in the person before us.