VEDIC COSMOLOGY !□□

Loka-traya - the 3 planetary systems

Tri-loka three material spheres tri-loka three material spheres tri-loka three material spheres

Loka-traya - the 3 planetary systems

“There are three planetary systems, namely the lower worlds, the intermediate worlds and the upper worlds. The human beings on earth are situated at the beginning of the intermediate worlds, but living beings like Brahmā and his contemporaries live in the upper worlds, of which the topmost is Satyaloka. In Satyaloka the inhabitants are fully cognizant of Vedic wisdom, and thus the mystic cloud of material energy is cleared.” (SB 1.19.23)

As stated in the Bhagavad-gītā, there are three divisions of material spheres in this universe, namely the ūrdhva-loka (topmost planets), madhya-loka (midway planets) and adho-loka (downward planets). Beyond the ūrdhva-loka planets, that is to say above the Brahmaloka, are the material coverings of the universes, and above that is the spiritual sky, which is unlimited in expansion, containing unlimited self-illuminated Vaikuṇṭha planets inhabited by God Himself along with His associates, who are all eternally liberated living entities.

Ūrdhvaloka (ऊर्ध्वलोक).—The “upper world” or ūrdhvaloka is above mount Meru. The celestial world, the realms of the gods or heavens, the svarga-lokas - heavenly planets.

Madhya-loka – the middle planetary system, world of mortals, the realms of the humans, animals and plants.

Adhaloka (अधलोक).—The adha-loka (Adholoka) is the lower world, the subterranean heavens, Bila-Swarga, the realms of beings other than humans, like Daityas, Dānavas and Nāgas etc.

tri-loka three material spheres

Ancient Greek – Mayan – Sumerian conception of the tree-tiered Universe

The 3-layered planetary systems and the 14 worlds According to the purāṇas this universe is called loka-traya- the three lokas (Bhūrloka, Bhuvarloka and Svarloka), or three spheres (or worlds) consisting of 14 planetary systems. In the material world, the planetary systems are arranged in three spheres, called triloka, or Svarga, Martya and Pātāla.

The three worlds are the upper, lower and middle intermediate planets of the universe. The human beings on earth are situated at the beginning of the intermediate worlds, but living beings like Brahmā and his contemporaries live in the upper worlds, of which the topmost is Satyaloka.

When we speak of loka-traya, we refer to the three primary planetary systems—Bhūḥ, Bhuvaḥ and Svaḥ—into which the universe is divided. Surrounding these planetary systems are the eight directions, namely east, west, north, south, northeast, southeast, northwest and southwest. Lokāloka Mountain has been established as the outer boundary of all the lokas to distribute the rays of the sun and other luminaries equally throughout the universe. (sb/5/20/37)

Lord Brahmā is the creator of the three worlds, namely the lower planets, called the Pātālalokas, the middle planets, called the Bhūrlokas, and the upper planets, called the Svarlokas. Still higher planets, such as Maharloka, Tapoloka, Satyaloka and Brahmaloka. The upper three planetary systems are

called sāttvika planets because they provide facilities for a long duration of life and relative freedom from disease and old age, as well as a sense of fearlessness. The great sages and saints are promoted beyond the heavenly planets to Maharloka. In the creation, during Brahmā's day, the three planetary systems—Svarga, Martya and Pātāla—revolve, and the inhabitants, including the lower animals, human beings, demigods and Pitās, appear and disappear in terms of their fruitive activities.

The cosmic manifestation is grossly divided into three worlds, the upper, lower and middle planetary systems, and then it broadens into the cosmos of fourteen planetary systems. There are fourteen divisions, Caturdaśa-bhuvana. There are seven down and seven up. We are in the middle. This is called Bhūrloka. Above this, there is Bhuvarloka. Above that, there is Janaloka. Above that, there is Maharloka. Above that, there is Satyaloka. Above that, there is Brahmaloka, the highest planetary system. Similarly, down also, we have got Tala, Atala, Talātala, Vitala, Pātāla, Rasātala. This information we get from Vedic literature, fourteen worlds. Each and every universe is consisting of these fourteen planetary systems, and there are innumerable universes.

The fourteen worlds -lokas- or spheres The fourteen lokas or worlds are generally called as Caturdaśa-bhuvanas. Of these, six lokas (worlds) are above the earth (Bhuloka) and seven below it.

The vedic concept of the 14 lokas state that they are divided into 7 upper worlds (Svargaloka) and the 7 lower ones, generally known as the Pātālas.

The fourteen worlds are enumerated in Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, Second Canto, Fifth Chapter. The upper planetary systems are (1) Bhū, (2) Bhuvar, (3) Svar, (4) Mahar, (5) Janas, (6) Tapas and (7) Satya. The seven lower planetary systems are (1) Tala, (2) Atala, (3) Vitala, (4) Nitala, (5) Talātala, (6) Mahātala and (7) Sutala. The lower planets, as a whole, are called Pātāla. Among the upper planetary systems, Bhū, Bhuvar and Svar constitute Svargaloka, and the rest are called Martya. The entire universe is thus known as Triloka.

The universe is divided into fourteen planetary systems. Seven planetary systems, called Bhūr, Bhuvar, Svar, Mahar, Janas, Tapas and Satya, are upward planetary systems, one above the other. There are also seven planetary systems downward, known as Atala, Vitala, Sutala, Talātala, Mahātala, Rasātala and Pātāla, gradually, one below the other. In this verse, the description begins from the bottom because it is in the line of devotion that the Lord's bodily description should begin from His feet. Śukadeva Gosvāmī is a recognized devotee of the Lord, and he is exactly correct in the description. (SB 2.1.26, Purport)

Modern enterprisers (the astronauts who travel in space) may take information from Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam that in space there are fourteen divisions of planetary systems. The situation is calculated from the earthly planetary system, which is called Bhūrloka.

Above Bhūrloka is Bhuvarloka, and the topmost planetary system is called Satyaloka. These are the upper seven lokas, or planetary systems. And similarly, there are seven lower planetary systems, known as Atala, Vitala, Sutala, Talātala, Mahātala, Rasātala and Pātāla lokas. All these planetary systems are scattered over the complete universe, which occupies an area of two billion times two billion square miles. (sb/2/5/40-41)

The 14 planetary systems are named as follows, from highest to lowest:

The 14 planetary systems The 14 planetary systems

This universe is called: catur-daśa-bhuvana - fourteen different planetary systems:

1) Satya-loka, 2) Tapa-loka, 3) Jana-loka, 4) Mahar-loka, 5) Svar-loka, 6) Bhuvar-loka, 7) Bhūr-loka, 8)

Atala-loka, 9) Vitala-loka, 10) Sutala-loka, 11) Talātala-loka, 12) Mahātala-loka, 13) Rasātala-loka, 14) Pātāla-loka.

We are wandering in these different planetary systems up- and down, life after life. If we are pious, then we are promoted to the higher planetary system, Svargaloka, Janaloka, Maharloka, Tapoloka, Brahmaloka, Satyaloka. There are so many… Siddhaloka. And if we are impious, then we are downtrodden. We go down more and more. Ūrdhvaṁ gacchanti sattva-sthāḥ (BG 14.18). If you are situated in sattva-guṇa, then you are promoted to the higher planetary system: adho gacchanti tāmasāḥ. Jaghanya-guṇa-vṛtti-sthā adho gacchanti tāmasāḥ. If you are infected with tamo-guṇa, then you go down, down, down, down. Madhye tiṣṭhanti rājasāḥ. And if we are infected by the modes of passion, then we keep ourselves in the middle. But Kṛṣṇa says in the Bhagavad-gītā, ābrahma-bhuvanāl lokāḥ punar āvartino 'rjuna (BG 8.16). Even if you go to the highest planetary system—it is called Brahmaloka—where the duration of life is very, very long… That is described in the Bhagavad-gītā: sahasra-yuga-paryantam ahar yad brahmaṇo viduḥ (BG 8.17).

The lotus flower growing from the navel of lord Viṣṇu Brahma on lotus flower growing from the navel of lord Viṣṇu

Situation of the planetary systems The planetary systems are situated within the stem of the lotus flower growing from the navel of lord Viṣṇu.

From Viṣṇu's navel, the stem of a lotus flower grows, and on that lotus flower the first creature, Brahmā, is born. Within the stem of that lotus flower are fourteen divisions of planetary systems, which are created by Brahmā.

Lord Brahmā is the most exalted personality in the universe because of his causeless devotional service unto the Lord in mature transcendental knowledge. He therefore created all the fourteen planetary divisions for inhabitation by the different types of living entities. (sb/3/10/9)

Thus engaged in the service of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Lord Brahmā entered into the whorl of the lotus, and as it spread all over the universe he divided it into three divisions of worlds and later into fourteen divisions. (SB 3.10.8, Translation)

The seven lower planetary systems

The seven lower planetary systems "…below the earth by 70,000 yojanas are the 7 lower planetary systems—Atala, Vitala, Sutala, Talātala, Mahātala, Rasātala and Pātāla. Demons and Rakṣasas live in these lower planetary systems with their wives and children, always engaged in sense gratification and not fearing their next births. The sunshine does not reach these planets, but they are illuminated by jewels fixed upon the hoods of snakes. Because of these shining gems there is practically no darkness. Those living in these planets do not become old or diseased, and they are not afraid of death from any cause but the time factor, the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

The seven lower The lower, subterranean regions The seven lower The lower, subterranean regions

In the planet Atala, the yawning of a demon has produced three kinds of women, called svairiṇī (independent), kāmiṇī (lusty) and puṁścalī (very easily subdued by men). Below Atala is the planet Vitala, wherein Lord Śiva and his wife Gaurī reside. Because of their presence, a kind of gold is produced called hāṭaka. Below Vitala is the planet Sutala, the abode of Bali Mahārāja, the most fortunate king. Bali Mahārāja was favored by the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Vāmanadeva, because of his intense devotional service. The Lord went to the sacrificial arena of Bali Mahārāja and begged him for three paces of land, and on this plea the Lord took from him all his possessions. When Bali Mahārāja agreed to all this, the Lord was very pleased, and therefore the Lord serves as his

doorkeeper. The description of Bali Mahārāja appears in the Eighth Canto of Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam.

Below Sutala is the planet Talātala, the abode of the demon Maya. This demon is always materially happy because he is favored by Lord Śiva, but he cannot achieve spiritual happiness at any time. Below Talātala is the planet Mahātala, where there are many snakes with hundreds and thousands of hoods. Below Mahātala is Rasātala, and below that is Pātāla, where the serpent Vasukī lives with his associates." (sb/5/24/24_summary)

This idea of 'seven lower planetary systems' may create the impression in a person's mind of seven layers of many globe-like planets orbiting in space somewhere below the assumed Earth globe. The term 'planetary systems' was Śrīla Prabhupāda's choice of words, and it is a term that he used consistently, but our modern conception of what might constitute 'planetary systems' is wholly different from what is being described by Śukadeva Goswami as seven huge realms within the one vast Earth circle. From the very beginning of Śrīmad Bhāgavatam, Śrīla Prabhupāda was translating verses relating to the Bhū-maṇḍala without even have a map or image of Bhū-maṇḍala to help him conceptualize where each place is situated, and how each place is related to the other.

The Fifth Canto especially presents a detailed description of the universal form that is very difficult to follow without a map, or depiction, or explanation of any kind. Without a map, or image, or explanation, the description of the virāṭ-rūpa (universal form) is very difficult to visualize. Śrīla Prabhupāda invariably used the word 'planet' to cover the multitude of places mentioned by Śukadeva Goswami. However, one should be aware that many of the places that Śrīla Prabhupāda refers to as 'planets,' are actually references to places upon the Bhū-maṇḍala's vast landscape, or within the depths of the Bhū-maṇḍala itself (the subterranean realms). They are not 'other planets' as we conceive them, but part of the Earth itself. As we shall see presently, the conception of seven layers of globe-like planets floating below the Earth is definitely not what is being described by Śukadeva Goswami. (Please refer to: Mayesvara Das, What's Below the Earth? , Oct 2017)

The seven lower planetary systems

Description of the upper, heavenly realms

Satyaloka The highest planet is Satyaloka, or Brahmaloka, where the prime person of this universe, Lord Brahmā, resides. We have seen already that we can hardly calculate the wondrous condition of life in Brahmaloka, but the highest condition of life, the mode of goodness, can bring us to this.

The human beings on earth are situated at the beginning of the intermediate worlds, but living beings like Brahmā and his contemporaries live in the upper worlds, of which the topmost iTapa-lokas Satyaloka. In Satyaloka the inhabitants are fully cognizant of Vedic wisdom, and thus the mystic cloud of material energy is cleared.

In that planet of Satyaloka, there is neither bereavement, nor old age nor death. There is no pain of any kind, and therefore there are no anxieties, save that sometimes, due to consciousness, there is a feeling of compassion for those unaware of the process of devotional service, who are subjected to unsurpassable miseries in the material world. The duration of life in Satyaloka is calculated to be 15,480,000,000,000 years. (sb/2/2/27)

Tapa-loka Tapoloka means those who have performed here severe penances, and they are transferred there in Tapoloka. In Tapoloka, when there is destruction, annihilation of this material world, in the Tapoloka there is no destruction. The higher planetary systems, beginning with Maharloka, Janaloka and Tapoloka, are not inundated at the time of this devastation.

In the upper planetary systems (Svargaloka, Janaloka, Tapoloka, Maharloka, Brahmaloka, etc.) the

living entities enjoy a longer duration of life, an increased amount of knowledge, and a generally more blissful existence. Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura estimates that Dhruvaloka, the polestar, is 3,800,000 yojanas above the sun. Above Dhruvaloka by 10,000,000 yojanas is Maharloka, above Maharloka by 20,000,000 yojanas is Janaloka, above Janaloka by 80,000,000 yojanas is Tapoloka, and above Tapoloka by 120,000,000 yojanas is Satyaloka. Thus the distance from the sun to Satyaloka is 233,800,000 yojanas, or 1,870,400,000 miles.

Jana-loka Great saintly persons, after death, they go to Janaloka or Maharloka. One in goodness attains higher planetary systems, like Brahmaloka or Janaloka, and there enjoys godly happiness. The word amalān is significant; it means “free from the modes of passion and ignorance.” There are impurities in the material world, but the mode of goodness is the purest form of existence in the material world. There are different kinds of planets for different kinds of living entities. Those who die in the mode of goodness are elevated to the planets where great sages and great devotees live.

The Personality of Godhead said: O son of self-born Brahmā, once long ago on Janaloka, wise sages who resided there performed a great sacrifice to the Absolute Truth by vibrating transcendental sounds. These sages, mental sons of Brahmā, were all perfect celibates. At that time you happened to be visiting the Lord on Śvetadvīpa—that Supreme Lord in whom the Vedas lie down to rest during the period of universal annihilation. A lively discussion arose among the sages on Janaloka as to the nature of the Supreme Absolute Truth. Indeed, the same question arose then that you are asking Me now. (SB 10.87.9)

At that time you happened to be visiting the Lord on Śvetadvīpa—that Supreme Lord in whom the Vedas lie down to rest during the period of universal annihilation. A lively discussion arose among the sages on Janaloka as to the nature of the Supreme Absolute Truth. Indeed, the same question arose then that you are asking Me now.

The (cosmic) devastation takes place due to the fire emanating from the mouth of Saṅkarṣaṇa, and thus great sages like Bhṛgu and other inhabitants of Maharloka transport themselves to Janaloka, being distressed by the warmth of the blazing fire which rages through the three worlds below. (SB 3.11.30)

Mahar-loka The yogī alone goes beyond this circle of Śiśumāra and attains the planet [Maharloka] where purified saints like Bhṛgu and others enjoy a duration of life of 4,300,000,000 solar years. This planet is worshipable even for the saints who are transcendentally situated.

The great sages and saints are promoted beyond the heavenly planets to Maharloka, but that also is not the place of complete fearlessness because at the end of one kalpa the Maharloka is annihilated and the inhabitants have to transport themselves to still higher planets.

In the Maharloka one can live even at time of partial annihilation of the universe. The annihilation begins with volcanic flames of fire emanating from the mouth of Shesha Ananta Deva from the lowest portion of the universe. By such big blazing fire, the heat reaches up to Maharloka and the residents thereof pass to Brahmaloka which exists up to twice the duration of parardha(?) time.

Svar-loka The karmīs, or fruitive workers, can elevate themselves to the Svargaloka planets, which include the sun and the moon. The moon, the sun and higher planets are called svargaloka. There are three different statuses of planets: higher, middle and lower planetary systems. The earth belongs to the middle planetary system. In the word svārājyasya, svar refers to Svargaloka, the heavenly planet, and svārājya refers to the ruler of the heavenly planet, Indra.

The denizens of heaven, who live in the planetary systems beginning from Svarloka, cannot even see

Lord Viṣṇu in Śvetadvīpa. Unable to reach the island, they can simply approach the beach of the milk ocean to offer transcendental prayers to the Lord, appealing to Him on special occasions to appear as an incarnation.

At the end of Lord Brahmā's day, everything up to Svargaloka is inundated with water, and the next morning, when there is darkness in the universe, Brahmā again brings the phenomenal manifestation into existence. Therefore he is described here as he who manifests this universe.

Indra, King of the higher planetary system, has the power to push down any conditioned soul attempting to go from the lower to the higher planets without proper qualifications. The modern attempt to go to the moon is also an attempt by inferior men to go to Svargaloka by artificial, mechanical means. This attempt cannot be successful. From this statement of Indra it appears that anyone attempting to go to the higher planetary systems by mechanical means, which are here called māyā, is condemned to go the hellish planets in the lower portion of the universe. To go to the higher planetary system, one needs sufficient good qualities. A sinful person situated in the mode of ignorance and addicted to drinking, meat-eating and illicit sex will never enter the higher planets by mechanical means. (sb/8/11/5)

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