

WORLDS OF EMERGENCE

By Kenneth Johnson

The Maya used the Mesoamerican Sacred Calendar to compute large cosmic and historical cycles. These vast computations were accomplished by the use of a system of reckoning called the Long Count.

The Long Count is one of the greatest achievements of Mayan civilization. It endowed the Maya with a sense of cosmic vision that made them unique. Whether or not they "invented" it, they adapted it as their own and made it one of the foundation stones of their culture. In a way, it is a measure of their unique mathematical and philosophical gifts.

The cycle of 13 bak'tuns began on August 11, 3114 B.C., when First Mother and First Father brought the present world into being, as the Palenque Creation Myth tells us. It ended on December 21, 2012. Before we can understand the significance of their historical vision, we need to place their ideas in context.

A cyclic philosophy of history was part of the Mesoamerican world view. The surviving Aztec codices speak of four previous eras, worlds or "suns" that have come and gone before the advent of our present world, the "fifth sun." The Pueblo tribes of the American Southwest, such as the Hopi, conceive of humanity as "emerging" through successive worlds. Many Hopi elders perceive our present era as a transition from the Fourth World to the Fifth.

The Mayan *Popol Vuh* records a similar progression of worlds. The gods make several attempts at creating human beings, but the first few attempts fail. The earliest effort results in howling, chattering creatures, which the gods transform into the animals. The next try results in a man of mud who dissolves in the rain. The third try produces men of wood who are able to function in a primitive fashion but cannot worship the gods properly—they are not yet spiritual beings. The gods destroy them in violent rains and floods, even sending the animals to attack them. Their descendants are the monkeys. Finally, on the fourth try, the gods create men.

We can be certain, beyond any reasonable doubt, as to what the ancient shamans were attempting to do with the invention of the Great Cycle. The Maya were making a bold and powerful effort to mathematically quantify and define the "worlds" or cycles of emergence. By placing mathematical values upon the patterns of emergence, they created a model for the course of human history.

But do the Mayan world ages embody anything resembling a perceptible pattern? Does they give human history a shape or a rhythm?

The beginning of the Fourth World in 3114 BCE corresponds to a major transition in the way human beings lived their lives, a transition marked by the development of powerful new technologies which caused a quantum leap in the human experience. It was Jose Arguelles who first drew attention to the fact that the precise midpoint of the Fourth World, at 551 BC, corresponds with uncanny accuracy to what religious historians call the “axial age.” This important era serves as a virtual starting point for many of the world’s most important spiritual traditions. The midpoint of the cycle indicates a time in which spiritual concepts and ideas, after a long period of development, reaches a kind of apex, and one which disseminated itself throughout the world during the second half of the Great Cycle.

If this is indeed the outline of a pattern, we ought to be able to test this assumption with reference to a wider world view. If 3314 BC – 2012 CE constitutes the Fourth World, it will be easy enough to calculate the previous “worlds of emergence” and examine them for a similar pattern.

WORLD AGES	DATES
First World	18,489 BC – 13,364 BC
Second World	13,364 BC – 8,239 BC
Third World	8,239 BC – 3,114 BC
Fourth World	3,114 BC – 2012 CE

The First and Second Worlds

Both of these World Ages fall within the extremely long span of the Paleolithic. Advances in technology are subtle and difficult or impossible to date; speculations regarding spiritual ideas are even more so. Yet despite these difficulties, the midpoint of the Second World, which falls at 10,801 BC, stands out with remarkable clarity, for it corresponds nicely with current archaeological dates for the Magdalenian Culture of Western and Central Europe, which stands out as the very apex, the high point of prehistoric art. This would seem to be the period of time in which the finest artwork of Lascaux and Altamira was accomplished. While the motivation behind the painted caves has been argued over and over again by generations of

scholars, many have suspected some sort of religious impulse. If our hypothesis about the structure of the Mayan World Ages is correct, we might suspect that the great artistic achievements of the Magdalenian Era were inspired by the essential spiritual world view of that time – that the cave paintings, constitute the human expression of that spiritual outlook at its finest. Recent work in the field (for example, David Lewis-Williams, *The Mind in the Cave*) has focused upon the shamanic content of the cave paintings. Using our Mayan model of history, we might call Shamanism the principal spiritual paradigm of the Second World, and the cave paintings of Lascaux and Altamira its apex of expression.

The Third World

It is with the advent of the Third World or cycle of emergence that the Mayan dates begin to show a spooky accuracy of correlation with actual events. By 8,239 BC, the Ice Age is over. The world is a warmer place. The substance of human life has changed dramatically, and a new technology – agriculture – emerges to create a whole new lifestyle with a whole new world view.

Earlier generations of scholars spoke of a “Neolithic revolution,” as if agriculture and village life had suddenly burst upon the human scene all at once. It is now clear that the adoption of the Neolithic lifeway was a process rather than an event, and that it occurred independently in various parts of the world (Southeast Asia seems to be a bit earlier than the Near East). Scholars now date the primary impulse of this process from 9000 to 7000 BC. The beginning of the Mayan Third World pinpoints the axis of this process with great specificity. The Third World is the Neolithic Era. The new technology which characterizes this World Age is agriculture. Its principal lifeway is village existence, replacing the camp existence of the Paleolithic.

At the midpoint of the third cycle of emergence, 5,677 BC, the world view of the farmers formulates a new spiritual paradigm, one which characterizes the Neolithic as a whole. Between 6000 and 5000 BC, the religion of the Great Goddess develops its unity and its principal mode of artistic expression. This iconography of the Goddess, formulated in pottery styles and sculpted figurines, continued to develop and flourish during the rest of the Third World.

In accordance with the Long Count Calendar, the neolithic cultures began to decline at the end of the Third World due to climate change in the form of a “little Ice Age.” New hierarchies arose, bringing with them war tools made of metal. This new technology, emerging with great force around 3000 BC, marks the beginning of the Fourth World.

The Fourth World

Once again, the Mayan Calendar pinpoints the vortex of that process with great accuracy. King Menes united the upper and lower kingdoms of Egypt to found the First Dynasty of the Egyptian Pharaohs c. 3100 BC, within fourteen years of the inception of the Fourth World in 3114 BCE.

The beginning of the Fourth World – sometimes described as the “beginning of civilization” – was characterized by the development of metallurgical military technologies which assisted the rise of “sacred kings” who were able to command public resources through force and power alone, mobilizing populations into the building of cities, ziggurats and pyramids, thus creating a whole new urban lifeway. This process of urbanization occurred at the same time (c. 3114 BC) in at least four different regions of the world: Egypt, Mesopotamia, the Indus Valley, and coastal Peru.

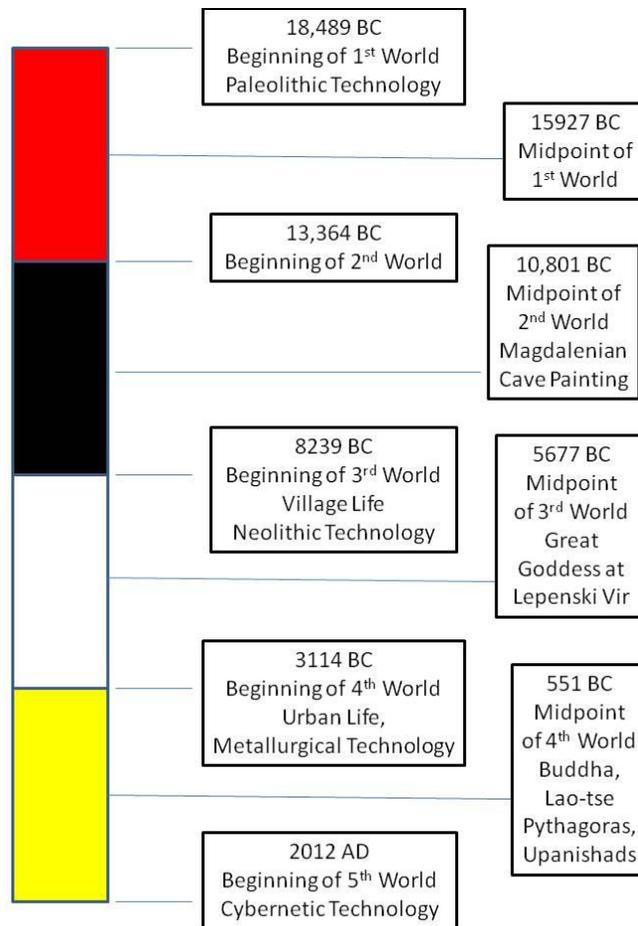
The midpoint of the Fourth World is 551 BC. Here again the Mayan Great Cycle reaches a degree of extraordinary accuracy, for this is demonstrably the primary vortex of religious thinking for the entire Fourth World. Sometimes called the “axial age,” it marks traditional dates for the lifetime of the historical Gautama Buddha and is the precise birth date of Confucius. Lao-tse, the author of the *Tao te Ching*, is also believed to have lived at this time. Ezekiel was active in the Near East. Pythagoras and other pre-Socratic philosophers were flourishing in Greece. The Upanishads were being compiled in India.

Now we can develop a schema for the “shape of history” inherent in the Mayan Great Cycles:

WORLD AGE	TECHNOLOGY & LIFEWAY	SPIRITUAL EXPRESSION
First World	Paleolithic Technology Camp Lifeway	Uncertain
Second World	High Paleolithic Technology Camp Lifeway	Shamanism, Magdalenian Cave Painting
Third World	Neolithic Technology Village Lifeway	Religion of the Great Goddess

Fourth World	Metallurgical Technology Urban Lifeway	Himalayan Mind Teachings
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This schema may also be usefully represented in a visual manner in the shape of a graph:



At present, we stand at the beginning of the Fifth World. There can no longer be any question as to what sort of technology will be responsible for powerful, indeed overwhelming changes in the way that human beings live. The proliferation of cybernetic technology during the last forty years of the Fourth World speaks for itself. It has already wrought immeasurable changes in human lifeways, and it is clear that the process is only just beginning.

And as for the spiritual expression of the new Fifth World?

Ah, we still have a long while to wait!

