

Manvantara and Loka

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Deep philosophies can be found within Hindu mythological stories. Revealing the inherent wisdom and extracting the true interpretations from one story is attempted in this article. While concepts of time and space can be applied on a physical plane, the same through using certain keywords like 'manvantara' and 'loka' can be explained on a mental plane as propensities of the mind. The mythological story may take on the hue of an imaginary rendition initially but have hidden knowledge pertaining to the working of the mind and its attachment to the soul.

*Manvantara*¹ - मन्वन्तर (Annexure 1) is a concept of time as given in the *Puranas* and are described as being fourteen time-periods. In the present *manvantara*, Indra is the lord of *devas* (Gods) and Chitragupta² is his son. The job of Chitragupta is to record each karma performed by every individual residing on Earth. As per the *Puranas*, in the next *manvantara* the lord of Gods will be Bali (also known as Mahabali). Bali is an *Asura* (Demon) in the present *manvantara* who was sent to Sutala (one of the netherworlds) by Vishnu in his avatar as Vamana. It is also mentioned in the *Puranas* that Sutala is one of the most beautiful places among the various *loka*³ लोक (Annexure 1) or Universes (fourteen in number in respect to space factor) existing in the cosmos. While Vamana pushed Bali into Sutala from the Earth he is greatly impressed with the selflessness of Bali. Vamana, as Vishnu, vows to guard Bali at the gates of Sutala so that no one will disturb the blissful enjoyment of Bali. Sutala knows no disease, no discomfort, unhappiness, etc. It is a Universe where uninterrupted bliss is the norm. The *manvantara* proclaimed as a time concept when related to the space concept of *loka*, then in fact, reveal the nature of mind. The psychological nature of the mind can be explained when the time concept of *manvantara* is combined with the space concept of *loka*.

¹ (Mitchiner 1982)

² (Wilkins 1882)

³ (Dutt 2016)

Manvantara is derived from the two words with the meaning of Manu, the thinking creature, containing the ‘*man*’ which is mind and ‘*antara*’ which is difference or demarcation, the word *manvantara* takes on a completely new meaning. *Manvantara*, according to this interpretation, becomes the crossing of the boundary of the mind from one time period to another. Applying *manvantara*, which initially described as a concept of time, goes beyond the time factor and in relation to the physical self, i.e. space factor of tangible matter, takes the new garb of ‘nature/aspects of mind’ (Annexure 2). To elaborate on the time factor of a *manvantara* - it is the intervals of times in the progression of the journey of soul. Almost every subject and object in the world is allotted the status of a deity in ancient texts. Following this the soul is personified as Manu. The soul is described as a subject and the mind as the object attached to the soul. The four natures of mind are *manas*, *buddhi*, *ahamkara* and *chitta* which together give rise to multitudes of thought-constructs⁴ in a human being. Various experiences are enjoyed because of the existence and interactions of these four natures of mind.

The space factor of a *manvantara* is the *loka* or Universe that corresponds to each of the time period. The ‘mind’ does not have a tangible body and its manifestation cannot be perceived unless through the karma performed by a physical body. The mind itself comes into being due interaction between an individual soul and its relatable physical body. Indra is the lord of the Gods but has an intrinsic meaning of lord of senses⁵ or ‘*indriya*’. The senses are primarily sight, smell, hearing, taste and touch. The organs of eyes, nose, ears, tongue and skin⁶ of a physical body that perform the functions of acquiring sight, smell, hearing, taste and touch, respectively. The conduit of perception between mind and the external environment are the five organs of senses which form the parts of the tangible physical body. The mind perceives, interprets, processes data from the external environment through the five senses of the physical body.⁷ In the present times we observe our life revolves around constantly satisfying these five senses only. There is a pursuit for happiness which translates into acquiring pleasant sensations through sight, smell, hearing, taste and touch. Thus, in all fairness we can say that Indra is the lord of Gods in this *manvantara*. During

⁴ (Singh 1979, 127)

⁵ (Rath 2007)

⁶ (Pargiter 1904)

⁷ https://www.swami-krishnananda.org/disc/disc_74.html

the course of this ever-constant pursuit one inevitably performs various karmas. All our activities whirl around getting and maintaining this state of pleasure derived through the senses or '*indriya*'. And karmas are the manifested actions performed by the physical body (Annexure 2) to fulfill the unmanifested and intangible thoughts arising due to the desire for pleasing the senses. We are slaves of our physical senses only and thus followers of Indra. The mind predominantly operates using logic and reasoning to perform karma to attain happiness through the senses while being identified completely with the physical body. One eats to appease hunger of the physical body where the primary sense utilized is of taste. One does make choice for an edible mushroom over a poisonous one to live and this action is based on logic and reasoning. The field of where all this occurs is known as *Kurukshetra*. The present *manvantara* is the seventh *manvantara* in the total of fourteen *manvantara* (Annexure 3).

Kurukshetra is when and where the physical body is dominantly at play in respect to the time and space concept which is on Earth. *Kurukshetra* is the field where the Mahabharat war takes place and thus may be described as the war between the good and bad tendencies within oneself⁸. The good tendencies are the five *Pandavas* that represent the fighters against the five senses or *indriya* who refuse to be enslaved and ruled by Indra. Incidentally, a seeming paradox exists as one of the *Pandavas*, Arjun, is the son of Indra and the five *Pandavas* are aided by Indra in the war. The *Pandavas* are in the pursuit of the 'eternal' happiness that can be enjoyed without the senses of the physical body and who are willing to be ruled by Krishna or the soul consciousness. While the *Pandavas* seek eternal happiness, they do give due respect to the *indriya* or the senses, for through the senses only one can proceed towards finding the divine path. The divine path is referring to the pathway for eternal and constant bliss unlike the normal path which has fleeting and fitful joy. The direction of the senses, instead of being turned outwards, need to be turned inwards. On the other hand, there are the bad tendencies – 100 *Kauravas*, who glorify Indra and seek the sole enjoyments which take hundred forms of pleasures that are derived from the five senses only. This happens when the *indriya* are directed outwards completely in order to enjoy the various types of sense pleasures. The mind whose nature is most closely associated with the physical body is the known as *manas*, which essentially is the logic and reasoning part of the mind.

⁸ (Yogananda 1996)

Since we have surmised that Indra is the lord in the current time and space, the nature of Chitragupta is discussed. *Chitra* means picture/profile/persona and *gupta* means secret/protected/private. Chitragupta is one who records each act performed by every human being on Earth in the etheric plane.⁹ Etheric records are maintained which is like an account of every human being's lifetime with all karmas performed on Earth. One can compare this to being something like a surveillance system (as the word meaning of Chitragupta suggests) which is a combination of Google, Facebook, governmental records, surveillance cameras, etc. Information through these various tools/platforms is fed into a centralized database that has complete data on every single individual on Earth. After the physical body of an individual perishes the 'ever-observing intelligent living entity', that is a definition of 'soul', along with the mind of an individual is transported by Yama (the lord of death) to a court presided by Chitragupta. Here, the court can mean an intermediate form of court which may be compared to that of district level court. The field of where this occurs is known as *Dharmakshetra*. From the database that is compiled, composed and collected by Chitragupta¹⁰, the soul stands as a witness and listens to activities performed. The mind associated with the soul either defends, accepts or refutes with reasons as to one's karma performed on Earth. The other souls who were associated with the soul on Earth and who have also passed on are the ones that question the actions and seek answers for such actions. A discussion ensues where the emotions of hurts, joys, etc. due to the aforesaid actions are brought out in the open where lessons can be learnt, or the soul can continue to cling on to its own perceptions of the still existing identity of mind. This aspect of the mind can be referred to as emotions and feelings. Emotions and feelings come into play at the interaction between different souls. Relationships arise between two self-identifying entities. This aspect of mind does not require the presence of a physical body. *Dharmakshetra* arises only when the battle within the physical body ends and the mental body with emotions begins. The emotions are the realm of *chitta*, the nature of mind that involves mainly with feeling and sentiment that has can exist outside the confines of a physical body.

Once *chitta* becomes the focus of concentration in the *Dharmakshetra* the soul may become aware of another nature of the mind which is the ego or *ahamkara*. *Ahamkara* is the identification

⁹ (Dutt 2016)

¹⁰ (Tagare 1950)

of the mind with the related self which is limited in nature. The limitedness occurs because there is a demarcation between the physical body of 'I' and rest of the surrounding nature that includes other self-identifying entities. The infinite Self, on the other hand, is the identification of the mind with both the 'I' and the surrounding nature. This thought process is what gives rise to the *lokas* which primary deals with the space aspect. The surrounding nature is fluid for each mental ability of a person. It can vary with knowledge. The surrounding nature can be the size of what is viewable or the size of the solar system, or galaxy, etc. As one's knowledge increases, the natural course is to move to higher realms that encompass expanding existences or Universes.

Karma is manifested and visible action of this *ahamkara* which is one of the different natures of mind. While, in *Dharmakshetra* the soul realizes the self-identifying nature of its mind *ahamkara* due to the exercise of exchange of emotions of different entities. The soul, with the identification to the self, is first challenged as different souls meet without the demarcation of their respective physical bodies. The opportunity to transcend the boundary of the limited self to the infinite Self is presented now. But, oftentimes, this opportunity is not used for the natural ascension but becomes entangled within the web of karma itself. In *vedic* astrology, the lord of karmas is the planet Saturn. Saturn, being present at the proceedings in the court of Chitragupta, gives the consequent effect of karma which follows the principle of 'cause and effect' to the hilt, blind as to whether it is positive or negative, at the ascertained time ruled by the wheel of time. It is said that planet Saturn gives the result at his own pace which can be interpreted either as a physical reality (the time it takes Saturn to rotate around on its own axis and time for its revolution around the Sun) or with respect to the karmic wheel (seeing the position of Saturn in an individual's horoscope chart). The different *lokas* come into existence for the purpose of enacting out the consequences of one's karmas. The establishment of the nature of *ahamkara* in the mind becomes more entrenched and forms the basis of where the soul proceeds to.

Once *ahamkara* becomes the focus of concentration, in relation to the natures of mind, the emergence of right and wrong of the manifested action comes forth. So, what comes into play is probably what is understood in common parlance as morals or ethics or the good & bad of each karma. This function of categorizing between good and bad is performed by what is called the discerning intellectual part – *buddhi* - of the mind with a moral code of ethics that is unique to each one within their limited purview. The concept of Heaven, Hell and Earth spring from this

differentiation of karma into the categories of good and bad which as per Hinduism is not eternal in nature but are for exhausting the consequences of karmas. When there is an interaction of different souls, who each are attached with their identification to their limited selves, emotions spring forth connecting them to each other in the form of relationships among themselves. This makes the souls interdependent and bound to each other and ensure the cycle of birth and death in order to experience the consequence of their karma. On the direction and advice of Saturn, the lord of karma, the executors are Rahu and Ketu, who are called as shadow or illusory bodies in Vedic astrology. The Rahu-Ketu together constitute the *ahamkara* or ego. The soul with *ahamkara* is on the lookout for certain traits in a body in the myriad of wombs that are available on Heaven, Hell and Earth, in an attempt, to enact out certain part of their karma that has ripened. Rahu-Ketu are the mode through which this becomes possible.

The Rahu-Ketu are intangible and are mathematical constructions¹¹ only, which are points drawn based on lunar position at a specified point of time in space that are represented in *vedic* astrology. In the natural biological processes, the reason for reproduction in many living things to bring into existence a new being. Meiosis¹² is a process whereby the division of single cell occurs into four daughter cells that contain half of the genetic material of the original cell. These divided cells are the sex cells termed as sperms and eggs in males and females, respectively. Rahu-Ketu connects with the process of meiosis when the DNA strands mix in a certain way to produce the result of a gamete with certain set of traits. In one of the phases of meiosis the DNA chromosomal double helixes are pulled apart 180° and then brought together to exchange parts of the strands to form a new set of permutation and combination of traits. The axis of Rahu-Ketu is the reason for birth in Vedic astrology and who are 180° in some charts like the natal birth chart (D1) but are together in some charts like the spiritual development chart (D20). On fusion of an ovum and sperm, the individual gametes, (as in the species of Human Beings) a whole new set of traits arise through natural selection and forms the basis of the soul to enter and manifest itself in a physical form. This individual when born is represented by a horoscope where a certain arrangement and alignment of the celestial bodies at that specific time of birth (time factor) can be viewed when referenced from a point on Earth of that specific co-ordinates of latitude and longitude which is

¹¹ Indian Scientific Heritage, Dr. N. Gopalakrishnan, Indian Institute of Scientific Heritage, Thiruvanthapuram, India

¹² What is Meiosis? <https://www.yourgenome.org/facts/what-is-meiosis>

the place of birth (space factor). The axis of Rahu-Ketu in a horoscope point towards the set of traits most conducive to enable the enaction of the chosen part of the residual karma. The zero point of this Karmic meter is the liberation of the soul or *moksha*. From the standpoint of *buddhi* - the nature of the discerning intellect of the mind, the question of whether a karma is good or bad arises and happens solely due to identification of the soul with a limited self.

The above paragraphs explain, in a very rudimentary way, the reason of birth of a certain individual which is ruled by the karma ripening and is only a direct result of the - cause and effect - principle. And as we have seen the journey takes the form of a circle of 'birth and death' may it be as different species on Earth or when we expand into the astral bodies (Annexure 3) in the different realms of Heaven or Hell. When the balance weighs in only on the 'good' karma one attains Heaven and when 'bad' Hell. A mixture of good and bad results in the birth on the planet Earth. The astral bodies can mean a different nature of mind with a different type of body which is not physical in nature. This circle of 'birth and death' comes into formation due to the centripetal and centrifugal forces acting in tandem which can be compared to the good and bad karma again. It is a never-ending process when viewed through the lens of karma. The solution is to find the tangent to this circle, gain the exact velocity to escape from this cyclic circle of constant birth and death. The explanation deals with the transition of the mind - *manvantara*, when Bali replaces Indra as the king. A different lens is required and used henceforth.

Bali, in Sanskrit, means sacrifice. *Thiruonam*, a festival celebrated in Kerala, India, marks the return of Bali and forms as a reminder to the people at large at the sacrifice made by Bali. After traversing the *Dharmakshetra* when the soul (please remember the definition given in the aforesaid paragraphs) is to be transported to the different realms of Universes, then the soul requires the sacrifice of the 'I' of the astral body to reach a higher realm. Sacrifice of identification of the self within the limitation of astral body, *ahamkara*, needs to be transcended to enter the next *manvantara*. It is easier said than done, though. Vamana, in an effort, to subdue the ego of Bali asks from him three steps of land on which he can place his feet to which Bali acquiesces. Vamana is of a small stature in this avatar of Vishnu. On availing Bali's promise Vamana takes an enormous form and with his first step covers the entire Earth and the second step covers the remaining cosmos (the portion perceivable by Bali). The Earth can also mean the physical body and remaining cosmos the mind composed of *manas*, *buddhi* and *chitta* without *ahamkara*. Vamana enquiringly

looks at Bali as to where he is to place his next step when Bali bows his head and with folded hands asks Vamana to place it there. Vamana places his foot atop Bali's head and literally pushes the Ego out. Thus, liberated from the limited confines of the mind due to the existence of Ego, Bali attains a new perspective whereby the demarcation of 'self' and 'Self' vanished. The 'self' refers to the limited physical body and mind, whereas the 'Self' describes the infinite that surrounds the 'self'.

With this fall of the circumferential boundary of 'I', the mind sheds that aspect and transcends into an entirely new world and finds the tangent and acquires the escape velocity required for it. Vamana is pleased that Bali is willing to sacrifice the 'I' without any hesitation or reservations. Vamana rewards Bali the world of Sutala which Vamana personally guards against the occurrence of any untoward events.¹³ This is the world one enters when one sheds the 'I' (ego) like the payload attached to a rocket (physical body) which is for the purpose of putting a satellite (soul) in a certain orbit (mindset) to reach a certain destination (salvation). In this stage, the different individual selves merge into a single individual Self and becomes the whole to the extent understandable to our comprehending of the infinite. When this occurs where is the need for karma theory? It vanishes with its connotation of good and bad because the arising of this theory serves and holds true only when *manas* and *chitta* in association with *ahamkara* exists. When *manas*, *chitta* and *ahamkara* are vanquished the soul is freed from tarnishing entities, that makes the observance lopsided, then the requirement of *buddhi* with its ability to differentiate between good and bad becomes redundant. The quality of perception changes and one finds oneself in a new world that is more beautiful because of its inherent nature, due to the freedom of the soul from the mind with its different natures. This world is beyond the purview of Heaven, Hell and Earth. *Manvantara* can also be compared the 'light year'¹⁴ which is a measure of distance but ties in the concept of time within its meaning as it is the distance a light ray travels in one Earth year. The *manvantara* occurs whereby the transition of the soul, by unloading different aspects of mind, acquires a new sort of peace and bliss when circumnavigating through few of the different *loka*.

¹³ <https://practicalphilosophy.in/2016/09/05/what-happened-to-mahabali/>

¹⁴ What is a light year? <https://spaceplace.nasa.gov/light-year/en/>

Annexure 1¹⁵

	Manvantara	Loka (Universe)
1	<i>Svayambhuva</i>	<i>Satya</i>
2	<i>Svarocisa</i>	<i>Tapa</i>
3	<i>Auttami</i>	<i>Jana</i>
4	<i>Tamasa</i>	<i>Mahar</i>
5	<i>Raivata</i>	<i>Svar</i>
6	<i>Caksusa</i>	<i>Bhuvar</i>
7	<i>Vaivasvata (present)</i>	<i>Bhu (Earth)</i>
8	<i>Savarni</i>	<i>Atala</i>
9	<i>Daksa-Savarni</i>	<i>Vitala</i>
10	<i>Brahma-Savarni</i>	<i>Sutala</i>
11	<i>Dharma-Savarni</i>	<i>Talatala</i>
12	<i>Rudra-Savarni</i>	<i>Rasatala</i>
13	<i>Raucya Savarni</i>	<i>Mahatala</i>
14	<i>Bhautya Savarni</i>	<i>Patala</i>

Annexure 2

Nature / Aspects of the mind	Interpretation
<i>Manas</i>	Logic and reasoning
<i>Chitta</i>	Emotion and feeling
<i>Ahamkara</i>	Identification to a limited self
<i>Buddhi</i>	Discerning Intelligence
<i>Atma</i>	Soul consciousness with Intuition

Annexure 3

Name	Identification of self	Nature of self
Physical Body	Physical Body, Mind Body and Soul Body	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determinate spatial dimensions • Tangible matter
Astral Body	Mind Body and Soul Body	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determinate spatial dimensions • Intangible matter
Causal Body	Soul Body	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indeterminate spatial dimensions • Intangible matter

¹⁵ <https://www.wisdomlib.org/hinduism/compilation/puranic-encyclopaedia/d/doc241753.html>

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2. <https://www.yourgenome.org/facts/what-is-meiosis>
3. <https://practicalphilosophy.in/2016/09/05/what-happened-to-mahabali/>
4. <https://spaceplace.nasa.gov/light-year/en/>
5. <https://www.wisdomlib.org/hinduism/compilation/puranic-encyclopaedia/d/doc241753.html>