

# Four Yugas



*If you have wiped out tears of even one man, by a single word of comfort and cheer, by a single good deed, you may count the day well spent. You will have utilised time with great wisdom. If you have not done so, you may not be making best use of the most precious gift of life.*

*Mental stillness, discovering the profound in everyday life, and living in the moment are elusive experiences for most people. We put so much value on doing, on accomplishment, and so little on being. One of my favourite cartoons shows two cigar smoking, pinstriped executives in discussion. One laments that "maybe true happiness comes after the first \$700 million."*

*They say that it is wisdom to know others, but it is enlightenment to know oneself. Take a few moments each day to get to know yourself.*

*As far as the following hypothesis is concerned we have three options: we can either believe in it, know it from our intuition, or look at it with utter disbelief!*

## **The Four Yugas**

Each Yuga is an age with specific characteristics. The four yugas make up a cycle called divya-yuga, which lasts 4,320,000 years.

1. SATYA YUGA lasts 1,728,000 years.
2. TRETA YUGA lasts 1,296,000 years
3. DVAPARA YUGA lasts 864,000 years
4. KALI YUGA - 432,000 years



# Four Yugas

The Ancient Vedic Texts describe the four yugas as follows:

1. Satya-yuga, or the golden age, is the ideal age, characterized by virtue, wisdom, religion, and practically no vice or ignorance. Humans do not hate or envy each other, nor do they ever feel anxious, fearful or threatened. They solely worship the one Supreme Personality of Godhead, hear the one Veda, obey the one law, and practice the one religious process -- meditation on the Supreme.
2. In Treta-yuga, or silver age, vice is introduced. The good qualities that humans had in Satya-yuga reduce by one third. People introduce religious rites, sacrifices, and ceremonies. They start to act with fruitive desires, expecting a reward for their work and religious activities.
3. In Dvapara-yuga, or bronze age, uprightness is only half of what it was in Satya-yuga. The Vedas are divided into four parts, and only a few people study them. Sensual desires and diseases begin to well up, and injustice spreads in human civilization.
4. In Kali-yuga, or iron age, only one fourth of human uprightness remains and gradually reduces to nil as the age progresses. We now live in Kali-yuga, the iron age; the most degraded of the four ages (kali literally means "quarrel and hypocrisy"). In this age men are short lived and have less intelligence. They are especially lazy in performing their spiritual duties and exceedingly slow to surrender to the Lord. They are misled, frustrated and, above all, always disturbed. The qualities of religion (truthfulness, cleanliness, forbearance and mercy) and the qualities of life (intelligence, duration of life and bodily strength and beauty) all diminish. By now already 5000 years of Kali yuga have passed and it is predicted that by the end of the Yuga people will hardly be older than 20 years and their only food will be meat. There is mass destruction of the old and the golden age is once more ushered in.

## Where We Are Now

According to the Vedic scriptures, we are now in the 28th turnover of the 71 yuga cycles. Modern astronomy calculates the beginning of the present Kali-yuga at 2:27a.m. on February 20th in the year 3102 B.C.

## More detailed reading follows:

According to Yogic legends men in the age of truth were pure and divine, with the predominance of sattva (purity), while rajas (pride) and tamas (ignorance) remained fully suppressed. They believed in valour and virtue and upheld Dharma. With the help of their subtle senses (tanmantras), they were able to remain in contact with the gods (devas), who resided in the higher worlds, as well as their own subtle bodies in their inner world. Hindu scriptures affirm that the deities, whom we worship in the Vedas, reside not only



# Four Yugas

in the cosmos (antariksha), but also in the inner space (chidakasa) of our bodies in their subtle forms.

Ordinary people in today's world do not feel their presence because they do not have the sensitivity or the spiritual purity to know their subtle bodies, except perhaps through study and dreams. But the people of Satya yuga were able to communicate with gods directly in their wakeful consciousness and invoke them through their mental and spiritual powers. As men became increasingly gross in their nature and lost their ability to communicate with gods, they also stopped communicating with humans and manifesting themselves in the earthly world in their heavenly forms. This barrier between heaven and earth had to happen, as a part of the divine plan, in this particular epoch, which is known as kaliyuga.

Based upon the knowledge available in the Puranas, the epics and the Vedas, this article tries to make an argument that symbolically the four epochs or the great ages represent the four phases of involution during which the outer covering or veiling of the souls gradually became grosser and denser as a result of which the beings (jivas) lost the awareness of their subtle bodies and their divine nature. Correspondingly, as the time passed, the quality of sattva (purity) gave way to the two impure qualities namely rajas and tamas. It is mentioned in the scriptures that as the time progresses from one epoch to another, God would keep releasing grosser and more restless souls into the world, including demonic and asuric ones, thereby increasing the chaos and confusion which would ultimately culminate in the destruction of the worlds and the withdrawal of all the souls.

According to Yogic texts, humans beings have five bodies not just a physical body. The physical body is what we see and what is visible to the naked eye. But it is just the outer sheath. Beneath it there are four more layers, which the scriptures refer to as sheaths or compartments (kosas). Starting from the outer layer, the five sheaths are identified as show below.

1. The gross physical body (annamaya-kosa),
2. The breath body (pranamaya-kosa),
3. The mental body (manomaya-kosa),
4. The intelligence body (vignanamaya-kosa) and
5. The bliss body (anandamaya-kosa).

## **Satya Yuga or the Age of Truth**

According to the theory which we are currently discussing, during the age of truth, people were pure. In them only the quality of sattva was active while the other two, namely rajas and tamas were dormant. They had awareness of all their bodies and were able to control them consciously. They used them with the same ease as we do now with our physical



# Four Yugas

bodies. They led very pure lives and adhered to truth. Everything was transparent and visible and there was nothing to conceal.

Their physical bodies were much lighter and less dense than the bodies of today. They radiated light. The beings of this age existed entirely in the subtle planes, assuming a physical body, by the power of their thought, only when needed. Since the physical bodies were impure and imposed several limitations, they chose to remain in their subtle bodies. They obtained energy for their bodies directly from the subtle worlds instead of consuming gross food. As embodied beings, they were subject to the cycle of births and deaths, but lived longer for hundreds or even thousands of years as their subtle bodies lasted longer and suffered much less wear and tear.

In this age, men were truthful and free from the common vices, namely sexual desire, anger, pride, greed and envy. Hence epoch in which they lived is known as Satya yuga or

the Age of Truth. With well advanced intellect (buddhi), mastery of their minds and bodies, and all the chakras active, they possessed immense psychic powers, which are known in the yoga tradition as perfections (siddhis). They adhered to the religious and moral duties as prescribed by the law of God (dharma). They maintained regular contact with the gods and visited them in their subtle planes using their psychic power. Because they were predominantly subtle beings, they could travel to these worlds easily through the exercise of their will. Men were so pure and divine that gods sought their company and occasionally their help to fight against the demons or asuras. As chronicled in the epics and the Puranas, the ancestors of Rama and many of their contemporaries did participate in battles on behalf of the gods and against the demons.

## **Treta Yuga**

During the next epoch, which is known as the Treta Yuga, men lost some of their purity and subtlety. Instead of only sattva now they possessed some rajas and tamas, which made them vulnerable to some of the vices identified previously. Like the people of satya yuga, they had well developed intellect, but they lost contact with their bliss bodies, while their physical bodies accumulated some grossness due to changes in the food habits and breathing pattern that took place in the last part of satya yuga. As the outer bodies became grosser and physical senses became active, people lost some of their power to connect to their inner bodies and communicate with gods. They now had awareness of actually only three bodies. The physical body developed strongly in some enabling them to perform incredible tasks such as the ones performed by Sri Ram, Lakshmana, Anjaneya, Bali, Ravana, Indrajit, Jambavant and so on.

As rajas and tamas became active in many, there was a decline in the moral standards of the people. The impurities of egoism, ignorance and delusion increased, while the loss of contact with the bliss body made them vulnerable to the pairs of opposites and the experience of suffering. This is evident in the story of Ramayana. We can see the tainting



# Four Yugas

of human nature and the frailty of human character, in the demands of Kaikeyi, the grief of Dasarath and the restlessness of both Rama and Sita after the latter was abducted by the demon king, Ravana. The veiling of the souls and the increasing involvement of the embodied souls with the sense objects is also amply illustrated in the behaviour of the people Ayodhya when they suspected the fidelity of Sita upon her return from Lanka even though she was subjected to the humility of fire ordeal and proved innocent. Despite these developments, people, in this age were still were predominantly sattvic (pure and virtuous) like their ancestors in Satyayug and exercised intellect (buddhi) in their personal lives.

## **Dwapara-yuga**

Treta yuga was followed by Dwapara yuga, during which sattva yielded to rajas as the predominant quality, while tamas also increased in some proportion. With the loss of purity (sattva), the physical body became grosser while there was a corresponding loss of

contact and control over the intelligence body. Compared to their ancestors, the people of Dwapara yuga became physically denser, sensually more outgoing and now subject to all the five vices named previously. They were now conscious of only their three outer bodies, namely the breath body, the mental body and the physical body.

As people lost the knowledge of their innermost two bodies, they became more outward, materialistic, competitive and ambitious and began focusing more on worldly acquisitions often at the cost of their morality and religious duties. A few like Bhishma, Dharmaraja and Vidura, were virtuous and righteous. But their numbers were gradually declining as there was an overall decline in the moral standards of society and people began identifying themselves with their outward forms, under the temptations of their lower selves and their countless desires.

Some people had immense physical power, which they often misused for selfish and egoistic reasons. As they had control over their breath bodies, some of them had the ability to suspend their breathing and remain underwater for hours together. With control over their mental bodies, they were also able to play mind games, create illusions and the like or defeat their enemies in war using trickery and fraud. With the increase in rajas and tamas and decrease in sattva, people had lost their power of discretion (buddhi) and began indulging in immoral and self-destructive actions.

## **Kaliyuga**

Kali yuga is the last and final epoch in each time cycle and also the shortest one having a total span of about 432,000 years. In the beginning of this age men had lost control over all their inner bodies but retained some control over their mental bodies and physical bodies. In the first phase of this epoch they had some awareness and control over their breath bodies as they could sense the movements of breath in their bodies and the flow of



# Four Yugas

energy through the various chakras (subtle nerve centres). But this ability was also lost as time went by and the bodies became increasingly gross to the point where the quality of sattva became negligible while the quality of Tamas followed by rajas increased in proportion. As a result the physical bodies of the beings in this age became denser and grosser while the senses turned completely outward and the mind became attached to the sense objects.

The present age is truly the age of the physical body. Physical body is also known as food body (annamaya kosa) because it is made up of the food we eat. Since it is the only way by which the physical body can be nourished and sustained, its quality and luminosity depends to a great extent upon the type of food we consume and the qualities or gunas present in them. Sattvic food increases the quality of sattva while rajasic and tamasic foods increase the other two qualities respectively.

In this epoch, which is the current one, people are aware of their physical and mental bodies only. They are predominantly mind and body centered. They identify themselves

with their minds and bodies and regard their material possession as an extension of themselves. They live for material things and physical pleasure, work for them and die for them. The descent of the soul (consciousness) into the matter (nature of prakriti) is now complete. It manifests in the behaviour and attitude of the human beings and their total obsession with material things and objective reality. Matter in all its forms consumes their interest. From quantum level to the cosmic level and from subatomic particles to the galaxies, they extend their interest, knowledge, study and research. Having lost the contact with their subtle senses (tanmantras) and the knowledge of using them, they rely exclusively upon their physical senses and what can be perceived and experienced through them.

We have become so engrossed with matter and material things that now we have the ability to manipulate Nature, create forms and shapes, split atoms, alter human cells and embryos and create highly complex machines. It would not be long before our research in cellular biology and computing technology would lead to the development of vastly superior biological machines capable of programming themselves and performing routine tasks including space travel.

With the preponderance of tamas and rajas and negligible quantities of sattva, kali yuga witnessed a great decline in the moral standards of the people. People now have little respect for the eternal laws of god, no fear of retribution and no concern for the consequences of their actions and thoughts. Our moral behaviour is clouded by the pragmatism and opportunism of ideology and scientific research or the illusion of personal freedom. It does not matter if a million souls are depending upon compassion and ethical actions, waiting expectantly at the other end of the universe, to enter this planet and continue their spiritual journey. Because we have lost contact with our inner



# Four Yugas

bodies, we demand physical and intellectual validation to accept every truth, even though we know the limitations of our sensory knowledge and the wisdom derived from it.

We can truly call this as the age of physics and physical laws. It is also the age of pure materialism and ignorance (tamas). We have but limited awareness of the world in which we live and our connection with it. We know but little about ourselves and our potentialities. We may dissect the human brain and understand how it functions, but we cannot control our thoughts. We may replace the heart of a person with an artificially made heart, but we cannot have a good heart in ourselves without rigorous spiritual discipline. We may formulate numerous theories and complex ideas about our existence, but cannot control our thoughts, desires and impulses. We have expanded the horizons of our perception outwardly through artificial means, but do not have the ability to look within ourselves and find the transcendental knowledge which is locked up in our subtle bodies. This is the age of profound tamasic ignorance. We have descended into our physical bodies fully, and identified ourselves with our lower nature so much that we do not see our selfish, self-centered and purely pleasure oriented behaviour as an aberration but normal and very human.

The extent of our preoccupation with our bodies and minds can be seen and felt in every aspect of our present day society. See what we value most, where our thoughts are mostly centered and what we do most of the time. Think why society is today so obsessed with physical looks and pretty things. Think why there is so much prejudice in hiring against older people and why many recruiters fall for good looks, ignoring talent, experience and intelligence. Understand why tasty food sells, however harmful it might be. See how much time the companies spend on advertising and in packaging things attractively, instead of saving the costs and passing on the benefits to the consumers.

Our obsession with materialism is such that we want to find solution to every problem of our existence through physical means. We want to contact God physically, through prayers and rituals, by visiting religious places or worshipping His images. We want to see Him physically in person to become convinced about His existence. We argue and quarrel over His names or the methods of worshipping Him or finding Him. We spend more time in the ornamentation of our thoughts and activities, in the ostentatious display of our power and status, in impression management and the superficial display of what is valued in society rather than what is spiritually important and urgent for us and our world. We tend to settle our disputes through physical elimination, alteration, manipulation, restraint and contractual agreements. We want to enhance our looks through the use of cosmetics, medicines, plastic surgery, makeup, fashion or illusion. The world revolves around passion, senses, body, money, physical pleasure, sex, food, dieting, dating, exercise, sports, films, and other forms of physical entertainment.



# Four Yugas

## What Happens Next?

It is stated in the scriptures that in kali yuga chaos will increase as increasing number of demonic and asuric souls will take birth on earth to spread confusion and evil. At the end of this dark epoch there will be a great destruction, during which the physical bodies of all the embodied souls will be either destroyed completely or subjected to a great transformation in which their grossness will be lost. All the embodied souls will be withdrawn from the material world by God, followed by a period of involution during which beings will slowly advance into higher realms gaining, in phases, purity and awareness of their subtle bodies, until they emerge as truth beings.

It is not necessary that every soul will become a truth being. Some souls will remain for ever in ignorance and darkness as God employs them especially for spreading chaos in the fourth epoch. Some souls on the other hand remain permanently free from the bondage to the cycle of births and deaths. These are evolved souls whom we call the devas, bodhisattvas, muktas, angels and the like. They remain in the transcendental realms either as free souls or duty bound souls performing specific tasks for the liberation of others. Sometimes they also incarnate upon earth to spread the knowledge of God's eternal law.

Interpretation of the four ages given here is purely a product of this writer's intuitive thought, based upon his studies and understanding of the scriptures. There is no historical

or physical evidence to prove it. This author truly believes that events such as the ones mentioned in the Mahabharata and the Ramayana or the Puranas happened in the subtle planes and implanted in our collective memory. It is possible that some events similar to the ones mentioned in the Ramayana and Mahabharata might have taken place a few thousand years ago upon earth, but the actual events mentioned in the epics must have happened much before in the subtle planes, before mankind acquired the present day gross material bodies.

## Is there any Evidence? Unfortunately Not!

All that the present methodologies of history and science can do is to probe the physical reality and find facts based on evidence. They cannot lead us into the subtle planes or study the records that exist in the ethereal planes of our universe. Even science acknowledges that the physical laws are not consistent throughout the universe and that there are areas in some parts of the universe where physical laws as know them cease to exist. The Buddhists speak of akashic records, which one can read in the astral plane. But science and history cannot reach them. There is no way we can prove the existence of the previous ages when the souls existed mostly in their subtle bodies, except perhaps through psychic means such as clairvoyance. Unfortunately through such methods we cannot produce physical evidence that can be verified by everyone.



# Four Yugas

The events mentioned in the previous three and half epochs might not have even taken place in the physical plane of this planet, but probably in subtle planes of the earth itself. Just as we have different sheaths or layers (kosas) the earth also has its own subtle bodies where a lot of activity takes place before it is manifested in the physical plane of the earth. In all probability, the events of the Ramayana, Mahabharata and the Puranas came out of our collective consciousness as stories of great value from which we can learn about ourselves and our past. Since, they happened in the subtle planes, no amount of digging and no amount of research probably would help us establish their authenticity.

**Courage is not the absence of fear, but rather the judgment that something else is more important than fear. *Ambrose Redmoon***

