

Karana Sharira

Definitional Essay

Theosophy Trust

Karana Sharira means the causal body or causal vesture. In the Theosophical teaching considered here, it is associated with the higher individuality and the spiritual harvest of experience across incarnations. *Karana* means cause; *sharira* means body or sheath. The bodily image is analogical: it describes an inward vehicle of consciousness, distinguished from the visible organism and the changing personal self-image.

H.P. Blavatsky's teaching, cited by Professor Iyer, gives the central key: the human Ego is neither *Atman* nor *Buddhi*, but higher *Manas*, and ancient works refer to it as *Karana Sharira* on the plane of *Sutratma*. *Sutratma* is the golden thread on which the various personalities of the higher Ego are strung like beads. Each life is a bead, distinct and time-bound; the thread is the deeper continuity. *Karana Sharira* is the causal vesture through which the meaning of many lives can be preserved without being confined to any single personality.

The term also requires care across different classifications. In "Cognition, Breath and Speech," Professor Iyer relates the inward rhythms called breaths to *Karana Sharira* and *Anandamaya Kosha*, inseparable from *Buddhi*. Elsewhere his emphasis falls on the higher Manasic individuality and its continuing vesture. These relations should be studied in context rather than flattened into a single list of interchangeable names. The distinction between a spiritual principle and its vehicle helps the reader follow the particular argument.

This distinction is essential. Reincarnation is not the return of the surface personality in a crude or mechanical sense. The changing personality belongs to one incarnation, with its body, temperament, circumstances, hopes, wounds, tendencies, and limitations. The higher individuality endures through the deeper continuity of the Ego. *Karana Sharira* is the vesture in which the spiritual essence of experience may be gathered. It does not preserve every passing detail as ordinary memory does. It assimilates meaning, tendency, wisdom, compassion, and the moral fruit of experience.

The difference between recollection and assimilation gives this teaching a point of contact with experience. Someone may forget the details of an encounter while retaining a deeper patience learned through it. The doctrine extends that distinction beyond one life, considering the spiritual essence of experience through successive personalities. The image of a harvest expresses what is gathered and made available for further growth.

In “History and Myth,” Professor Iyer describes *Karana Sharira* as a subtle, luminous, noumenal or causal sheath. He associates withdrawal into this inward vesture with soul-memories of earlier human evolution. The claim belongs to a spiritual account of consciousness and history, giving the causal body a significance beyond the recollections of a single personality.

This broader human significance becomes especially important in Professor Iyer’s treatment of Aquarian civilization. He teaches that in an ancient Golden Age, the vast human inheritance of spiritual wisdom and scientific magic was assimilated into the *Karana Sharira*, the permanent vesture of the monad. In that inmost vesture, the container of soul-memories, the original wisdom and theurgy of humanity remain latent. This gives *Karana Sharira* a collective and evolutionary depth. The causal body is not a private storehouse of personal recollection; it is connected with the great pilgrimage of humanity and with the hidden inheritance of the Wisdom Tradition.

In “Aquarian Civilization,” Professor Iyer connects *Karana Sharira* with noetic consciousness and benevolent magic. He describes it as the ground of latent knowledge called into active potency by Hermes. The vesture is thus considered through both what it preserves and what it may make possible. Its creative significance belongs to the teaching on *Kriyashakti*, concentrated spiritual ideation, rather than to the personality’s wish to make every imagined event occur.

This active potency must be understood carefully. *Kriyashakti* is not fantasy, psychic display, or the personal will trying to manipulate events. It belongs to purified ideation, concentration, meditation, and noetic self-command. *Karana Sharira* provides the deeper vesture through which such creative thought can eventually become lawful and beneficent. When the mind is restless, personal, reactive, or bound to desire, thought scatters. When *Manas* turns toward *Buddhi*, thought becomes more causal, more luminous, and more capable of serving the whole.

Professor Iyer also links *Karana Sharira* with the meditation body. In “Kriyashakti,” he describes a permanent astral vesture emanated from the causal vesture through a development extending over many lives. He associates this purest meditation vesture with Buddha-nature or Buddha-body. Such terms belong to a demanding account of spiritual training. A moment of unusual feeling does not establish that this development has been completed; the emphasis is on sustained inward stability and freedom.

The practical meaning is immediate. *Karana Sharira* teaches the student to live causally. Instead of being swept away by outer events, reactions, hurried speech, and surface identity, one begins to ask what is being planted in the deeper field of being. Professor Iyer says that to live in the causal realm and in the *Karana Sharira*, one must see the ideas behind words and behind one’s own mind. Profound ideas take shape in the silence and solitude of the immovable mind, far from the noisy speech of the manifesting movable mind.

This gives the term a direct ordinary-life application. Much human speech is premature manifestation. A thought arises and rushes into expression, defense, display, or reaction. *Karana Sharira* asks for another rhythm: hold the idea, let it settle, let it become impersonal, let it become worthy of speech. Before speaking, one may ask: what seed is hidden in this word? Before reacting, one may ask: what am I planting in the causal field? Before despairing, one may remember: the visible personality is not the whole story.

The causal body is strengthened through discipleship. Professor Iyer teaches that as attachments to form through inverted desire are transcended, one can generate a Manasic identity, a sense of “I-am-I” independent of the *rupa*, and through meditation draw oneself toward the Spiritual Sun. In this way, one strengthens the spiritual fibres of the *Karana Sharira*. Those fibres are strengthened not by information alone, but by fidelity, meditation, restraint, compassion, non-separateness, and repeated self-correction.

Drawing a Larger Circle of Conception extends this care beyond one’s private improvement. Suppose a difficult disagreement has become a family story repeated for years. A person can ask what is being carried forward each time it is told: understanding, resentment, a warning, or a fixed picture of another human being. Silence may allow a fairer account to form. The causal inquiry concerns the quality of what the next generation receives, and the responsibility to transmit meaning with compassion.

Karana Sharira also deepens Human Solidarity and Universal Brotherhood. If the causal body holds not only individual soul-memory but also the latent inheritance of humanity, then the student is never merely working for a private salvation. Every sincere effort to purify motive, every act of compassion, every moment of true meditation contributes to the wider field. The deepest work may be hidden, but it is not lost. A purified thought, a vow kept inwardly, a truth held silently for the sake of others — these may be woven into the causal vesture.

This gives the teaching a quietly hopeful power. Human beings often feel confined by visible biography: wounds, mistakes, family patterns, social labels, and personal failures. *Karana Sharira* says that the visible story is not the whole story. There is a deeper continuity, a longer education, a more luminous memory. The soul carries not merely pain but latent wisdom, unfinished vows, and hidden strengths. To live with this knowledge is to become more patient with oneself and more compassionate toward others.

To understand *Karana Sharira* is to live less reactively and more reverently. The personality is no longer mistaken for the whole. Memory becomes more spacious. Speech becomes more responsible. Meditation becomes more serious without becoming heavy. The student begins to sense that life is not merely a sequence of events, but a field of causes. The question is no longer

only “What happened to me?” but “What essence is being formed in me?” In that recognition, *Karana Sharira* becomes not an abstract metaphysical term, but a quiet guide to causal living.

Glossary

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

Active potency — A capacity brought into effective expression, distinguished from a possibility remaining latent.

Anandamaya Kosha — The bliss sheath in Vedantic classifications; related to the causal vesture in the quoted teaching, with distinctions depending on the system and context.

Arcane — Hidden or esoteric; requiring more than an outward reading.

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

Astral vesture — A subtle vehicle through which embodied consciousness and its energies are expressed.

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

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

Causal body — The enduring spiritual vehicle considered in relation to *Buddhi* and higher *Manas*; the term has different technical uses in different systems.

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

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

Efflorescence — A flowering or full development; used of the higher intellectual individuality in the quotation.

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.

Eye of Dangma — The spiritual vision of the purified seer, described as penetrating beyond illusion.

Golden Age — A traditional image of an early period of spiritual harmony; the quotation places it within the Theosophical account of human evolution.

Gupta Vidya — Sacred or esoteric wisdom; also the title of Professor Iyer's collected Theosophical writings.

Hermes — The Greek divine messenger, associated in Hermetic and Theosophical symbolism with wisdom and the awakening of latent knowledge.

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.

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

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

Itchasakti — Will-power; also spelled *Ichchhashakti* or *Itchashakti* in transliteration.

Karana Sharira — The causal body or causal vesture, associated here with the higher individuality and the spiritual harvest of experience; also written *Karana Sarira*.

Kriyashakti — Creative spiritual power or ideation; its highest account in Professor Iyer's teaching joins concentration with universal compassion.

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

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.

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

Metaphysics — Inquiry into the nature and fundamental principles of reality, including consciousness, causation and the relation of unity to multiplicity.

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

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

Noumenal — Pertaining to an inward intelligible or spiritual ground, considered in relation to phenomenal expression.

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

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

Phenomenal — Pertaining to manifested appearances; phenomena is the plural noun.

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

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

Rupa — Form or a formed condition.

Soul-memory — The deeper spiritual memory or inheritance of the enduring individuality, distinguished from the fragmented recollections of a personality.

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

Substance — The underlying material or field of manifestation in the metaphysical account; it is not restricted to ordinary physical matter.

Sutratma — The thread-self or golden thread of continuity upon which successive personalities are pictured as beads; also *Sutratman*.

Theurgy — Spiritual or divine action; in the cited teaching, wisdom made operative through purified consciousness.

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.

Vehicle — A principle or medium through which another principle can be expressed; *Buddhi* is the spiritual vehicle of *Atman*.

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

Volition — The faculty or act of willing; the passages consider its relation to spiritual freedom.

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 Secret Doctrine*, Vol. II, p. 79.

“The human Ego is neither *Atman* nor *Buddhi*, but the higher *Manas*: the intellectual fruition and the efflorescence of the intellectual self-conscious Egotism — in the higher spiritual sense. The ancient works refer to it as *Karana Sarira* on the plane of *Sutratma*, which is the golden thread on which, like beads, the various personalities of this higher Ego are strung.”

Meditation thought: The bead and thread image distinguishes a changing personality from the continuity of spiritual individuality.

2. R.N. Iyer — “Cognition, Breath and Speech”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. I, p. 77.

“All of this amounts to a re-ascent in consciousness through the vestures of the mind towards their ultimate ground in that which is beyond manifestation. The same process may be understood in relation to the complex teaching of *Gupta Vidya* concerning the different aspects of breath and their relationship through speech to mind. Like everything else in arcane metaphysics, the concept of breath does not refer merely to something physical. It refers, even at the lowest level, to that which is astral, but which has its analogues all the way up to and including the highest vestures and beyond.”

Meditation thought: The inward meaning of breath is explored through a hierarchy of vestures and consciousness.

3. R.N. Iyer — “Cognition, Breath and Speech”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. I, p. 78.

“Philosophically, the breaths are rhythms and motions in the *karana sharira* or the *anandamaya kosha*, inseparable from *Buddhi*.”

Meditation thought: Similar terms can be approached through their relations without assuming every philosophical classification is identical.

4. R.N. Iyer — “The Scope of Self-Consciousness”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. I, p. 279.

“The more progress one makes in this direction, the more one can at first generate a Manasic identity, a sense of 'Iam-I', a sense of being a ray independent of the *rupa*. Then it is possible through meditation to draw oneself towards the Spiritual Sun and to recognize the unity of all the rays that come out of that One Sun, all the living ones, all the streams projected on the cosmic screen of illusion from the absolute life. Thus one strengthens the spiritual fibres of the *karana sharira*, the causal body. This is the task of discipleship, and it demands effort over successive lives.”

Meditation thought: The spiritual harvest is strengthened through a sustained orientation beyond attachment to form.

5. R.N. Iyer — “Levels of Manifestation”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. I, p. 369.

“Ancient wisdom has always taught the use of certain periods of time through which, by analogy and correspondence, one can come more easily into the subtle luminous vestures, into the *karana sharira*, and, ultimately, into the *anandamaya kosha*.”

Meditation thought: Recurring periods can provide occasions for renewed attention to the inward life.

6. R.N. Iyer — “Levels of Manifestation”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. I, p. 370.

“To live in the causal realm, and in the *karana sharira*, one must see the ideas behind words, and also behind one's own mind. Profound ideas take shape when dwelt upon in the silence and solitude of the immovable mind, far from the noisy speech of the manifesting movable mind. That which is supernally true spontaneously subsists in silence.”

Meditation thought: Let an idea mature in silence before deciding how it should enter speech.

7. R.N. Iyer — “History and Myth”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. II, p. 71.

“We are helped to withdraw our consciousness from the external precipitations and materializations in recorded History (or historical time) into our inmost recesses, at least to the *karana sharira* (the sheath of subtle, luminous, noumenal or causal substance), which may bring into view our 'soul-memories' of a past human evolution, helping us to stand outside history, as it were. When this is achieved, we shall be able to open and direct the Eye of Dangma (intimately connected with the third eye now lost to man) toward the essence of things in which no *maya* can have any influence.”

Meditation thought: The visible historical account is considered alongside a deeper continuity of human consciousness.

8. R.N. Iyer — “Aquarian Civilization”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. III, p. 34.

“In that idyllic time the vast human inheritance of spiritual wisdom and scientific magic was assimilated into the *karana sharira*, the permanent vesture of the monad. It is in that inmost vesture, which is the container of all soul-memories, that the original wisdom and theurgy of humanity lie latent to this day.”

Meditation thought: The inheritance of wisdom calls for stewardship rather than a claim to private possession.

9. R.N. Iyer — “Aquarian Civilization”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. III, p. 35.

“Considered in relation to noetic consciousness and benevolent magic, the significance of the *karana sharira* is that it is the ground of the latent knowledge called to active potency by Hermes.”

Meditation thought: Latent knowledge becomes significant through the quality of consciousness that brings it into use.

10. R.N. Iyer — “Kriyashakti”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. III, p. 201.

“To experience the ultimate in lightness and effortlessness combined with fearlessness, detachment and faith in creativity, one must transcend altogether the astral plane. One must develop an inward sense of being that can function freely through the *karana sharira*, the permanent vesture which is the basis of the permanent astral body.”

Meditation thought: The meditation body is contemplated as a long development of inward stability and freedom.

11. R.N. Iyer — “Kriyashakti”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. III, p. 201.

“This process, continuing through many lifetimes, involves the hatching out of astral matter of a particular kind of permanent astral vesture, which itself is emanated out of the *karana sharira* out of the purest vesture which might be called 'the meditation body'. It is what is sometimes called in Buddhist literature the Buddha-nature or Buddha-body. Only through profound meditation can one gain a sense of the potential reality of that subtle vesture of meditation.”

Meditation thought: Patience gives spiritual aspiration a horizon wider than the demands of one lifetime.

12. T. Subba Row, quoted by H.P. Blavatsky — “The Twelve Signs of the Zodiac”, *The Secret Doctrine*, Vol. II, p. 173.

“*Kriyasakti* — the mysterious power of thought which enables it to produce external, perceptible, phenomenal results by its own inherent energy. The ancients held that any idea will manifest itself externally, if one’s attention (and Will) is deeply concentrated upon it; similarly, an intense volition will be followed by the desired result. A *Yogi* generally performs his wonders by means of *Itchasakti* (Will-power) and *Kriyasakti*.”

Meditation thought: Creative potency is considered in relation to trained attention and will; its beneficent use calls for purified motive.