

Moha

Definitional Essay

Theosophy Trust

Moha means delusion, bewilderment, infatuation, or ignorance of truth. In the Theosophical and *Gupta Vidya* setting, it is more than not knowing. It is the mind's captivity to unreality, the inward hardening of illusion into a way of being. *Moha* begins when the finite is taken as final, when the passing mask is treated as the Self, and when the conditioned personality becomes the center around which thought, speech, and action revolve.

Professor Iyer makes an essential distinction between *maya* and *moha*. *Maya* is the field of appearance, relativity, and conditioned manifestation. It belongs to the divine process of the world. *Moha* is the mind's deluded bondage within that field. The real difficulty, he says, is entrenched delusion: the consolidation of the ephemeral and finite at the expense of the immortal and infinite in man and Nature.

Moha works through captivity to a conditioned sense of being. It appears as mindlessness, passivity, fear, insecurity, obsession with success and failure, slavery to comparative merit, and dependence upon external façades. It may appear as ambition or resignation, pride or helplessness, worldly hunger or pseudo-spiritual detachment. What all these forms share is a narrowed standpoint.

The distinction asks for care in judging others. A person who lacks information may readily welcome a correction; another who possesses much information may arrange it around an assumption that must never be questioned. The second condition reveals the ethical problem more clearly. The mind has an interest in remaining confined. It may defend an appearance because the appearance confers security or importance. Recognizing that interest in oneself gives discrimination a practical beginning, without claiming knowledge of another person's hidden motives.

The teaching concerns philosophical and moral bewilderment. Its purpose is self-examination, not a method for diagnosing the inner condition of a stranger. To call every disagreement *moha* would itself protect one's opinions from inquiry. The student must be willing to discover that a criticism contains truth, that a remembered injury has acquired imaginary details, or that a cherished explanation leaves out the circumstances of someone else. The possibility of correction belongs to both sides of a disagreement.

The Voice of the Silence says that the mind is the great slayer of the Real. This does not condemn mind itself. *Manas* is a divine power when turned toward *Buddhi*, toward intuition, compassion,

and discrimination. But when *Manas* is enslaved to desire, fear, and the senses, it becomes the maker of false worlds. It mistakes its own images for truth and then bows before them.

The cure is *metanoia*, a turning around of the mind. This is not a passing mood but a reversal of standpoint. Instead of seeing from below upward, through fear and comparison, the student learns to see from above downward, through the eye of the soul. The practical beginning is the question “Who am I?” Am I merely a bundle of habits, reactions, anxieties, and social images, or is there a deeper witness capable of truth?

In ordinary life, freedom from *moha* begins in small acts of honesty. One sees the desire to appear right and lets it soften. One catches resentment before turning it into righteousness. One recognizes fear before making it into a philosophy. One sees another person’s weakness without reducing them to it. Such moments loosen the prison of delusion.

Suppose an invitation receives no reply. Before knowing what happened, the mind may construct an account of rejection and rehearse the answer it intends to give. The actual fact is small: no reply has arrived. The interpretation may already be elaborate. One can distinguish the fact from the story, consider other explanations and make a courteous inquiry. This modest exercise does not amount to spiritual illumination. It does reveal how readily an unexamined image begins to govern feeling and conduct.

Drawing a Larger Circle of Conception begins here by recovering what the narrow story excluded. The other person has duties, difficulties and an inward life that may be unknown to us. Our own disappointment also deserves honest recognition. A wider view holds both without requiring either to become the whole truth. In this way discrimination and compassion can assist each other. Clearer thought makes kindness less sentimental, while kindness gives the mind a reason to investigate beyond its first defensive account.

Professor Iyer gives the compassionate image of the lotus lake. Some beings are deeply plunged in the mud of *maya* and *moha*. Some have already risen to the surface and opened to the Spiritual Sun. Many are in the middle, struggling upward through the currents of earthly life. These are the ones who need assurance that they too can rise.

This image protects the doctrine from harshness. Every human being participates in *moha* to some degree. Delusion is grave, but it is not hopeless. The lotus hidden in mud still belongs to the Sun. Compassion does not excuse delusion, but it refuses to identify a soul with its present bondage.

Moha also has social and ethical consequences. It isolates, narrows the circle of concern, and makes consciousness circle around “my success, my hurt, my image, my security.” When *moha* is lessened, the circle widens. Thought becomes less reactive, speech cleaner, suffering more

instructive, and relationships less possessive. The work of freeing the mind is therefore a form of service to Universal Brotherhood and Human Solidarity.

The oldest practical safeguard is altruism. Professor Iyer points away from brooding on the shadow and toward living for others. Self-study must become self-transcendence. Through self-forgetfulness, dutifulness, detachment, and concern for the human family, the mind discovers that its prison was partly maintained by contraction.

The work needs continuity because a recognized pattern can return under a different name. Pride may become pride in humility; resentment may become attachment to a carefully cultivated forgiveness. Patient self-study examines the motive again when circumstances change. It need not become a running accusation against oneself. Professor Iyer's counsel against brooding on the shadow directs attention toward a useful duty that can be undertaken now. A concrete act of assistance can interrupt an otherwise endless conversation with one's own importance.

Recollection also changes the place of memory. In "Anamnesis," the soul passes through many roles while retaining the capacity to know itself as more than its masks. That capacity gives the study of *moha* its hope. A habit may be old and consequential without being the final measure of the person who carries it. Responsibility includes making amends where harm has occurred, learning what sustained the error and preparing a different response. Freedom grows through this willingness to learn, rather than through a declaration that the past has ceased to matter.

The student can therefore review a day with a specific question: where did an assumption harden before it was examined? One honest instance gives more material for learning than a sweeping verdict upon one's entire character. Tomorrow's response can begin with what that instance has made clear.

Moha teaches by warning and by hope. It shows what happens when *Manas* forgets *Buddhi*, but it also shows that the mind can turn. If the lotus is in mud, it can still rise. If the mind is the slayer of the Real, it can also, when purified, become the servant of the Real. To understand *moha* is to discover where one is asleep, and to begin to turn toward the Sun.

Glossary

Anamnesis — Recollection or recovery of an inward knowledge; Professor Iyer applies it to the soul's recognition that it exceeds its changing roles.

Buddha — An awakened or enlightened one; in the cited teachings, the title refers to Gautama *Buddha*.

Buddhi — The spiritual soul or faculty of intuitive discernment; Buddhist means pertaining to it.

Cognition — Knowing or the act of knowing; cogniser names the knower, and cognised refers to what is known.

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

Dvesha — Aversion or anger; *Dwesha* is the source's entry form, describing anger and hatred in relation to desire and ignorance of truth.

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

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

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

Ishvara — The Lord or manifested divine principle; also written *Ishwara*, *Iswara* or *Eswara* in the sources.

Kama — Desire or appetite; its association with mind is called *Kama-Manas*.

Krishna — The divine teacher in the *Bhagavad Gita*, representing a source of spiritual wisdom and guidance.

Krodha — Anger; associated in the quoted account with desire, greed and delusion.

Kshetrajna / Kshetragna — The knower of the field; the two spellings occur in Theosophical discussions of the witnessing or Supreme Self.

Lobha — Greed or avarice; *loba* is the spelling in the quoted passage.

Manas — The self-conscious thinking principle; in its higher sense, the reincarnating individuality. Manasic means pertaining to this principle.

Manifestation — The expression of differentiated existence from a subtler or unmanifest condition.

Maya — Conditioned or illusory appearance when compared with ultimate reality; not a denial of responsibility within lived experience.

Metanoia — A radical change of heart and mind, involving a reorientation of understanding, feeling and will.

Moha — Delusion or ignorance of truth; in Professor Iyer's account, the mind's entrenched captivity to finite appearances and a conditioned identity.

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

Raga — Attachment, passion or desire; the quoted glossary account connects it with pride and evil desire.

Rajah — King or ruler; used symbolically of the thought-producing mind as ruler of the senses in *The Voice of the Silence*.

Rajoguna — The quality of *rajas*, or activity and passion; *rajogunam* is the form used in the quoted passage.

Spiritual Sun — The inward source of spiritual illumination contemplated beyond the visible solar orb in Theosophical symbolism.

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

Quotes for Meditation and Self Study

1. R.N. Iyer — “Atma Vidya”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. II, p. 64.

“There is no being in any of the worlds which entirely lacks the possibility of entering into the realm of light, and not a single person can wholly avoid participation in the darkness of *moha*, delusion, of *maya*, illusion, and of *kama*, *krodha* and *loba*, desire, anger and greed.”

Meditation thought: Hold the possibility of illumination together with the fact of shared human error. What becomes of condemnation when both are remembered?

2. R.N. Iyer — “Atma Vidya”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. II, pp. 64–65.

“Early in the Gita, *Krishna* speaks of the omnipresent obscuring power of *rajogunam*, the common enemy of humanity, that which leads the best of persons to lose their firm foothold in the realm of the Divine. This progenitor of evil operates upon the mind which, as a dynamic field, may be seen to manifest a positive and negative polarity, together with a third intermediate factor.”

Meditation thought: Notice a movement of agitation before accepting the conclusion it urges. How does the condition of the mind affect its judgment?

3. R.N. Iyer — “The Eye of Wisdom”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. II, p. 206.

“*Maya* is inseparable from *Ishvara* in the sum total of everything that exists in the realm of conditioned existence, and to miss this is to fall prey to a sense of pseudo-detachment that has nothing to do with true spirituality.”

Meditation thought: Examine a claim to detachment. Does it clarify one's responsibility within experience, or provide a reason to evade it?

4. R.N. Iyer — “The Eye of Wisdom”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. II, p. 206.

“The real difficulty is entrenched delusion. It is the deliberate consolidation of the ephemeral and the finite at the expense of the immortal and infinite in man and Nature. Delusion, or *moha*, works through a deliberate captivity to a conditioned sense of being, through mindlessness and passivity, through appalling fear and insecurity, through a terrible obsession with success and failure, through slavery to comparative merit and external façades.”

Meditation thought: Choose one occasion when appearance became a measure of worth. What did that measure exclude from consideration?

5. R.N. Iyer — “The Eye of Wisdom”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. II, p. 206.

“This is, of course, an unnatural condition, but it arises through a misuse of the mind, and it can only be corrected and cured by a fundamental *metanoia*, what *Buddha* called a turning around of the mind. All thinking is either from the standpoint of the real or from the standpoint of the unreal, from the standpoint of the one or from the standpoint of the many.”

Meditation thought: A change of standpoint asks more than a change of opinion. What assumption about the self is ready for examination?

6. R.N. Iyer — “The Eye of Wisdom”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. II, pp. 206–207.

“To be truly humble at least towards one's view of oneself is a starting point which can certainly give a lot of integrity to thinking. One cannot really use that as a basis and a starting point without also including other selves, without becoming concerned with general truths about the human condition, about the relationship of man to Nature, Nature to god, and therefore god to man.”

Meditation thought: Let humility include other selves. Which circumstance of another person has been absent from a judgment you have made?

7. R.N. Iyer — “Anamnesis”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. II, p. 251.

“Assuming a complex series of roles as an essential part of the endless process of learning, the soul becomes captive recurrently to myriad forms of *maya* and *moha*, illusion and delusion. At the same time, the soul has the innate and inward capacity to cognize that it is more than any and all of these masks.”

Meditation thought: Recall a role that once seemed to define you completely. What capacity for learning remained when that role changed?

8. H.P. Blavatsky — *The Theosophical Glossary*, p. 110, “Dwesa”.

“*Dwesa* (Sk.). Anger. One of the three principal states of mind (of which 63 are enumerated), which are *Râga* — pride or evil desire; *Dwesa* — anger, of which hatred is a part; and *Moha* — the ignorance of truth. These three are to be steadily avoided.”

Meditation thought: Consider how desire, anger and ignorance of truth reinforce one another. Which connection can be interrupted by a more honest attention?

9. R.N. Iyer — “The Healing of Souls”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. III, p. 85.

“Above all, if one would seek freedom from the forests of delusion, from the enslavement of *Manas* to the senses, one must turn to the one and only source which can give protection and refuge, the *Kshetragna* within the sun.”

Meditation thought: The forest image gives the senses their place within a wider field. What could guide attention beyond its immediate attractions?

10. R.N. Iyer — “The Healing of Souls”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. III, p. 85.

“*Buddha* taught that the entire world is like a lake of lotuses, each representing beings in different stages of *maya*. He explained that his life was not for the sake of those few who had already approached the Light of the Spiritual Sun, nor for those so deeply plunged in the mud of *maya* and *moha* that they could make no significant progress in their present incarnation, but rather for those in the middle, struggling to come out, those who need the assurance and the confidence that they too can move further up through the swirling currents of earth life and reach the surface of the waters and open to the sun.”

Meditation thought: Attend to those struggling toward the light. What form of encouragement would help without denying the work they must do themselves?

11. R.N. Iyer — “Spectator and Participant”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. III, pp. 320–321.

“The oldest and wisest course is to begin to practise altruism. Try to live for others. Try to see beyond the self, by forgetting the self. Everyone is entitled to look earnestly at the sky under which all human beings live and to look lovingly at the earth upon which all human beings walk.”

Meditation thought: Choose a useful duty that interrupts preoccupation with your own image. Let the actual needs of the task direct attention.

12. H.P. Blavatsky — *The Voice of the Silence*, p. 1.

“Having become indifferent to objects of perception, the pupil must seek out the *Rajah* of the senses, the Thought-Producer, he who awakes illusion. The Mind is the great Slayer of the Real. Let the Disciple slay the Slayer.”

Meditation thought: Distinguish the power to think from captivity to thought's images. What changes when an image is examined instead of obeyed?