

Psychic Consciousness

Definitional Essay

Theosophy Trust

Psychic consciousness is the personal field of awareness associated, in Theosophical teaching, with lower *Manas*, desire, impressions, and the changing conditions of embodied life. The word psychic has a broader meaning here than its common association with extraordinary perceptions. It includes familiar responses: the memory that colors an encounter, the expectation that directs attention, and the feeling that quickly becomes an interpretation. Understanding the term helps us study how experience is received before deciding what that experience means.

H.P. Blavatsky distinguishes psychic from noetic action. Noetic refers to the higher mind and its spiritual source; psychic concerns the reflected mind working through the personal constitution. Professor Iyer relates the latter to *Manas* in association with *kama*, the desire principle. These are distinctions of function and orientation. An impression can be inward, subtle, or emotionally compelling while remaining personal and conditioned. Its intensity does not establish that it discloses another person's intention or the hidden meaning of an event.

This is a useful point of entry for self-study. We hear a short reply and feel dismissed. The feeling is real as an experience, but the conclusion may need examination. Perhaps the other person is impatient; perhaps attention was divided; perhaps we have carried an earlier disappointment into the exchange. Psychic consciousness gathers impressions and associations very quickly. Reflective attention can distinguish what was perceived from what was added, preserving the experience while opening its interpretation to a more adequate understanding.

In "Aquarian Spirituality," Professor Iyer describes psychic action as limited by the polarities of *kama*. Attraction and aversion organize the field around what seems desirable or threatening to the personal self. This organization has practical force. A compliment can make a weak argument appear persuasive, while an unwelcome speaker can make a sound argument difficult to hear. The inquiry concerns these distortions of judgment. It does not require becoming indifferent to feeling; it asks that feeling be considered within a wider account of the situation.

The governing image is a reflecting surface. What appears there depends upon the object, the light, and the condition of the surface itself. A troubled reflection may tell us something about what is before us and something about the medium through which we see it. This is why self-observation matters. We cannot simply remove ourselves from perception, but we can become more aware of the expectations and desires that shape it. Such awareness makes an honest question possible before an uncertain impression becomes an accusation.

Consider hearing a rumor about someone absent from a gathering. The story fits an irritation we already feel, and agreement offers the comfort of belonging to the group. We may notice the satisfaction before noticing how little is actually known. A responsible response begins by separating the report from the reaction it produces. What was directly observed? What has been inferred? Does passing the story onward serve a legitimate need? The personal mind can ask these questions even while the attraction of the story remains.

Drawing a Larger Circle of Conception includes the absent person, the uncertainty of the information, and the effects that repetition could have. Human Solidarity is expressed by allowing another person the dignity of an account not constructed entirely from other people's impressions. This does not require ignoring reliable evidence or protecting harmful conduct. It requires care with what we claim to know. The same sensitivity that made us responsive to the group can become attentive to the person whose voice the group has not heard.

Professor Iyer's "Noetic Self-Determination" explains why such a change is possible. The projected ray of *Manas* has an intermittent capacity to disengage from desire. In moments of limited objectivity, alternatives become visible. We can recognize similarities and differences instead of following the first emotional association. This beginning is modest, but it matters. The mind does not have to wait until every bias is dissolved before refraining from an unjust word or seeking information that might revise an attractive interpretation.

The psychic nature also has capacities that can serve care. Imagination helps us consider what another person may be experiencing; sensitivity allows us to notice a change of tone; memory recalls a promise or a previous difficulty. These faculties need direction and proportion. Imagination can inquire, or it can claim to know what has never been communicated. Sensitivity can invite a question, or it can demand obedience to a feeling. Their usefulness grows when the higher purpose of understanding guides their expression.

This distinction is especially important in affection. Professor Iyer's "Eros and Kamadeva" examines the ways desire can employ the mind in possessive love. Strong feeling may seek reassurance, control, or confirmation of a preferred identity. The task is to bring intelligence and care to those claims. We can acknowledge a wish without assigning someone else the obligation to fulfill it. Affection then has a chance to become more attentive to the actual person, including the freedom and difference that make a relationship possible.

"Continuity and Choice" places the question within a larger decision about identity. Will we understand ourselves chiefly as a personal center to which events happen, or cultivate a more conscious relation to the purposes by which we live? This is not a denial of circumstances beyond our control. It asks what responsibility remains available within them. We may be

unable to change a report already circulating, yet still choose whether to repeat it, correct it, or listen more fairly when the person concerned can speak.

Meditation supports this work by revealing how readily impressions continue after their occasion has passed. An exchange is replayed, a reply improved, an imagined judgment answered. The student can notice the process and return attention to a steadier object of inquiry. The aim is neither to manufacture blankness nor to treat every inward image as a message. It is to become less compelled by the succession of images, so that attention can serve a chosen purpose with greater continuity.

Blavatsky's contrast between action from without inward and from within outward is developed within her spiritual philosophy of mind. Professor Iyer uses it to distinguish reaction to appearances from understanding informed by a deeper principle. In practical life, the distinction asks whether an impression has become our only guide. A principle such as truthfulness can give us a reason to pause, even when the surrounding atmosphere rewards an immediate reaction. The personal faculties are then being brought into a different relation with the source of their direction.

We should apply this inquiry first to ourselves. Calling someone else psychic can easily become a way to dismiss the person without listening. The terminology is most useful when it makes our own judgments more accountable. It can help us notice the gratification of certainty, the wish to influence, or the refusal to consider another explanation. Correction becomes more humane when we remember that these tendencies belong to common human experience and that their presence does not exhaust anyone's capacity to learn.

A reflecting surface becomes more useful as distortion is recognized and reduced. In the same way, personal awareness can become more trustworthy through careful observation, honest inquiry, and repeated acts of restraint. Its sensitivity need not be lost. It can be educated into responsiveness, allowing feeling and imagination to support a more generous understanding. The work is carried into each encounter where we leave room for what we do not yet know and give another person a fairer chance to be seen.

Glossary

Absolute — Unconditioned reality, beyond the limitations and relations of manifested existence.

Astral — Pertaining to the subtle form or field associated in Theosophy with embodied life and psychic impressions.

Atman — The universal spiritual principle, also written *Atma*; distinguished from the personal sense of self.

Black Magic — The selfish, harmful, or coercive use of occult powers in the terminology of the quoted sources.

Buddhi-Manas — *Manas* illumined by *Buddhi*; spiritual discernment focused through self-conscious mind.

Composite — Made up of several constituents; used of the temporary personal vehicles of consciousness.

Dugpa — In the quoted Theosophical usage, a practitioner of harmful or coercive occultism. This polemical use should not be applied as a label for a Tibetan people or religious community.

Egotism — Self-centered appropriation or assertion. Some older quoted usage qualifies the term to refer instead to higher spiritual self-consciousness.

Higher Manas — The enduring thinking individuality, distinguished from its personal or lower ray; spiritual illumination involves its union with *Buddhi*.

Human Solidarity — Shared human dignity and interdependence, expressed through considerate responsibility for others.

Ideation — The activity or formative power of thought; in the sources, also the spiritual patterns underlying manifestation.

Idée fixe — French for a fixed idea; a thought that persistently dominates attention.

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

Kama — Desire or passion in the human constitution; in cosmic symbolism, also an impulse toward creation or universal good. Kamic means pertaining to *kama*.

Kama-Manas — The personal or lower mind in association with desire; also written *kama manas*.

Kama-rupa — The desire-form; the organization of passions and desires associated with the personal nature, also discussed as a postmortem residue. *Kamarupa* and Kama-rupic are related forms.

Kamadeva — The deity of love or desire; in Theosophical cosmology, a symbol of an all-embracing creative desire for universal good.

Lower Manas — The personal or projected ray of mind, working through embodied faculties and capable of association with desire or guidance from higher understanding.

Manas — The thinking principle or self-conscious mind; its higher individuality and lower personal ray are distinguished. Manasic means pertaining to *Manas*.

Metaphysics — Inquiry into the fundamental principles and relations of reality beyond immediate appearances.

Metapsychology — A philosophical inquiry into mind and its spiritual ground, beyond the description of personal responses alone.

Noetic — Pertaining to the higher or spiritual mind; associated here with *Buddhi-Manas* and an understanding rooted in unity.

Noetic self-determination — The conscious direction of thought and action from the standpoint of the spiritual individuality.

Nous — Greek for mind or intelligence; used in these Theosophical passages for the higher or divine mind.

Occultism — The study and disciplined realization of hidden laws and spiritual principles; the quoted sources distinguish it from the mere exercise of unusual powers.

Personality — The temporary personal constitution, memories, and roles of a particular life, distinguished from the enduring individuality.

Plane — A level or mode of being or consciousness; not necessarily a location in physical space.

Psychic — Pertaining to personal and subtle awareness shaped by impressions and desire; not by itself equivalent to spiritual wisdom.

Psycho-molecular — Blavatsky's term in the quotation for psychic action through the composite bodily vehicles, contrasted with noetic or spiritual action.

Silent Spectator — Professor Iyer's designation for the higher witnessing intelligence and source of spiritual self-conscious will.

Spiritual-dynamical — Blavatsky's proposed expression for noetic force acting from within outward in her metaphysical account.

Vesture — A sheath or vehicle through which consciousness acts; often used of the temporary human instruments.

Quotes for Meditation and Self Study

1. H.P. Blavatsky — *The Gupta Vidya*, Volume III, Appendix A — “Psychic and Noetic Action” — p. 449

“Now, since the metaphysics of Occult physiology and psychology postulate within mortal man an immortal entity, ‘divine mind,’ or *Nous*, whose pale and too often distorted reflection is that which we call ‘Mind’ and intellect in men – virtually an entity apart from the former during the period of incarnation – we say that the two sources of ‘memory’ are in these two ‘principles.’”

Meditation thought: The reflected mind is placed within a larger spiritual constitution. Let the distinction encourage inquiry into the sources of a response, without treating a compelling personal impression as the whole of what can be known.

2. R.N. Iyer — *The Gupta Vidya*, Volume II — “Noetic Self-Determination” — p. 273

“Consider a human being who is completely caught up in chaotic desires and who is extremely uncritical in relation to his experiences, his tastes, his likes — in short, to his self-image. Even that kind of person will have moments of disengagement from emotion and a relative freedom from desire. In such moments of limited objectivity the person may see what is otherwise invisible. He may see alternatives, recognize degrees, glimpse similarities and differences from other human beings in similar situations; gradually, he may sense the potential for self-determination.”

Meditation thought: A moment of objectivity can interrupt the movement from desire to action. Notice the alternative that becomes visible and give it enough attention to become a practical possibility.

3. R.N. Iyer — *The Gupta Vidya*, Volume I — “Dateless and Deathless” — p. 103

“In other words, though the metaphor of the two birds or selves is helpful, one is, in reality, only one being with the power of ideation. The concept of the scale of ideation, ranging from the absolute and abstract to the particular and concrete, is directly reflected in the constitution of the human mind. The distinction between the divine intelligence of higher *Manas* and the personal ray of the same mind is really a difference between sets or classes of perceptions. One can look at anything passively by comparing and contrasting, obsessively, and from within a narrow spatio-temporal framework. Or one can loosen the framework and look at the same thing from a larger perspective, in relation to the distant past and what may be in the dawning future, in relation to what is deceptively near or far, but also in relation to certain intimate feelings and enduring convictions that are actually much closer to oneself than the dominant emotions or *idée fixe* of any particular context.”

Meditation thought: We can alter the frame through which an event is understood. A wider horizon may reveal an enduring conviction or a relation obscured by the emotion that first dominated the scene.

4. H.P. Blavatsky — *The Gupta Vidya*, Volume III, Appendix A — “Psychic and Noetic Action” — p. 451

“Responding to the touch of both a physical and a metaphysical Force, the impulse given by the psychic (or psycho-molecular) Force will act from without within; while that of the noetic (shall we call it Spiritual-dynamical?) Force works from within without.”

Meditation thought: The contrast concerns the direction of influence within Blavatsky’s spiritual philosophy. In self-study, ask whether an immediate impression has become the sole guide or whether a more inclusive principle can inform the response.

5. R.N. Iyer — *The Gupta Vidya*, Volume III — “Aquarian Spirituality” — p. 62

“The same facts viewed from the standpoint of meta-psychology lead to the distinction between the noetic action of *Buddhi-Manas*, which draws upon the light of the one indivisible *Atman*, and the psychic action of the lower *Manas*, which is inherently restricted by the polarities of the *kama* principle to residual effects upon the composite mortal vestures.”

Meditation thought: Personal awareness is shaped by attraction and aversion. Recognizing their influence can help us examine an interpretation before allowing it to determine how another person will be treated.

6. R.N. Iyer — *The Gupta Vidya*, Volume III — “Aquarian Spirituality” — p. 62

“In essence, the difference between atoms and molecules, between noetic and psychic action, is the difference between seeing from within without and seeing only from outside. Hence, people often come closest to the core of things when they shut their sense-organs, which is where concentration and meditation begin.”

Meditation thought: Quiet can loosen the urgency of impressions. Use the interval to inquire into what an experience means, allowing reflection to precede the claim that its meaning has already been established.

7. R.N. Iyer — *The Gupta Vidya*, Volume II — “Noetic Self-Determination” — p. 273

“Whereas *Manas* itself is noetic, and signifies what could be called the spiritual individuality, there is also that which may be called the psychic individuality — this same *Manas* in association with *kama*, or desire. This projected ray of *Manas* itself has a capacity, though intermittent, for a kind of free will.”

Meditation thought: The psychic nature includes a capacity for limited freedom. Its conditioning can be acknowledged while the personal mind learns to recognize and exercise the alternatives still available within a particular situation.

8. R.N. Iyer — *The Gupta Vidya*, Volume II — “Noetic Self-Determination” — p. 273

“The projected ray of *Manas* is the basis of the psychic nature and potentially the organ of free will in physical man. *Manas* itself is the basis of the higher self-conscious will, which has no special organ, but is capable, independent of the brain and personality, of functioning on its own.”

Meditation thought: The instrument and its higher source are distinct without being unrelated. Consider how the personal faculties can become more reliable when their activity is directed by a purpose larger than immediate satisfaction.

9. R.N. Iyer — *The Gupta Vidya*, Volume II — “Continuity and Choice” — p. 284

“The moment of choice takes a variety of forms, but in the end all the choices come back to one basic choice: living in terms of a false conception of psychic identity caught passively in a series of events happening to oneself, or living self-consciously with awareness as a noetic being.”

Meditation thought: The choice concerns the standpoint from which life is approached. We may not control the event, yet can still examine the meaning assigned to it and the responsibility available in responding.

10. R.N. Iyer — *The Gupta Vidya*, Volume II — “Noetic Self-Determination” — p. 273

“The contrast between the silent Spectator and the despotic lower *Manas* explains the difference between the psychic and the noetic. Wherever there is an assertion of the egotistic will, there is an exaggeration of the astral shadow and an intensification of *kama manas*.”

Meditation thought: The demand to prevail can magnify a partial impression. Let the recognition of that demand make room for a question, a missing fact, or another person’s account before judgment hardens.

11. R.N. Iyer — *The Gupta Vidya*, Volume II — “Noetic Self-Determination” — p. 273

“When the projected ray of *Manas* becomes hard and cold, it tends to become parasitic upon others, taking without returning, claiming without thanking, continuously scheming without scruples. Ultimately, this not only produces a powerful *kamarupa*, but also puts one on the path towards becoming an apprentice *dugpa* or black magician.”

Meditation thought: This warning concerns the deliberate hardening of intelligence into exploitation. Apply it as a test of one’s own motives, restoring reciprocity and respect rather than using spiritual language to condemn another person.

12. R.N. Iyer — *The Gupta Vidya*, Volume I — “Eros and Kamadeva” — 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: Intensity does not by itself establish the quality of love. Attend to the claims that strong feeling makes upon another person, and consider whether those claims permit care to become freer and more considerate.