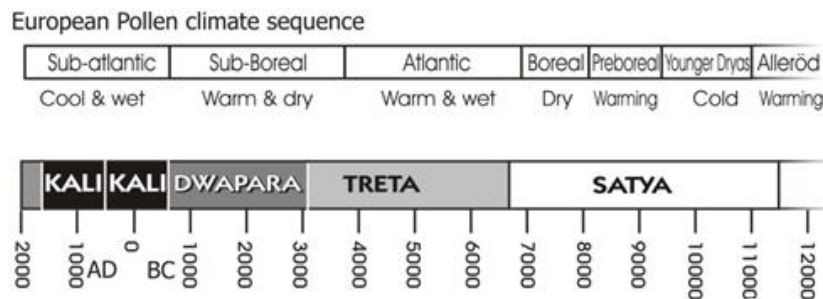


## Climate change and the Yugas

Byasa Steinmetz (An edited excerpt from *Tides of Dharma* Jan. 2010)

Through the ages, climate changes have had profound effects on human societies. Civilizations have been wiped out by a prolonged drought or an extended cold period. The Sahara has switched from rich savanna dotted with lakes to dry sand dunes causing mass migrations of human population. Today we experience the great impact of natural forces such as tsunamis and hurricanes, monsoon failures, and concern about global warming. No discussion of history on the broad scale would be complete without considering the role of weather.

Tradition has it that each transition between Yugas is accompanied by a major catastrophe of global proportions. Indications of such events can be seen in paleoclimatology studies, appearing as long-term climate shifts or short-duration disruption of normal weather patterns. In Northern Europe there are peat bogs that have been accumulated over many millennia. As each annual layer is laid down, it traps pollen from the surrounding plants. Each variety of plant is known to thrive in a certain range of temperature and moisture, revealing a record of climate changes in the peat bog layers. The resulting widely used sequence, called the Blytt-Sernander scheme after its turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century discoverers, lines up rather well with Sri Yukteswar's Yugas (Figure 1).



**Figure 1** The Yuga time periods correspond approximately to recognized climate intervals, and significant climate disruption events. The European Pollen sequence of climatic periods is the Modified Blytt-Sernander scheme, given by J. Mangerud et al., in *Boreas* Vol. 3 (1974) converted to calendar dates using CALIB 4.4 program. The pollen sequence is given in round thousands of Carbon 14 years before present, so differences of a few hundred years between the pollen sequence and the Yuga sequence are probably not significant.

After having warmed up from Ice Age glaciation to nearly modern temperatures, the descending Satya Yuga began with a sudden return to frigid conditions initiating the thousand-year long period called the Younger Dryas. Again in the early part of the Treta Yuga there was a 400-year long cold snap called the Mini Ice Age. Another shift at the beginning of the descending Dwapara Yuga caused widespread drought and frigid temperatures. The climate disruptions at the close of the descending Dwapara Yuga coincide with what historians label "The collapse of the Bronze Age" when many empires including those of ancient Egypt, the Hittite, the Mycenaean all ended at around the same time. The cold snap around 540 A.D., which coincides with the junction of the two Kali Yugas triggered widespread famine, migrations, and an outbreak of bubonic plague.

Historians naturally assume that climate change is the causative factor, and the changes in human society are the result. From the perspective of the Yugas, perhaps it is the chaos in human consciousness at the junction of the ages that triggers the climate changes. The Gaia hypothesis formulated by James Lovelock in the mid-1960s proposes that the earth functions as a living being that maintains conditions suitable for its continued existence. If this were true, would the earth not be at least as conscious as plants and animals? Would it not respond to the consciousness of its inhabitants?

In an article published in 1926, Paramhansa Yogananda describes the relationship between human consciousness and nature:

Nature's calamities are occasioned by the sum total of the multitudinous wrong human thoughts. Every event in Nature is the outcome of the thoughts of creation. We are all indissolubly linked together and bound up in a common fate. Our thoughts help to bind or to liberate the world at large. We are hungry, and we find all the forces of Nature, the earth, the sun and wind and water working together to yield our food. The more spiritually civilized we grow, the more we will control Nature. The servant of Nature rebels when the Master of the house of civilization sleeps. ... We are not the creatures, but the creators, of this universe. Our thoughts and deeds have contributed throughout the ages to the making of tidal waves, of forest fires, of volcanic upheavals, no less than they have flowered forth in spiritual giants, in innocent children and in the soft petals of the flowers.

----- Yogananda, Swami *Thoughts on the Florida Disaster* East-West magazine Sept-Oct 1926

Not all such episodes of climatic disruption have resulted in the kind of global shift that is associated with a change of yuga. Some shorter term climate upsets have occurred very near a yuga change, but others have not. It would appear that the climate factors alone are not a cause of the yuga shifts, but when climate disasters occur near the change of yugas, the social and economic stresses they create may set in motion changes ready to happen. These stresses grant the shift of consciousness an opportunity to manifest by disrupting the old patterns and presenting new problems requiring new responses.

Thus it may come as no surprise to the student of the yugas to recognize that we are in the midst of a climate change that promises great stress our civilization. Nor should it surprise us to realize that human greed has had something to do with it.