

Varuna

Definitional Essay

Theosophy Trust

Varuna is a Vedic deity whose Theosophical interpretation opens from the sea toward the encompassing depths of Space. In Blavatsky's account, the waters associated with him signify the Waters of Space or all-investing *Akasha* before they are understood as terrestrial oceans. The distinction changes the scale of the symbol. Water becomes an image through which the mind approaches the field that contains a world, while *Varuna* joins that encompassing presence to order, knowledge and moral responsibility.

The Theosophical Glossary expressly distinguishes *Varuna* from a merely marine deity. Its comparison with the Greek Ouranos places him in a cosmic setting. *The Secret Doctrine* likewise calls him the Universal Encompasser and interprets the later oceanic figure as a narrowing of an older conception of Space. This is Blavatsky's comparative reading of sacred symbolism. It should be approached as a metaphysical interpretation, with attention to the contexts of the traditions being compared.

An ocean can help us contemplate that interpretation without exhausting it. A vessel moves upon a surface whose depth it cannot see; its route depends upon relations extending beyond its own outline. Yet Space in this doctrine is not simply a larger quantity of water. *Akasha* is a subtle spiritual principle, and physical water is one visible field through which the symbolism becomes approachable. The image is useful when it widens inquiry and remains an image.

The Glossary quotes Muir on the cosmic functions attributed to *Varuna*: sustaining heaven and earth, knowing the paths of birds and ships, and witnessing human truth and falsehood. These passages belong to a portrayal of an ordered and intelligible universe. Their moral force arises from placing conduct inside that order. A human act does not become inconsequential because it is hidden from immediate observation or because its effects have not yet returned to its maker.

Truthfulness therefore has a depth beyond the fear of being discovered. A knowingly misleading statement alters a relationship and gives its speaker a false position to maintain. Other statements may then be required to protect it. The symbol of encompassing waters suggests that these consequences enter a field already shared with other lives. This is an ethical reflection upon *Varuna*'s portrayal, rather than a claim that a particular emotion literally changes cosmic water.

Cosmic order also exceeds the rules that a person or community happens to prefer. Invoking law should not make one's own judgment immune to examination. A sincere account of events

may still be incomplete, and an established custom may conceal an avoidable injury. The moral witness in *Varuna's* symbolism calls the student toward greater honesty, including honesty about the limits of personal knowledge. It asks for fidelity to truth as inquiry continues.

The same source presents *Varuna* as instructing the sage *Vasishta* in mysteries and guarding secrets associated with *Mitra*. In this setting, knowledge implies fitness of character and responsibility for use. Secrecy alone is no proof of wisdom; a claim to hidden knowledge can itself feed vanity. The more useful question concerns whether a person can receive something entrusted to them without turning it into display, advantage or an instrument of control.

This has an ordinary application when someone confides a difficulty. To be trusted with another person's uncertainty is to hold more than information. The confidence may need discretion, patient listening or practical help. It should not become a story told to establish one's importance. At the same time, responsible care requires judgment about the person's welfare. Reverence for what is entrusted becomes an active discipline, attentive to circumstances and consequences.

Blavatsky's discussion of cosmic water also relates the Great Deep to Nature, *Prakriti* and, at a more abstract level, *Aditi* and *Mulaprakriti*. These terms describe related aspects or levels; they are not interchangeable labels for one material substance. *Mulaprakriti* signifies root-substance, while the physical ocean belongs to manifested existence. The movement of the symbol from Space toward seas helps the student distinguish a metaphysical source from its more limited expressions.

Varuna's association with *Makara* carries this layered character into sacred and zodiacal imagery. In *The Secret Doctrine*, *Makara* appears in the account of his later marine representation. The symbol should not be reduced to the identification of a familiar animal, nor made to support any private claim about hidden powers. It belongs to a field of correspondences whose meaning must be learned from its particular use. A striking image is the beginning of study, rather than its completion.

Professor Iyer brings *Varuna* explicitly into "Self-Transformation." He places *Varuna* with other divine figures representing archetypal modes of creation, preservation and regeneration. The subject is the transformation of consciousness, including the relation of brain-mind and spiritual heart. The cosmic imagery thus becomes relevant to the way a human being perceives and participates. Its inward significance concerns a change in the reach and quality of awareness.

In the same discussion he describes the replacement of an angular view by a rounded view. An angle offers a real perspective, but becomes confining when mistaken for the whole. Greater inward depth should enlarge sympathy and the ability to appreciate different situations and

human beings. This provides a practical way of approaching *Varuna*'s encompassing symbolism. One can ask whether an inward conviction is making understanding more inclusive, or merely giving a narrow preference more impressive language.

Drawing a Larger Circle of Conception can begin in a disagreement about a place held in common. A person who values silence may see a neighbour's gathering only as disturbance; the neighbour may see a request for quiet only as hostility. A fuller view includes the need for rest, the value of companionship, the character of the space and the possibility of an agreed time. Understanding the shared field does not remove the need for boundaries. It gives those boundaries a more truthful basis.

This roundedness requires listening to facts that may alter one's preferred solution. It also requires the courage to state a real limit without turning the other person into an enemy. The waters of the image hold distinct lives, not a featureless sameness. An encompassing view becomes useful through the particular arrangement it makes possible: a clearer agreement, a repaired misunderstanding, or a responsibility that can actually be carried.

Human Solidarity acquires substance through this attention. The universal field includes people whose interests do not immediately resemble our own, and whose circumstances may remain largely unseen. Professor Iyer measures inward depth by a widening range of sympathies. The student of *Varuna* can therefore test contemplation by asking who has been omitted from the picture, and what the omission has allowed us to overlook in our conduct.

The image also invites care for the actual waters on which embodied life depends. Their spiritual symbolism does not diminish their concrete importance. Stewardship requires learning how a place is used, noticing damage and supporting a fitting remedy. The contemplative connection supplies a motive of reverence; observation and practical knowledge guide the action. A larger conception should make us more attentive to the world before us.

Varuna finally returns the student to the quality of the inner field. Can a truth be admitted without immediate defence? Can a confidence be held without appropriation? Can *Manas* become more transparent to *Buddhi* through a fuller concern for other lives? The encompassing sky and deep waters leave room for these questions. Their usefulness appears as awareness becomes less cramped, conduct more trustworthy, and the space we share more hospitable to truth.

Glossary

Aditi — The Vedic Mother of the gods; a symbol of the boundless matrix of manifestation.

Adityas — Sons of *Aditi*, associated with divine and solar powers.

- Agni** — Fire; the Vedic divine figure associated with sacred fire and creative spiritual energy.
- Akasha** — The subtle spiritual substance or medium of manifestation, distinguished from ordinary physical space and the lower astral light; *Akasa* is another spelling, and Akashic means pertaining to it.
- Anthropomorphism** — The representation of a divine or cosmic principle through human form and characteristics; criticized by Blavatsky when it obscures a symbol's metaphysical scope.
- Archetypal** — Pertaining to an original pattern or principle through which particular forms and processes are interpreted.
- Atman** — The universal Self or spiritual principle in Theosophy; also written *Atma*.
- Brahma** — The creative deity in Hindu cosmological symbolism; written *Brahmā* in the cited passages.
- Brahma Vach** — Divine speech or expression associated with *Brahma*; Professor Iyer connects it with Divine Thought and the Light of the *Logos*.
- Brain-mind** — The personal mind as expressed through the brain and ordinary experience, distinguished in the cited teaching from spiritual consciousness.
- Buddhi** — The spiritual soul or faculty of intuitive discernment; Buddhic means pertaining to it.
- Coadunition** — A coming together or union; in the quoted metaphysical account, the interrelation of subjects and objects upon overlapping planes.
- Consubstantiality** — Participation in the same substance or essential nature; used within Professor Iyer's metaphysical interpretation.
- Cupid / Eros** — Roman and Greek figures of love, named together in the quoted comparison of Venus and cosmic water.
- Differentiation** — The emergence of distinct forms, functions or levels from a less divided condition.
- Drawing a Larger Circle of Conception** — Widening understanding to include more relationships, consequences and the needs of others.
- Duration** — In the cited Theosophical usage, an underlying continuity distinguished from ordinary measurements of successive events.
- Exoteric** — Pertaining to the outward or publicly expressed form of a teaching, contrasted with its inward or esoteric interpretation.

Firmament — The vault or expanse of the heavens; used in the traditional portrayal of *Varuna's* cosmic functions.

Gaia / Gæa — The Earth in Greek mythology, compared in the cited passage with Nature and its more abstract metaphysical ground.

Great Deep — The universal matrix or primordial cosmic depth represented through water in the cited symbolism.

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.

Life-atoms — Living units or centres participating in the constitution of forms and vestures in Theosophical teaching.

Logos — Word or reason; in Theosophical metaphysics, an intelligible expression or ordering principle of manifestation. *Logoi* is the plural, and Logoic means pertaining to it.

Makara — A sacred aquatic and zodiacal symbol associated with *Varuna's* vehicle in the cited 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.

Matrix — An originating or encompassing field within which forms develop.

Metaphysics — Inquiry into the fundamental nature and principles of reality, including consciousness and causation; metaphysical means pertaining to such inquiry.

Mitra — A Vedic deity closely associated with *Varuna* in the quoted account of sacred knowledge.

Monad — The spiritual unit or pilgrim, commonly related to *Atma-Buddhi*; its essential unity is distinguished from the changing vehicles through which evolution proceeds.

Mulaprakriti — Root-substance; the primordial basis of the objective aspect of manifestation, distinguished conceptually from the consciousness aspect associated with the *Logos*.

Mysteries — Sacred knowledge and disciplines; the quoted account connects their communication with responsibility and fitness to receive them.

Nara-Nari — Masculine and feminine principles or figures named together in Professor Iyer's discussion of archetypal modes of transformation.

Noumenon — An underlying reality or intelligible ground distinguished from its appearance to an observer; noumena is the plural.

Ouranos / Uranos — Greek names for the sky deity compared with *Varuna* in Blavatsky's metaphysical interpretation; also written Uranus.

Overbrooding — Overshadowing or spiritually illumining from a higher level; the Monad is described as overbrooding embodied consciousness.

Pantheon — The divine figures of a particular religious or mythological tradition considered together.

Personal ego — The limited sense of self associated with a particular personality, distinguished in Theosophy from spiritual individuality.

Phenomena — Things or events as they appear or are experienced; the singular is phenomenon.

Planes — Levels or orders of consciousness and substance within the Theosophical account of manifestation.

Prakriti — Nature or substance, considered at the relevant level of manifestation.

Pristine — Pure or unspoiled; used in the quoted passage for the quality of devotion, warmth and love to which the seeker returns.

Regeneration — Renewal of consciousness and conduct through spiritual and ethical transformation.

Rishi — A seer or sage; *Rishis* is the plural.

Rounded view — Professor Iyer's image of understanding enlarged through inward depth and widened sympathy, compared with a restricted angular perspective.

Sat / Asat — Being and Non-Being; paired metaphysical terms whose precise meaning depends on context.

Self-consciousness — The capacity to reflect upon one's own experience, intention and action; the sources distinguish personal and more universal degrees.

Shiva — A divine figure of transformation; also written *Siva*, and associated with *Rudra* and the *Kumaras* in the sources.

Spirit and matter — In the cited *Gupta Vidya* account, two aspects of one underlying Substance-Principle, rather than wholly independent realities.

Subjectivity / objectivity — The aspects of knowing consciousness and of what appears as an object; the quoted metaphysics examines their shared ground before differentiation.

Substance-Principle — The unified spiritual and substantial ground of existence in the quoted metaphysical teaching.

Surya — The Sun in Vedic tradition; in the Theosophical interpretation, a symbol of spiritual illumination whose visible expression reflects a deeper source.

Triad — The higher threefold constitution of *Atman*, *Buddhi* and *Manas* in the human being, as used in this discussion.

Varuna — The Vedic deity interpreted by Blavatsky through the Waters of Space, encompassing order and moral witness; also written *Varuṇa*.

Vasishta — A Vedic sage described in the quoted account as receiving instruction from *Varuna*.

Vedic — Pertaining to the early Hindu sacred texts known as the *Vedas* and the tradition associated with them.

Vishnu — The divine preserver in Hindu tradition; *Mahavishnu* or *Maha Vishnu* emphasizes the cosmic scope of that principle.

Waters of Space — A symbol of primordial cosmic depth or matrix, distinguished from terrestrial oceans in Blavatsky's interpretation.

Quotes for Meditation and Self Study

1. H.P. Blavatsky — *The Theosophical Glossary*, p. 364, "Varuna".

"The god of water, or marine god, but far different from Neptune, for in the case of this oldest of the Vedic deities, Water means the 'Waters of Space', or the all-investing sky, *Akâsa*, in one sense. *Varuna* or *Ooaroona* (phonetically), is certainly the prototype of the Ouranos of the Greeks."

Meditation thought: The water image opens into Space and *Akasha*. Allow the visible ocean to suggest an encompassing depth while retaining the distinction between a spiritual principle and its physical symbol.

2. Muir, quoted by H.P. Blavatsky — *The Theosophical Glossary*, p. 364, "Varuna".

"The grandest cosmical functions are ascribed to *Varuna*. Possessed of illimitable knowledge he upholds heaven and earth, he dwells in all worlds as sovereign ruler ... He made the golden ... sun to shine in the firmament. The wind which resounds through the atmosphere is his breath. ... Through the operation of his laws the moon walks in brightness and the stars ...

mysteriously vanish in daylight. He knows the flight of birds in the sky, the paths of ships on the ocean, the course of the far travelling wind, and beholds all the things that have been or shall be done. ... He witnesses men's truth and falsehood. He instructs the *Rishi Vasishta* in mysteries; but his secrets and those of *Mitra* are not to be revealed to the foolish."

Meditation thought: This portrayal is Muir's, quoted by Blavatsky. Cosmic order and moral witness meet in it: a hidden action still enters a shared field of consequences and responsibilities.

3. H.P. Blavatsky — *The Secret Doctrine*, Vol. II, p. 268.

"Uranos is a modified *Varuna*, 'the Universal encompasser,' the all-embracer, and one of the oldest of the Vedic deities — Space, the maker of Heaven and Earth, since both are manifested out of his (or its) seed. It is only later that *Varuna* became the chief of the *Adityas* and a kind of Neptune riding on the Leviathan — *Makara*, now the most sacred and mysterious of the signs of the Zodiac."

Meditation thought: The comparison follows a symbol from a cosmic to a more localized representation. Read each image at its proper level, without letting a vivid form close the inquiry too soon.

4. H.P. Blavatsky — *The Secret Doctrine*, Vol. II, p. 268.

"*Varuna*, 'without whom no creature can even wink,' was degraded like Uranos, and, like him, he fell into generation, his functions, 'the grandest cosmical functions,' as Muir calls them, having been lowered down from heaven to earth by exoteric anthropomorphism."

Meditation thought: Anthropomorphism can narrow a metaphysical idea to the dimensions of human preference. Ask where your own picture of order has become a projection of what you would like the world to permit.

5. H.P. Blavatsky — *The Secret Doctrine*, Vol. II, p. 65.

"From the 'Waters of Space,' the progeny of the male Spirit-Fire and the female (gaseous) Water has become the Oceanic expanse on Earth. *Varuna* is dragged down from the infinite Space, to reign as Neptune over the finite Seas."

Meditation thought: The passage contrasts infinite Space with finite seas. A symbol may lead from the familiar toward the universal, provided its different levels remain visible.

6. H.P. Blavatsky — *The Secret Doctrine*, Vol. II, p. 65.

“It is the universal matrix or the ‘Great Deep.’ Venus, the great Mother-Virgin, issues forth from the Sea-wave, and Cupid or *Eros* is her son. But Venus is the later mythological variant of Gaia (or *Gæa*), the Earth, which, in its higher aspect is Nature (*Prakriti*), and metaphysically *Aditi*, and even *Mulaprakriti*, the root of *Prakriti* or its noumenon.”

Meditation thought: Water here signifies the Great Deep or matrix of manifestation.

Contemplate the relation of a form to the ground that makes it possible, without reducing that ground to ordinary matter.

7. R.N. Iyer — “Self-Transformation”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. II, p. 289.

“One may imagine the immortal Triad as overbrooding the head, though incompletely incarnated because its reflected intelligence must consciously ascend towards the level of proper harmonization. This could be expressed in terms of metaphysical truths about consciousness which operates under laws of expansion and contraction, implying continuous creation, preservation and regeneration through destruction. These archetypal modes have been traditionally symbolized in the Hindu pantheon by *Nara-Nari*, *Agni*, *Varuna* and *Surya*, and also by *Brahmā*, *Vishnu* and *Shiva*.”

Meditation thought: *Varuna* appears within a wider account of transforming consciousness. Let the cosmic symbolism raise a practical question about how thought and heart can participate more harmoniously.

8. R.N. Iyer — “Self-Transformation”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. II, p. 289.

“This sacred teaching about cosmic and human consciousness could also be conveyed from the standpoint of matter. The essential axiom of *Gupta Vidya* is the affirmation that spirit and matter are really two facets of one and the same Substance-Principle. Objectivity and subjectivity are wholly relative to centres of perception, to degrees of differentiation, and to the coadunition and consubstantiality of objects with subjects upon overlapping planes of substance. Put entirely in terms of matter, this would imply that a person whose consciousness is deepened would experience a richer awareness of the invisible aspects and mathematical points of visible matter. There would be a heightened sensitivity to the gamut of invisible relations between life-atoms, corresponding to subtle colours and rarefied sounds.”

Meditation thought: Deeper awareness should discover more relations within what once seemed separate. Look again at a familiar place and consider the lives and dependencies your usual view leaves unnoticed.

9. R.N. Iyer — “Self-Transformation”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. II, p. 289.

“One would also be replacing an angular view by a rounded view: the greater the depth, the greater the roundedness. The price people pay for the settled three-dimensionality of their conception of the world of phenomena is that the brain-mind becomes captive to angular

views. If people are not truly self-conscious, they become extremely obtuse or are hopelessly caught within narrow angles and restricted orbits of perception. Whereas a person who can intensify the depth of perception and feeling, through private pain and unspoken suffering merged in effortless awareness of the vast suffering of all humanity, gains greater depth as a human being. This is continuously enriched by meditative experience of the Silence that surrounds the mystery of *Sat* and *Asat*, Being and Non-Being. The more this becomes a way of life, the more it is possible to have a profoundly balanced view of the world and a well-rounded conception of selfhood, alchemizing and elevating personal awareness and individual sensibility to the height and breadth of universal self-consciousness and the depths of boundless space, eternal motion and endless duration."

Meditation thought: Roundedness is measured through depth and widened sympathy. A conviction that makes you less able to appreciate another life may need a more searching examination.

10. R.N. Iyer — "Self-Transformation", *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. II, p. 289.

"This process of self-transformation may be illustrated by an initially shadowy circle, a very narrow segment of which seems to be lit up. There is a seemingly central focus, but it is only central to that visible segment, whilst the centre of the whole circle, most of which is obscured, remains hidden. This is analogous to the relationship between the personal ego and the individual Self."

Meditation thought: A lit segment can be mistaken for the whole circle. Hold your present perspective as something real but partial, and let that recognition invite attentive listening.

11. R.N. Iyer — "Self-Transformation", *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. II, p. 290.

"To convey this as a criterion of human stature, the greater the depth of one's inwardness, the broader, the vaster, the wider the range of one's sympathies, and the more one is able to appreciate a wider variety of experiences, situations, contexts and human beings. The more secure one's depth of consciousness, the more one is able to exercise the synthesizing gift of the Monad, capable of seeing in terms of any of the specific sub-colours, and also able to penetrate to the very centre of the white light, seeing beyond it, and benevolently using the entire range of the spectrum. What is true of colours applies equally to sounds, and ultimately to consciousness itself."

Meditation thought: Inward depth is tested by the breadth of human appreciation it makes possible. Seek a fuller understanding of one situation you have been inclined to dismiss.

12. R.N. Iyer — “Self-Transformation”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. II, p. 290.

“In order to take full advantage of sleep, the seeker must initially experience the pain of forcing the mind to return to a point on which it is placed, to a chosen idea, bringing the heart back to the deepest, purest and most pristine feeling of devotion, warmth and love. If one did this again and again, then certainly one would not only become more deep in response to life but one would also become more of a spiritual benefactor to the human race, drawing freely from the infinite resources of Divine Thought and the Light of the *Logos, Brahma Vach.*”

Meditation thought: Repeatedly returning mind and heart to a worthy purpose can prepare greater usefulness. Let the practice be measured by the patience and care it brings into shared life.