

Salayatana

Definitional Essay

Theosophy Trust

Salayatana means the six sense-bases: eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind. They open upon visible forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tangible objects and mental objects respectively. *Salāyatana* is the Pali spelling; the corresponding Sanskrit expression is *Shadayatana*. H.P. Blavatsky uses the older spelling *Chadāyatana* for the organs of sensation. The six bases are the gateways of experience, distinguished from both the objects encountered and the consciousness arising in relation to them.

In the usual forward order of dependent origination, *Salayatana* is the fifth link, following *Namarupa*, name-and-form, and conditioning contact. It is not the sixth link simply because it names six bases. The order describes conditions of experience and suffering; the sixfold count describes the faculties involved. Keeping these two counts distinct helps us see the arrangement without turning it into a memorized blur of unfamiliar names.

The term should not be reduced to physical anatomy. In Buddhist analysis, mind itself is one of the sense-bases. Thus *Salayatana* refers to the whole apparatus through which a world appears to consciousness. Seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, and thinking are gateways through which consciousness meets objects, forms impressions, and enters karma.

Theosophical teaching widens this further. The physical organs are instruments of deeper powers. Behind ordinary sight, hearing, touch, and thought are subtler faculties, astral and manasic correspondences, and spiritual possibilities. A sense-organ receives, but it also selects, colors, interprets, and is influenced by desire, memory, fear, habit, and attention.

The Voice of the Silence gives the governing warning: “The Mind (*Manas*) which follows the rambling senses, makes the Soul (*Buddhi*) as helpless as the boat which the wind leads astray upon the waters.” The danger is not that the senses exist. The danger is that *Manas* follows them. When mind becomes servant of the senses, *Buddhi* cannot guide the life. Consciousness is blown about by forms, sounds, touches, pleasures, pains, memories, and fears.

The same text tells the disciple to become indifferent to objects of perception and to seek out the “*Rajah* of the senses,” the “Thought-Producer,” who awakens illusion. The six sense-bases are therefore not mastered merely by closing the eyes. One must understand the mind that organizes sensation into attraction and aversion. A color is seen and desire arises. A word is heard and anger arises. A memory appears and identity tightens. Contact is born, and the chain begins to move.

Salayatana can be approached through a quiet examination of an ordinary room. Colour, a clock's sound, warmth against the skin and a remembered conversation belong to different fields of experience. The memory is not coming through the ear merely because it contains remembered speech. It is a mental object. Distinguishing the doors helps us notice how much apparent contact with the present consists of inwardly renewed impressions.

The senses seem to confirm reality. What is seen appears true because it is seen. What is felt appears final because it is felt. But Theosophy teaches that the phenomenal field is conditioned and relative. The senses bring a world, but not the whole of Reality. They deliver appearances, not final truth.

Professor Iyer gives the psychological application. Human beings are liable to limit themselves through sense-perception, acquiring a foreshortened and angular view of who they are. When the senses are treated as ultimate, the visible body seems to be the whole self, the immediate pain the whole life, the social image the whole being, and the present object the whole field of reality.

This limitation matters in helping others. We may assume that a spoken explanation has been received because we heard ourselves give it. The listener may have missed part of the sound, been distracted, or understood the words differently. Care begins by checking the conditions of reception. A clearer setting or another form of communication can be more useful than repeating the same instruction with growing impatience.

The doctrine becomes even more practical when mind is recognized as a sense-base. Many people discipline the outer senses while leaving the mental sense-base wild. They restrain the eye but indulge images; restrain speech but feed inner argument; restrain appetite but cling to self-importance. Mental images can be as binding as physical forms.

Yet Professor Iyer's teaching prevents harsh rejection of the senses. By invoking *Buddhi*, one may transcend the lower realm while giving proper value to what is transcended. The senses are a dynamic field of minor deities and intelligences. They are not enemies; they are powers that must be honored, purified, integrated, and placed under higher guidance.

This gives *Salayatana* a stewardship dimension. The eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind are entrusted instruments. What one repeatedly looks at, listens to, touches, tastes, and thinks about shapes consciousness. To guard the senses is not puritanism; it is reverent care for the gateways through which the soul meets the world.

Guarding the gateways begins with modest choices. One can reduce unnecessary noise, allow a conversation enough time, or notice when inward rehearsal prevents hearing. These are ordinary preparations for attentiveness, not claims of mastery over every sensory response. The

discipline becomes gentler and more effective when it asks what supports clear reception instead of treating the senses as guilty for functioning.

The Voice of the Silence speaks of merging the senses into one sense. Professor Iyer, following H.P. Blavatsky, explains that the senses were once united as a single spiritual perception and later fell asunder into distinct physical senses. Present sensory fragmentation is not ultimate. It is a stage in evolution, and it may be consciously reoriented toward synthesis.

Human Solidarity becomes concrete when we remember that people do not meet the world through identical conditions. Hearing, vision, fatigue, language and inward distraction shape access to shared life. Drawing a Larger Circle of Conception includes those differences in the way we arrange a meeting or offer help. The doctrine's ethical application is not to rank people by their faculties, but to make participation possible through the faculties available to them.

Imagine a community discussion in which one participant withdraws. The group may take the silence as indifference. Moving to a quieter room, facing the speaker and supplying the subject in writing can reveal an attentive person who had been excluded by the setting. The example does not explain the whole metaphysical doctrine. It shows why studying the conditions of perception ought to make us more considerate about the conditions we provide.

Mind as a sixth base also changes the meaning of seclusion. Quiet surroundings cannot prevent a remembered argument from filling awareness. The student may close a door to external noise while carrying the argument inside. Patiently recognizing the mental object allows attention to return to the task before it. The purpose is not to force an empty mind, but to cease confusing every arriving image with a command that must be obeyed.

Salayatana is especially urgent in an age saturated with images and sounds. The eye is captured, the ear crowded, the body agitated, the tongue tempted, and the mind flooded with impressions. Without discipline, consciousness is pulled outward into fragmentation. With discipline, the same world becomes a field of practice.

The practical teaching is not withdrawal from the world, but freedom within contact. The senses may continue to function; the question is whether they govern consciousness or serve it. When *Manas* ceases to trail after the rambling senses, *Buddhi* is no longer helpless. The six doors remain open, but the house is no longer abandoned to thieves. The senses become messengers, not masters.

Glossary

Ajnyana — Ignorance or lack of spiritual knowledge; the spelling used in *The Voice of the Silence*.

Anugita — A philosophical teaching within the *Mahabharata*, discussed by Professor Iyer in relation to mind, speech and the senses.

Astral — Pertaining to the subtle formative or psychic dimension described in Theosophical teaching.

Atman — The universal Self or spiritual principle; also written *Atma*.

Buddhi — The spiritual soul or vehicle of *Atman* in Theosophy, associated with intuitive discernment and the illumination of *Manas*.

Chadâyatana — Blavatsky's historical spelling for the organs of sensation; related to *Shadayatana* and *Salayatana*.

Conditioned — Dependent upon causes, circumstances, limits or relations; contrasted with the unconditioned.

Dependent Origination — The Buddhist teaching that conditioned existence and suffering arise through interdependent causes; the Twelve *Nidanas* give a standard twelvefold exposition.

Drawing a Larger Circle of Conception — Widening understanding to include relationships, circumstances and responsibilities omitted by an isolated personal view.

Epistemological — Pertaining to the nature, conditions and limits of knowledge.

Fifth Root Race — The fifth great phase of humanity in Theosophical cosmology; a technical evolutionary designation, not a modern ethnic classification.

Human Solidarity — Recognition of shared human dignity, vulnerability and interdependence, expressed through considerate responsibility.

Ideation — The activity or principle of thought; in cosmic contexts, universal intelligence rather than a private mental image.

Inferential — Reached by reasoning from signs or evidence; contrasted in the cited discussion with the direct involvement of mind in perception.

Karma — The law of ethical causation and adjustment; actions and motives bear consequences within a wider order.

Manas — The thinking principle in Theosophy; its higher spiritual individuality is distinguished from the personal ray. Manasic means pertaining to *Manas*.

Mara — The personification of temptation and delusion in Buddhist and Theosophical imagery.

Namarupa — Name-and-form; mental and bodily factors in dependent origination, and the named personality in Theosophical exposition. *Nāmarūpa* and *Nâmarûpa* are alternate spellings.

Nidana — A causal link or condition; the Twelve *Nidanas* describe the arising of conditioned existence. *Nidâna* is a historical spelling.

Pali — The language of the Theravada Buddhist canon; the source of such forms as *Phassa* and *Vinnana*.

Perfidious — Treacherous or deceptively alluring; used in *The Voice of the Silence* of appearances that mislead the unwary.

Personality — The temporary personal constitution, memories and roles of one life, distinguished from the enduring individuality in Theosophy.

Phenomenal — Pertaining to appearances and conditioned experience, as distinguished from an ultimate or underlying reality.

Probation — A period of testing and preparation; used of the spiritual discipline in *The Voice of the Silence*.

Rajah — A king or ruler; the *Rajah* of the senses symbolizes the thought-producing mind in *The Voice of the Silence*.

Root Race — A major phase in Theosophical human evolution; a technical cosmological term, not equivalent to modern ethnicity.

Salayatana — The six sense-bases of eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind; the fifth link in dependent origination. *Salāyatana* is the Pali form.

Sanskrit — The classical Indian language from which many Theosophical technical terms are drawn.

Shadayatana — The Sanskrit expression corresponding to Pali *Salayatana*, the six sense-bases.

Skandhas — The aggregates or changing factors of personal experience. *Skandha* is the singular; historical Theosophical translations of the factors differ from current Buddhist terminology.

Sparsa — Sanskrit for contact or touch, corresponding to Pali *Phassa*; the Glossary's narrower phrase is the sense of touch.

Vedana — Feeling or sensation, particularly the pleasant, painful or neutral tone of experience; the seventh link. *Vedanā* and *Vêdâna* are alternate spellings.

Quotes for Meditation and Self Study

1. H.P. Blavatsky, "Nidâna", *The Theosophical Glossary*, p. 232.

"(6) *Vêdâna*, or sensation; perception by the senses, it is the 5th *Skandha*. (7) *Sparsa*, the sense of touch. (8) *Chadâyâtana*, the organs of sensation. (9) *Nâmarûpa*, personality, i.e., a form with a name to it, the symbol of the unreality of material phenomenal appearances."

Meditation thought: The historical entry groups sensation, contact, organs and personality in its own enumeration. Its numbers and terminology differ from the usual forward Buddhist sequence; the present essay identifies *Salayatana* as the fifth link, naming six bases.

2. H.P. Blavatsky, "Preface", *The Voice of the Silence*, p. xi (citing the *Bhagavad Gita*).

"The Mind (*Manas*) which follows the rambling senses, makes the Soul (*Buddhi*) as helpless as the boat which the wind leads astray upon the waters."

Meditation thought: The boat is the image of a mind carried by its impressions. The discipline is to restore direction, with sensitivity to what supports steadier attention.

3. 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: Closing the eyes does not silence the producer of mental images. Consider the difference between withdrawing a faculty from an object and understanding the mind's relation to what it perceives.

4. H.P. Blavatsky, *The Voice of the Silence*, p. 6.

"Stifle the voice of flesh, allow no image of the senses to get between its light and thine, that thus the twain may blend in one. And having learnt thine own *Ajnyana*, flee from the Hall of Learning. This Hall is dangerous in its perfidious beauty, is needed but for thy probation."

Meditation thought: The warning concerns fascination with appearances that obscure inward discernment. It asks for lucid discrimination, not contempt for the body or its legitimate care.

5. H.P. Blavatsky, *The Voice of the Silence*, p. 7.

"This light shines from the jewel of the Great Ensnarer, (*Mara*). The senses it bewitches, blinds the mind, and leaves the unwary an abandoned wreck."

Meditation thought: *Mara* symbolizes the power of illusion to captivate. Notice when a compelling impression is granted authority simply because it is vivid.

6. H.P. Blavatsky, *The Voice of the Silence*, p. 13.

“Merge into one sense thy senses, if thou would’st be secure against the foe. ’Tis by that sense alone which lies concealed within the hollow of thy brain, that the steep path which leadeth to thy Master may be disclosed before thy Soul’s dim eyes.”

Meditation thought: The gathering of the senses is presented as an inward discipline. The image of integration points beyond distraction without making fragmentation a reason for self-condemnation.

7. R.N. Iyer, “Cognition, Breath and Speech”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Volume I, p. 79.

“Only through the mind are the various senses able to apprehend their respective objects. Unlike some epistemological systems which attempt to conceive the full operation of the senses independently of the mind, and then to depict the activity of the mind in relation to the senses as purely inferential, the *Anugita* points to a much more intimate relationship.”

Meditation thought: The faculties do not operate as an assemblage detached from mind. Attention to their relation helps us see why clear reception involves more than the physical presence of an object.

8. R.N. Iyer, “Cognition, Breath and Speech”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Volume I, p. 79.

“By recognizing the predominance of the mind in relation to the lower astral and physical senses, it is possible through deliberation and thoughtfulness to rise above the compulsive and involuntary processes that operate through the sense-organs of the gross body.”

Meditation thought: Deliberation can change the way sensory processes govern conduct. One small preparation for a conversation may enable more attentive listening than a demand for instant concentration.

9. R.N. Iyer, “Cognition, Breath and Speech”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Volume I, p. 80.

“By invoking the power of *Buddhi*, it is possible to transcend everything in this lower realm, while at the same time giving proper value to all that is being transcended. This means recognizing that the entire realm of the lower senses is a dynamic field of minor deities and intelligences.”

Meditation thought: The higher standpoint is asked to give proper value to what it transcends. Reverence for the faculties belongs with the effort to place them under wiser guidance.

10. R.N. Iyer, “Involution”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Volume I, p. 255.

“The separation of the senses characteristic of humanity in the Fifth Root Race represents a later and transitory stage of development which will eventually be resolved through a return to an earlier integrity of the faculties.”

Meditation thought: The separation of faculties is given an evolutionary interpretation. Contemplate the possibility of integration without confusing this occult account with a modern anatomical description.

11. R.N. Iyer, "Karma and Transmutation", *The Gupta Vidya*, Volume III, p. 371.

"Human beings are liable to limit themselves through sense-perception, acquiring a foreshortened and angular view of who they are. Through the progressive negation of false limitations, it is possible to regenerate awareness of the sphere of light that surrounds every human being, and to sense the intimate and close connection between that sphere and the sphere of light that surrounds every animal, every object, even every globe and planet, ultimately even the sun and the entire starry universe."

Meditation thought: A limited view of oneself can narrow the whole field of relation. The passage widens perception toward interdependence, giving a metaphysical foundation for more inclusive care.

12. R.N. Iyer, "The Astral Body", *The Gupta Vidya*, Volume III, p. 76.

"By treating the body as a temple and also as a laboratory for the making of judicious experiments through the powers of ideation and imagination, much can be discovered in reference to the different principles."

Meditation thought: The body is approached with reverence and thoughtful observation. Its care and use are part of spiritual responsibility, not obstacles to it.