

# Fabulous Four



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Srimate SrivanSatakopa Sri Vedanta Desika Yatindra Mahadesikaya nama:

# FABULOUS FOUR



## INTRODUCTION

My neighbor was remonstrating with his son over some minor infringement of discipline. "What will people say if they come to know of your conduct?" he queried. These, however, were not his exact words. Since he was speaking in Tamizh, he said, "Naalu perukku terindaal enna aagum?". I was listening to the exchange between father and son with interest, as anything happening at the neighbours' is of special interest to us.

In this case, the gentleman's reference to "Naalu per" or four people, set me thinking. Whenever we refer to popular opinion, we Tamilians refer to four people, who appear to represent society at large. "Naalu per enna ninaippaargal?" is the worry uppermost in our minds, when we contemplate a course of action which society may not approve. When you think of it, you wonder as to why the popular saying should refer to four people and not three or five or even ten? There must definitely be something significant about the Number four, without which the saying would not have gained currency. When I considered the matter further, I realized that prior to starting the purificatory ritual of Punyaaha vaachanam, which is a prelude to almost all vaidika karmas, it calls for the propitiation of four Brahmins—"Chaturo braahmaan toshayishye".

When Vibishana decides to flee Lanka and perform Saranaagati at the lotus feet of Sri Raghava, he does so with four of his acolytes in accompaniment—"Chaturbhi: saha raakshasai:" While this is so for auspicious matters, even

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when one is on one's last journey from home to the burning ghat, it is four persons who officiate as pall-bearers. Wondering at the propensity of Number Four to dominate the numerical scene, I did some more research and came up with an astonishing number and variety of occasions where the integer towers over other numerals.

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## PART 1

### THE FOUR VEDAS

Being basically vaidikaas, the first usage of Number Four that strikes us foremost is in the context of the Vedas being four:

1. Rig Veda,
2. Yajur Veda,
3. Saama Veda and
4. the Atharva Veda.

However, were the Vedas always four in number? We are told that in the Krita Yugam and Treta Yugam, the Vedas were one vast, undivided and undifferentiated body of knowledge. The Bhaagavata Puraana tells us that in the Krita Yuga, Vedas were only in the form of the Pranavam—"Veda: pranava evaagre dharmoham vrisha roopa dhrik".

During the Dwaapara Yugam, Krishna Dvaipaayana took birth as the son of the famed Paraasara Maharshi and as an avataaram of Sri Mahavishnu. Once, deep in meditation on the banks of Sarasvati River at Badarikashramam he looked into the future and finding men weak in physique and intellect and incapable of imbibing the vast body of Vedas, out of mercy for these weaklings, Krishna Dvaipaayana divided the Vedas into four, for convenience of study. It is thus that he acquired the name "Vyaasa"--"Vyadhadaat yagya santatyai Vedam ekam chatur vidham". These four Vedas were in turn imparted by Veda Vyaasa to four disciples of his:

1. Rig Veda was imbibed by Paila,
2. Yajur Veda by Vaisampaayana,
3. Saama Veda by Jaimini and



#### 4. Atharva Veda by Sumantu.

They, in turn, imparted the Vedic wisdom so acquired to their sishyaas, paving the way for people specializing in the study of particular branches of the Shruti.

#### FOUR DIVISIONS OF VEDAS:

We sometimes come across a classification of each Veda/saakha into four parts, viz.,

- 1.Samhita,
- 2.Braahmana,
- 3.Aaranyaka and
4. Upanishad.

For instance, the Yajus shaakhaa consists of the Taittireeya Samhita, the Taittireeya Yajur Braahmanam, Aaranyakam and the Taittireeya Upanishad.

However, the Vedas themselves contain several references to "Trayee" or three Vedas. We find, for instance, the Kaataka Prasnam referring to three Vedas—"Esho eva trayee vidya". The Bhaagavata Puraanam too tells that in the Tretaa Yugam, Vedas emerged from the Lord's heart, in the form of three separate bodies of knowledge—

**"Tretaa mukhe Mahaabhaaga! praanaan me hridayaat Trayee**

**Vidyaa pradurabhoot tasyaa: aham aasam trivrut mukha**

Rg, Yajus and Saama Veda are considered the principal Vedas, with Atharva Veda often being denied the status of an independent Veda, since it is regarded as an adjunct of the others.

#### FOUR OFFICIALS AT SACRIFICES:







Similar to the number of Vedas, the persons in charge of performing a sacrifice are also four in number—

1. Hota,
2. Adhvaryu,
3. Udgaataa and
4. Brahmaa.

The **Hota** sits near the sacrificial fire and recites mantras in praise of various deities. The Rig Veda details the functions of the Hota. The official who is engaged in the actual performance of the ritual from beginning to end is known as **Adhvaryu**, while one who sings the melodious verses of Saama Veda is called **Udgaataa**. The person in charge of general supervision of the Yagya, to ensure that everything is done as prescribed in the scriptures, is **Brahmaa** (not to be confused with the four-headed Brahmaa).

#### FOUR SWARAS:

Speaking of the four Vedas, Tirumazhisai Piraan calls them, "**naal niratta vedam**".

What is this quartet by which Vedas are qualified? They are nothing but the modulation with which Vedas are intoned, consisting of four types—

1. Udaattam,
2. Anudaattam,
3. Swaritam and
4. Prachayam.

It is these intonational differences, cumulatively known as "**Swaram**", that impart to the Shruti its majesty and grandeur and also represent differences in purport. Swaram is an indispensable component of Vedic recitation and mistakes in the same are likely to have major consequences. We hear of Tvashttaa (who developed enmity with Indra) performing a sacrifice to beget a





son who would kill Indra. He recited the mantra, "Indra shatru: vivardhasva". However, due to an error in intonation, the son who was born to him was killed by Indra, instead of becoming the killer of Indra.

Thus, a Veda mantra recited with improper intonation could very well prove counterproductive, often producing a result diametrically opposite to the one desired. It has now become the fashion in schools and colleges to begin the day with prayers from Vedas. Unfortunately, however, scant attention is paid to proper recitation. And in an ultimate insult to Mantras, we find the Gaayatri mantra blaring out even from tea shops, in the form of a song set to music by some accursed composer totally unaware of the significance of the mantra and the way it is to be intoned. And now, we have doorbells which recite the Gaayatri mantra in a mellifluous but totally incorrect fashion. When you go to such houses, it is better to knock on the door, rather than ring the bell and set off a string of mantras which can cause nothing but harm, the way they are recited.

#### FOUR CLASSES OF DEVOTEES:

Four figures prominently again, in another context. The Lord classifies His devotees into four categories—

**"Chatur vidhaa bhajante maam janaa: sukritina: Arjuna!**

**Aartho jigyaasu: arthaartthee gnaanee cha Bharatarshabha!"**

Those with a preponderance of meritorious deeds worship Emperuman. However, the basic purpose of all devotees is not the same. Depending upon the degree of their devotion and merit, while some go to Him seeking wealth and prosperity in their various forms, some who have lost their riches pray to Him for their restoration. While these two are basically materialistic in their pursuit, there is a third category of devotees (the "Jigyaasu"), which is inspired by the knowledge that the Jeevaatma is indeed a blissful entity. These bhaktaas seek to realize the Jeevaatma, prompted by the extraordinary





pleasure afforded by Aatma anubhavam. Towering head and shoulders above these people is the fourth category of devotee, the Gnaani, who regards both material prosperity and Aatmaanubhavam as mere baubles and spurns all mundane or even divine objects of pleasure. His single-minded devotion is focused on attaining the glorious Lord and being of eternal and everlasting service to Him.

It is this fourth category of worshipper who is dear to the Lord, since the Lord is dear to him— **"priyo hi gnaanina: atyarttham aham sa cha mama priya:"**

#### FOUR TYPES OF FOOD:

It is again in the Gita that Sri Krishna speaks of another group of four—four types of food. This classification is made based on the manner of intake of food. The Lord tells us that it is He, in the form of the Vaisvaanara Agni located in the stomach, who enables digestion of all food that we consume—

**"Aham Vaisvaanaro bhootvaa praaninaam deham aasthita:**

**Praanaapaana samaayukta: pachaami annam chaturvidham"**

And what is this "annam chaturvidham"? Sri Ramanuja says that it is

1. Food which is to be bitten and chewed,
2. That which is to be sucked in,
3. That which is to be licked and the last,
4. Liquids which are to be drunk.

For instance, rice, vegetables, etc. are to be bitten by the teeth and chewed well, while succulent fruits like mango are more to be sucked at. Viscous items like honey have to be licked and milk, water, etc. are to be drunk. All these four types of food are assimilated in our systems, only due to the existence of a digestive "fire in the belly", so to say, which is none other than the Lord. When you shut your ears with your palms, you hear a hum. The





Brihadaaranyakopanishad tells us that this is the sound of this Paramaatma.

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## PART 2

### THE FOUR VARNAS

The much-maligned but little understood Varna system too classifies human beings into four categories—Brahmanas, Kshatriyas, Vysyas and Shudras. Sri Krishna tells us in the Gita that this is a classification based on character, qualities and profession—“*Chaatur varnam mayaa srishtam guna karma vipaakasa*”

The profession-wise classification of people into four categories was as follows:

1. Those who devoted their lives for catering to the spiritual welfare of the populace through a life of prayer and penance, scriptural studies, fasting and self-denial. Poverty, chastity, contentment, devotion, cleanliness of body and mind, celibacy or Brahmacharyam as a way of life (but for the purpose of creating offspring), etc. were the prescribed virtues for Brahmins.
2. Those who were in charge of administering the country, ensuring an efficient Government catering to every need of the citizens, protecting them against onslaughts by alien invaders, etc. Unlimited bravery, tolerance, generosity, putting public interest before self, an eminent sense of justice and fair play and the readiness to sacrifice one's life and those of one's near and dear for the cause of the people, were qualities expected of a Kshatriya.
3. Those engaged in trade, industry and commerce and agriculture, making a living by identifying and satisfying existing and potential needs of the populace were the Vysyas. Belief in God, enthusiasm in earning wealth, keenness in sharing it with have-nots, etc. were the hallmark of a Vysya. It is interesting to note that the occupation of Vysyas was again classified into four—Agriculture, Dairy farming, Trade and Money-lending— “*Krishi vaanijya go rakshaa kuseedam turyam uchyate*” (Srimad



Bhaagavatam)

4. The fourth class of people were the service-providers, catering to the miscellaneous needs of the community and without whose contribution the society would grind to a halt. Patience, industry and hard work were the hall mark of Shudras.

It can be seen from the Scriptures that many of the so-called lower classes were praised sky-high—Sri Vidura, Dharma Vyaadha, Nampaaduvaan, et al are but a few examples—there were instances galore of the so-called people of higher birth being castigated for their misconduct, through ostracism and universal condemnation—Ajaamila, Kshatrabandhu, Asamanjasa..... the list is long.

However, if there is one tenet that has consistently disregarded caste barriers in eulogizing devotees of the Lord, it is Sri Vaishnavism. Sri Nammathwar, whom we regard as the Chief of Surrendered Souls ("Prapanna Jana Kootasttha") and who is held in high reverence by all, belonged to a so-called low caste. One of Sri Ramanuja's exalted preceptors, Sri Tirukkacchi Nambi, was a Vysya, with whom Sri Varadaraja was supposed to have conversed daily. Sri Maaraneri Nambi and Sri Dhanur Daasa are two more examples of exalted status being attained by sincere devotees, irrespective of their birth. Those who consider the Lord to be their everything and surrender themselves heart and soul to the Emperuman with four beautiful shoulders are indeed our masters, irrespective of their caste, says Sri Nammathwar—

**"Kulam thaangu saadigal naalilum keezh izhindu, etthanai  
nalam taanum illaada chandaala chandaalargale aagilum  
valam taangu chakkaratthu annal Manivannarkku aal endru ul  
kalandaar, adiyaar tam adiyaar em adigale"**

THE FOUR ASHRAMAAS:

The Varnaashrama Dharma detailed in the Manu Smriti was thus a panacea and





prescription for most of the social ills that plague humanity today, had it been adhered to in its letter and spirit. Having seen about the Varnas, we find that the Ashramaas are again four in number. Ashramam here refers not to hermitages or the abodes of sages, but to various stages in life one passes through. These are respectively

1. Brahmacharyam,
2. Gaarhastham,
3. Vaanaprastam and
4. Sanyaasam

From the day of Upanayanam, the boy is said to be a **Brahmachari**. Brahmam is another name for the Vedas and the Brahmachari is one who adheres strictly to scriptural commandments, spends his time in learning Vedas and other spiritual lore, wasting not a second in unwanted activities and staying away from all sources of material temptations. He was supposed to reside with his Acharya, considering him to be God personified, performing all sorts of service to him and adhering to him like a shadow, seeking and learning all the time and performing Sandhyaavandanam and Samidhaadaanam regularly without laziness.

The next phase of life for the Brahmachari who has successfully completed his studies to the satisfaction of his Guru and compensated the latter appropriately through Gurudakshina, is to enter into marriage. Marriage is intended to provide the young man with company suitable for the pursuit of Dharma and to keep the thread of procreation unbroken.

According to Ramayana, of all the Ashramas, that of the householder is counted as the best, as he is able to support those belonging to the other three Ashramas—

**“Chaturnaam Ashramaanaam hi Garhastthyam shreshttam Ashramam**

**Ahu: Dharmagya! Dharmagyaa: tam katham tyaktum arhasi?”**





## FOUR TYPES OF SANYAASIS;

We shall wind up the discussion of Ashramas, (though there remains much to be said) with mentioning the types of Sanyaaasis, which is again predictably Four—

1. Kuteesa,
2. Bahoodaka,
3. Hamsa and
4. Paramahamsa.

## THE FOUR MONTHS:

And as you know, Sanyaaasis are expected to stay at the same place for four months a year and not to travel during the monsoon season, observing a ritual known as Chaaturmaasyam. This is now observed, instead of four months, for four Pakshams or two months.

## THE FOUR YUGAS:

Well, to stop the social discourse and come back to the subject of the Fabulous Four, we find that the biggest measure of Time, the Yugam, is classified again into four—

1. Krita Yugam,
2. Treta Yugam,
3. Dwaapara Yugam and
4. Kali Yugam

**“Kritam Treta Dwaaparam cha Kalischa iti chaturyugam  
anena karma yogena bhuvipraanishu vartate”**

Just to give you an idea of the time span involved in a Yugam, here is the scale of measurement. (There are differing accounts of this scale and the following





is one of them):

1. The time taken for blinking is the basic measure. 18 such measures make one Kaashtta.
2. 30 Kaashttaas make one Kala
3. 30 Kalaas make one Muhoorttham (roughly equal to 48 minutes or 2 Naazhikai)
4. 30 Muhoorthaas consist of a day
5. 15 days make one Paksham
6. 2 Pakshams make a month
7. 2 months constitute a Ritu
8. 3 Ritus make an Ayanam
9. 2 Ayanams make a Year, by human standards
10. 1 human year constitutes a day for the Devas
11. 360 divine days constitute a divine year
12. 4800 divine years (equal to 1728000 human years) are there in the Krita Yugam
13. 3600 divine years (equal to 1266000 human years) constitute the Treta Yugam
14. 2400 divine years (equal to 164000 human years) are there in the Dwaapara Yugam
15. 1200 divine years (equal to 432000 human years) comprise the Kali Yugam.

The four Yugas combined, called a Chatur Yugam, thus consist of 43, 20,000 human years.

And one such Chatur Yugam forms a day for the four-headed Brahmaa.

A single day in the life of Brahmaa is thus incredibly and immeasurably long, by our standards.





This single day is again divided into 14 Manvantaras, each Manvantara consisting of 71 Chatur Yugams. Thus, for a single day and night of Brahma's life to elapse, 2000 Chatur Yugams or 86, 40,000000 human years must pass by. Mind boggling, isn't it?

Brahma's year too, just like ours, consists of 360 days, the only difference being the length of the day. Thus a year in the life of Brahma consists of 311, 04, 00,000000 years by our count.

And as Brahma's life consists of 100 such long years, his total lifespan measures up to 311 04 00 000 00000 years by the human time scale. One lifetime of a Brahma is known as a "Paraa" and half of it is "Paraardham".

These are not fictitious calculations, but are enshrined in the Bhagavat Gita, with the Lord telling us that the Brahma's life consists of a thousand Yugas (by divine standards)—

**"Sahasra yuga paryantam aha: yat Brahmano vidu:**

**Raatri: yuga sahasraantaam te ahoraatra vido janaa:"**

The point that Sri Krishna wishes to make here is that despite appearing interminable, even Brahma's lifespan is limited. All beings are thus subject to birth and death, some living longer than others. Only when we perform Bhakti or Prapatti, we reach the blessed land of Sri Vaikunttam, where the residents are no longer subject to the inexorable influence of time and are rid of the unending cycle of births and deaths.

You must have heard of the term "Yuga Sandhi". What exactly does it mean? Towards the end of a particular Yuga, people begin to develop the traits and qualities of the forthcoming Yuga. For instance, while Krita Yugam consists of 1728000 years, in the last 400 years, the influence of the Tretaa Yugam commences gradually. Also, in the first 400 years of Treta Yugam, the influence of the previous Krita Yugam persists, though on the wane. The last 400 years of the Krita Yugam and the first 400 of the Treta Yugam constitute





a Yuga Sandhi, a meeting point of the Yugas, so to say, wherein the influences of both the Yugas are felt. Similarly, the last 300 years of Treta Yugam and the first 300 of the Dwaapara Yugam constitute the second Yuga Sandhi and so on.

A Chatur Yugam, or the time spanned by the four Yugas put together, is supposed to be 43.20,000 years. Twelve thousand such Chatur Yugas make one Yugam for the Devas, for whom a year of our life is but a day.

People's lives were 400 years long during Krita Yugam, but during successive Yugas, the lifespan suffered reduction, becoming 300 years during Treta Yugam, 200 during Dwaapara yugam and 100 during the Kali Yugam. And these 400 years of Krita Yugam were fully productive years, unaffected by disease, ignorance, etc., ("pedai, baalakan adu aagum, pini pasi moopu tunbam")—

**"Arogaa: sarva siddhaartthaa: chaturvarsha sataayusha:**

**Krite Tretaadishu hi eshaam aayu: hrasati paadasa:"**

#### FOUR LEGS OF DHARMAM AND ADHARMAM:



We are told that among the four Yugas, Krita Yuga is the best, for people are at their righteous best, adhering fully to the duties ordained on them and to the dictates of Dharmam and Satyam. Dharmam is portrayed as a divine cow or bull, with four legs—

1. Satyam,
2. Dayaa,
3. Tapas and
4. Daanaam

This cow of Dharmam is able to stand balanced on all its four legs during the Krita Yuga.

Adharma too has four legs—



- 
- 
1. Dishonesty,
  2. Violence,
  3. Discontent and
  4. Strife.

The Yugas that follow the Krita Yuga show a progressive degeneration of Dharma, with the cow standing on three legs during Treta Yuga, two in Dwapara Yuga and teetering on just one leg, during the Kali Yuga. We find this deterioration of values over the Yugas reflected fully in the Epics.

#### FOUR PRAMAANAAS:

Leaving aside these fantastic figures of human, divine and Brahmaa's years, let us come back to basics. Which would you say are the sources by which knowledge is acquired? If you put this question to your son or daughter, he or she would come up with the following four—TV, Newspaper, Mobile Phone and friends circle. However, seriously speaking, the sources of knowledge (called "Pramaanaas") are again classified into four, according to the Uddhava Geeta—

1. **Shruti** or the unblemished and vast body of knowledge untainted by human composition, is the sole source of wisdom, in matters spiritual. The two Epics and 18 Puranas, which elucidate the cryptic dicta of the Shruti, along with Saamaanya and Vishesha Saastras, Angaas and Upaangaas of Vedas, together form a totally credible storehouse of wisdom.
2. **Pratyaksham** or sensory perception—what we are able to see, hear and feel with the aid of our own sensory organs.
3. **Anumaanam** or inference, where conclusions are drawn based on previous perceptions. For instance, when we see smoke rising on a hill, we infer that there must be a fire, for we have known that fire generates smoke, from having seen fire and smoke together.
4. **Itihyam** refers to concepts and convictions which have been passed on



by elders from generation to generation, forming a trustworthy body of knowledge.

Here is the relative Uddhava Gita slokam—

**“Shruti: Pratyaksham itihyam anumaana: chatushtayam**

**Pramaaneshu anavastthanaat vikalpaat sa: viraajate”**

The Shruti itself (Aruna Prasnam) classifies Pramaanas into four categories, substituting “Smriti” for Shruti—**“Smriti: Pratyaksham Itihyam, Anumaana: chatushtayam”**

**Dharma Lakshanam:** We often speak airily about Dharmam. However, what are the defining characteristics of Dharma? How exactly would we identify Dharma? Manusmriti tells us that these sources of Dharma are again four—

1. Vedas,
2. Smritis (compositions of various Maharshis based on the Shruti, clarifying and codifying its provisions),
3. The conduct of great men and finally,
4. What appeals to one's self

**“Veda; Smriti: Sadaachaara: svasya cha priyam aatmana:**

**Etat chaturvidham praahu: saakshaat Dharmasya lakshanam”**

However, we have to be careful here while interpreting Dharma as what is dear to one's heart—the heart referred to here is that of law-abiding persons who have absolute faith in the Shaastras. If people like me are given the choice of following what is dear to their heart, we would probably embark on an orgy of sin, under the pretext of following “Dharma”.

### A QUARTET OF FOURS

Ashtaavakra Rishi, in his youth, while debating with a famous vidvaan, enumerates the significance of the number four thus—





“Chatushtayam Braahmanaanaam niketam  
chatvaaro yuktaa yagyam imam vahanti  
Disa: Chatvaara: chaturascha varnaa:  
Chatushpadaa gourapi sasvat uktaa”

It is the four Ashramaas-

1. Brahmacharyam,
2. Gaarhasttham,
3. Vaanaprasttham and
4. Sanyaasam,

Which enable wise men to acquire the ultimate knowledge-- that of the Paramaatma. Only a person who passes through all these four Ashraamas would be able to comprehend the true nature of Brahman. The Gnaana Yagyam is conducted with the aid of people belonging to all the four castes.

THE LORD HAS FOUR FORMS

1. The Viraat Purusha or the cosmic form,
2. Sootraatma,
3. Antaryaaami or the Inner Dweller and the
4. Tureeya (fourth) Moorthi.

The Pranavam, which is a glorious mirror reflecting the Parabrahmam in all its splendour, is also comprised of four letters—the Akaaram, the Ukaaram, the Makaaram and the half letter (Ardha maatra).

THE FACULTY OF SPEECH STANDS ON FOUR LEGS

1. Paraa,





2. Pasyantee,

3. Madhyama and

4. Vaikharee

**“Chatvaari vaak parimitaa padaani, taani vidu: Braahmanaa ye maneeshina: ,  
guha treeeni nihitaa nengayanti, tureeyam vaacho manushyaa vadanti”**

says the Shruti,

Telling us that of the four types of speech, only the last, viz., Vaikharee is articulated by people. The other three remain hidden and only sages who have their mind in control are able to know them.

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## PART 3

### FOUR AND SRI VISHNU SAHASRANAMAM

If you were to look for the Lord's own favorite number, you would definitely plump for 4. For those who require proof of this, I would refer them to Sri Vishnu Sahasranaamam, which has no less than 12 names are based on Four. Shall we look into them individually?

#### 1. Chaturaatma

Commentators have interpreted this naama differently and we are blessed with a variety of meanings, all of which enable us to enjoy different facets of the Lord's auspicious attributes.

a) Emperuman has five forms—Param, Vyooam, Vibhavam, Antaryaami and Arcchaa. We are concerned here with the Vyoocha form of the Lord, because it is further classified into four. In this manifestation, the Lord divides Himself into four, as

1. Vaasudeva,
2. Pradyumna,
3. Aniruddha, and
4. Sankarshana.

These are primordial forms of the Lord, emanating from the supreme Para Vaasudeva or the Lord who rules at Sri Vaikunttam. The Naaradeeya Samhita tells us that there is a sequence in which these four Vyoocha moorties manifested—first Vaasudeva, then Sankarshana, followed by Pradyumna and Aniruddha.

The first to manifest, Vaasudeva, is pure white in complexion and complete in all divine aspects. He has four arms, representing the four dimensions of the







created universe, viz., Creation, Protection and Maintenance, Dissolution and Emancipation—respectively termed Srishti, Sthithi, Samhaaram and Mukti. He is pacific in aspect and clad in Peetaambaram. His right hand at the front holds a lotus or is in the gesture of protection (abhaya hastam), the corresponding left hand adorned by the Cosmic Conch. The upper right hand carries the Divine Discus Sudarsana, while the left holds the Mace (Gadaa) or a Book. When represented in the Vimaana of a temple, He is sculpted facing west.

Out of the divine tirumeni of Vaasudeva manifested Sankarshana (literally meaning one who was dragged out of the parent body), lustrous like the early morning Sun, wearing blue garments, wearing a kundalam in one ear, with His arms holding the plough (instead of the chakram) and pestle (instead of mace). In temple Vimaanaas, He faces the south.

Pradyumna, again, emerged from Sankarshana, red in complexion, wearing red silken garments. He has two or four arms. When He has two, He holds a bow and arrow and when four-armed, the Chakra and bow are held in His right and left upper hands, while lower ones are held in the Varada and abhaya postures respectively. He faces west.

Performing penance, Pradyumna produced from His own body the last of the four Vyootha moorties, viz., Aniruddha, the Lord of the Universe and the Master of Yogis. Dark blue in complexion and wearing yellow garments, He is four-armed and carries the Bow Saarnga, arrows and the gestures of Varada and abhayam. This form of the Lord is often found in a recumbent posture, with Sri and Bhoo Devi, facing north while on the Vimaana.

According to the Vishnu Dharmottara Puranam, there is a composite form of Sriman Narayana, with all the aforesaid four moorties in a single body, having four faces and eight arms, mounted on Garuda. The face of this Lord presented to the viewer is in a beautiful human form, representing Vaasudeva, while the face to the right is leonine, that of Nrisimha (symbolizing Sankarshana). The face to the left is that of a beautiful boar (Varaaha),





standing for Pradyumna, while the face to the back is terrifying in aspect and tawny-red in colour (raudram), representing Aniruddha.

Each of the four Vyooha moorties brings forth three other forms, known as Vyoohaantaraas—

1. From Vaasudeva-- Kesava, Narayana and Madhava,
2. From Sankarshana -Govinda, Vishnu and Madhusudana
3. From Pradyumna— Trivikrama, Vaamana and Sridhara
4. From Aniruddha— Hrishikesa, Padmanabha and Damodara.

It is also said that the four Vyooha moorties are responsible for the ten avataaraas (known as the Vibhava avataras)—

1. Vaasudeva for Vaamana and Krishna,
2. Sankarshana for Matsya, Koorma, Rama, Balarama and Kalki,
3. Pradyumna for Buddha and
4. Aniruddha for Varaaha and Nrisimha

Paancharatra texts speak of a great pillar in Sri Vaikunttam, known as Visaakha Yoopam, which is wisdom personified. It has four branches up and down, in the four directions. On each of these branches, the Lord is ensconced in Vyooha roopaas, with Vaasudeva in the East, Sankarshana in the South, Pradyumna in the West and Aniruddha in the North. Swami Desikan speaks about this Visaakha Yoopam in his Varadaraaja Panchaasat.

The corresponding feminine Divine Consorts of the Vyooha moorties are:

1. Shanti for Vasudeva,
2. Sri for Sankarshana,
3. Saraswati for Pradyumna and
4. Rati for Aniruddha.





There is a wealth of information in the Aagamaas regarding the Vyooha moorties. I have confined myself to a brief outline of them, and shall elaborate on some other occasion.

b) Coming back to Vishu Sahasranaam and the name Chaturaatma, the second interpretation of this tirunaamam" is--one who incarnated as four Vibhava forms, viz., Sri Rama, Sri Parasurama, Sri Balarama and Sri Krishna, all of whom represent the pinnacle of human perfection and exalted models for everyone to emulate.

c) The four functions mentioned above, those of Creation, Protection, Destruction and Emancipation, are the sole preserve of the Lord. He may delegate these duties to lesser demigods for performance, but He is the one who brings forth the universe with all its diverse inhabitants, affords it all protection in all forms, destroys it when the time comes for Pralayam and also blesses the devout with emancipation. As one who performs these functions, He is Chaturaatma. The following Vishnu Puraana Slokam confirms this—

**"Vyoohya aatmaanam chathurdhaa vai Vaasudevaadi moortibhi:**

**Srishtyaadeen prakaroti esha visrutaatmaa Janaardana:"**

d) Four intellectual functions owe their operation to the Paramaatma—Manas, Chittam, Buddhi and Ahankaaram (Mind, Intellect, Sense and Intuition)—He is therefore Chaturaatma. While the Mind resolves to carry out an act, the Intellect analyses the pros and cons and arrives at a modus operandi, Intuition guides us based on past experience and Ahankaaram is the pleasure of accomplishment born out of successful completion of the task.

e) The Lord is the Antaryaami or Inner Dweller of four types of devotees, as defined in the Bhagavat Gita—the sufferer, the seeker of truth, those in search of wealth and prosperity and those wise souls who seek only the Lord. Therefore, He is Chaturaatma.

f) The Jeevaatma too has four forms





1. The material, body called **Visva**
2. The subtle, spiritual portion called **Taijasa**
3. The **Kaarana Sareeram** or the aspect of Jeevaatma which enable the carry over of memories from a previous birth, and
4. The aspect of the soul transcending the aforesaid three forms, which is attained only through self-realization, is known as **Avikalpa**. The Lord supports each of the aforesaid forms of the soul, with appropriate forms of His own, known as Viraat, Sootramoorty, Isvara and the Paramaatma. This we come to know from the Nrisimha Uttara Taapini Upanishad.

Each of the hallowed names of the Lord is capable of multiple interpretations—the aforesaid is an example of how such a simple tirunaamam as Chaturaatma can conjure up so many varied and vivid portraits of Emperuman and His innumerable auspicious attributes.

### 2. Chatur Vyooha:

Leaving Chaturaatma reluctantly (for there is so much more to be said about Him), we come to the next tirunaamam, Chatur Vyooha: Sri Bhattar tells us that this name clarifies the functions of the four Vyooha forms of the Lord—Vasudeva, Sankarshana, Pradyumna and Aniruddha. The four forms divide among themselves the four states of existence—

1. **Jaagrat avasttha** or wakefulness,
2. **Swapna** or half-sleep in which dreams occur,
3. **Sushupti** or deep slumber and
4. **Turya** or deep yogam, resulting in union with the Paramaatma.

### 3. Chatur Damshtra:

The name Chaturdamshtra: tells us that the Lord, in His primordial form, possesses four large teeth, which Srimad Ramayana lays down as the characteristic of a great deity. While describing the incredibly handsome form





of Sri Rama in order to generate confidence in the troubled mind of Sita Piraatti, Hanuman tells Mythily that Her beloved Raghava has four great teeth—

**Chatushkala: chatur lekha: chatush kishku: chatussama:**

**Chaturdasa sama dvandva: chatur damshttra: chatur gati:"**

Sri Sankara opines that this name refers to Sri Nrisimha, who displayed four terrifying teeth, during His impromptu avataara.

Not only the Lord, but the divine elephant Iraavatam, (which too emerged along with Sri Mahalakshmi from the Milky Ocean when it was churned by Devas and Asuraas) also has four teeth—"Iraavatam chaturdantam kailaasam iva sringinam"

#### 4. Chatur Bhuj:

The next quartet that is referred to in the Sahasranaamam is the four arms of the Lord—Chaturbhuj:

Azhwars lose themselves in the beauty of the four-shouldered Emperuman. "My Lord of the four great arms!" Exclaims Sri Nammazhwar—"Naal Tol Endaai". The four lovely shoulders of Tirukkurungudi Nambi fill the hearts of all on-lookers—"Neela meniyum naangu tolum en nenjam niraindanave". Whichever direction one turns to, the sight of the four handsome arms fills the sight—"mannu poonum naangu tolum vandu engum nindridume". This characteristic of being four-armed is indicative of Supremacy, which can be gleaned from Mandodari's recognition of Sri Rama as none other than the four-shouldered Mahavishnu—"Tamasa: paramo dhaataa shankha charka gadaadhara:".

Why should the Lord have four arms and not just two as we do? Sri Nammazhwar says that the Lord sports four shoulders, so that He could destroy asuraas and save His devotees that much quicker—"asurarai tagarkkum tolu naangudai churikuzhal kamala kan senkanivaai Kaalamegam". The reason the





Lord sports four arms instead of two is perhaps to ensure speedy and adequate response in His principal occupation of providing succour to the distressed.

Another reason is that He blesses His devotees with the four Purushaartthas or desires of people—Dharmam, Arttham, Kaamam and Moksham. He gives to each devotee according to His prayer, with one hand specifically earmarked for each of the Purushaartthas.

These arms are compatible in size, proportion, beauty and strength with the rest of His glorious form and appear to be beautiful branches of a magnificent tree, growing upwards and down. These arms symbolize superlative Strength, Protectiveness and Might, all of which are indispensable qualities in the Paramapurusha, providing the rationale for devotees to pay obeisance. It is no wonder therefore that these divine arms are said to be the origin of the mighty ruling class, the Kshatriyas- "baahoo raajanya: krita:" (Purusha Sooktam). The beauty of these four arms is such that anyone casting even a stray glance at these stupendous specimens of virility is captivated totally, and doesn't like to prise his eyes away from the mighty arms, says Kamban- "tol kandaar tole kandaar". Even during the Krishnaavataaram, where, as a man, He ought to have sported only two arms, the Lord was born with four hands, but hid two of them at the request of His parents, who feared retribution from Kamsa—"Tam adbhutam baalakam ambujekhanam, chaturbhujam shankha chakra gadaadyudayudham" The Sahasranaama Stotram is so enamored of these four stupendous shoulders of the Lord, that about 600 tirunaamas later, there is a repetition of this supreme characteristic, as "Chatur baahu:"

#### 5. ChaturMoorti:

Difficult though it is to leave the subject of the four great arms, let us move on to the next group of four—Chatur Moorti: During Ramavataaram, the Lord divided His form into four separate entities, as the four sons of Dasaratha. The Lord had four forms in the Krishnaavataara too, as Krishna, Balabhadra,





Pradyumna (Krishna's son) and Aniruddha (Krishna's grandson), corresponding to the four Vyoocha moorties.

"Chatur moorti:" may also refer to the four complexions the Lord sports during various Yugas-- white in Krita yuga, red in Treta yuga, yellow in Dvaapara yuga, and black in Kali yuga. Sri Tirumangai Mannan confirms this—

**"Munnai vannam paalin vannam muzhudum nilai nindra  
pinnai vannam kondal vannam"**

#### 6. "Chaturgati:"

"chaturgati:" is another tirunaamam, which connects the Lord with number 4. Sri Bhattar tells us that depending on the intensity of devotion and requirements of the devotees, the Lord bestows on them exalted status and power, represented by the posts of Indra (the chief of celestials), Brahmaa (the four-headed creator), self-realization or Aatmaanubhavam (known too as Kaivalyam) and finally, unimaginable bliss and uninterrupted service to the Divine Duo at Sri Vaikunttam.

Others say that the Lord bestows on sincere devotees four types of Moksham, differing from one another in the intensity of pleasure (Ananda taaratamyam). These are

1. Saalokyam (being in the same world as Emperuman)
2. Saameepyam (being in close proximity to the Lord),
3. Saaroopyam (attaining the same beautiful form as the Paramatma, with four hands, etc. and
4. Saayuujyam (deriving the same degree of bliss as does Emperuman).

We Visishtaadvaitins do not agree with this, as we feel that all jeevaatmas who attain liberation become equal in all respects to the Lord, but for the power and responsibility for creation, etc. ("Jagat vyaapaara varjam", "Bhoga maatra saamyam lingaaccha") and that there is absolutely no difference of any sort,





whether in bliss or otherwise, between one occupant of Sri Vaikunttam and another.

"Chaturgati:" can also be taken to mean the four gaits of the Lord. Sri Rama was credited with four styles of walking and bearing. At times, His gait resembled the ponderous stepping of an elephant, at times that of a regal lion, at others the spring of an angry tiger and at others, the majestic step of a virile bull—"Gaja simha gatee veerou saardoola vrishabhopamou". It is interesting to note that Sri Ranganatha too is said to move in a variety of gaits as aforesaid.

#### 7. "Chatur Veda vit"

"chatur veda vit" is another tirunaamam, which tells us that the Lord is the only person who knows the exalted purport of the four Vedas. Others may indeed learn the entire Vedas, but they can realize only a minuscule portion of the Lord's glory as revealed in the Shruti. This can also be interpreted as referring to the Paramaatma as the only entity to be known through the study of the four Vedas—"Vedaischa sarvam aham eva vedya:"

#### 8. "Chaturasra:"

The Lord takes care of all the four types of creatures—those born from an egg, those from sweat, those from a womb and those that come out of the earth. His command is obeyed in all four corners of the universe. He bestows desired fruits on those who worship Him in a "Chaturasra", i.e., a yantra square in shape.

#### THE FOUR HORNS:

Since the other naamas with the theme of four have more or less similar purport, let us leave the Sahasranaama Stotram at this stage, and go on to the Taittireeyopanishad, which tells us that Paramaatma has four horns. "Horns and the Paramaatma!" You may wonder. The Shruti often speaks symbolically and allegorically and here, horns mean the Vedas and four horns refer to the





four Vedas—"Chatvaari shringaa: trayo asya paadaa: dve seershe sapta hastaaso asya".

The Lord's fascination with 4 doesn't end with the aforesaid. During the Mahabharata war, the chariot He drove had four horses pulling it. And the names of the horses were Saibya, Sugreeva, Balaahaka and Meghapushpa. These were really the best of their species and are described as "Haya ratna chatushtayam".

### THE FOUR METHODS

There are four ways of accomplishing getting things done by others. You first try nicely to convince the person who is to do it, of the need to do the job. If this doesn't work, you try to create division among the ranks, to ensure that your job gets done. If this too fails, you offer material inducements so that the person is motivated to carry out the task. If all else fails, you pick up the stick and resort to punishment. Till date, we find managements adhering to the aforesaid steps for achieving their goals. This, however, is no new management technique, but one as old as the hills, finding mention in the Amara Kosam, which names these steps respectively as

1. Saamam,
2. Bhedam,
3. Daanam and
4. Dandam

**"Sa prataapa: prabhaavascha yat teja: kosa dandajam**

**Bhedo Danda Saamascha Daanam iti upaaya chatushtayam"**

When I started writing on this subject, I thought I would be able to conclude it in about 4 or 5 pages, as usual. However, the wealth of information available and the reluctance to leave out even not- so- significant matters resulted in its running on to 22 pages. And when I decided to split it up for readers'





convenience, it naturally ended up in four parts!

Well, we had ended the previous part with the four methods of accomplishing things.

## THE FOUR DIRECTIONS

My son reminds me that the directions too are four in number—North, South, East and West. Here are some interesting tidbits about directions.

The Kaataka Prasnam tells us that

1. Agni the Fire God is the deity of East,
2. Indra of South,
3. Soma of West and
4. Mitraavaruna, of North

However, the overall Lord and Master of all directions is Vishnu—  
"Vishnavaasaanaam pate!"

It is the same Kaatakam which points out the association of directions with Vedas—

1. East with Rg Veda,
2. South with Yajur Veda,
3. West with Atharva Veda and
4. North with Saama Veda

At the time of Creation, all these four directions came out of the Paramaatma's ears, says the Purusha Suktam— "Padbhyaam bhoomi: disa: shrotraat"





## FOUR TYPES OF SARANAAGATI

Prapatti or Saranaagati too is said to be of four types. According to the Saranaagati Deepika of Swami Desikan, those who surrender to the Lord adopt one of the following paths-

1. **Svanishtta**—People with exceptional clarity about the nature of themselves, the Lord, the way to reach Him, etc., can perform Prapatti on their own. Sri Ramanuja's Prapatti at the lotus feet of the Divya Dampatis at Srirangam on Panguni Uttaram is an outstanding example of Svanishtta.
2. **Ukti Nishtta**—Performance of Prapatti with the guidance of the Acharya, repeating the Saranaagati Mantra after him, is known as Ukti Nishtta.
3. **Acharya Nishtta**—here, the Acharya himself performs Prapatti on our behalf.
4. **Bhaagavata Nishtta**—A Bhaagavata of good standing, other than the Acharya, with exceptional devotion, performs Prapatti on our behalf.

However, whichever is the type of Prapatti, it is the Lord who makes us perform the same, out of His infinite mercy for our eternal wellbeing, ridding us of the twin shackles of sin and merit and making us eligible for boundless bliss. Here is the beautiful slokam from Saranaagati Deepika—

**"Bhakti: Prapatti: athavaa Bhagavan! Tat ukti:**

**Tannishtta samshraya iteeva vikalpyamaanam**

**Yam kanchit ekam upapaadayataa tvayaiva**

**Traataa: taranti avasare bhavino bhavaabdhim"**

## FOUR YOGAASANAAS:

Here are some miscellaneous quartets. Those conversant with Yogaasanaas would know that the principal Asanaas are four in number:





1. Bhadram
2. Siddham
3. Simham
4. Padmam

Of these, Siddhaasana is supposed to be the best according to the Hata Yoga Pradeepika

**“Siddham Padmam tathaa Bhadram veti chatustayam  
shreshttam tatraapi cha sukhe tishttet Siddhaasane sadaa”**

RAMA AND NUMBER FOUR:

We have seen how Sri Rama had four great teeth—“**Chatur Damshttra:**” We are told by Valmiki that Sri Rama had four lines on His broad and beautiful forehead, four lines at the bottom of His thumb signifying four Vedas and that His height was equal to four arm-lengths. Four pairs of His body parts were absolutely equal to each other—His arms, knees, thighs and cheeks. All the aforesaid characteristics signify a great man—“Uttama Purusha” and are in conformity with Saamudrika Lakshanam. Sri Hanuman delights in describing these aspects of Sri Raghava's physical features to Sri Mythily—

**“Chatushkala: chatur lekha: chatushkishku: chatu: sama:**

**Chaturdasa sama dvandva: chatur damshttra: chatur gati”**

When it is time for Sri Rama's coronation, holy water is brought by four Vaanara veeras in four golden pots, from the four oceans of the world.

THE FOUR RAMAS:

We have heard of three Ramas—Parasurama, Dasaratha Rama and Balarama. Swami Desikan speaks of a fourth Rama, who has all the auspicious aspect of the other three Ramas combined, without any of their apparent shortcomings—





"Raamam turyam upaasmahe". And who is this mysterious fourth Rama? It is none other than Sri Mankkaal Nambi, (also known as Sri Rama Misra) the Acharya of Sri Alavandaar. But for his diverting Sri Alavandaravandar from mundane pursuits and exposing him to Bhagavat anubhavam, our Sampradaya would have been much poorer. The immense contribution of Sri Alavandar would have been totally unavailable to us, but for the stellar role played by Sri Rama Misra and this is the reason for Swami Desikan's glowing tribute to the Acharya, putting him on a pedestal higher than that occupied by even the Lord.

Says Swami Desikan in Sri YatirAja Saptati—

"I pay obeisance to Rama the Fourth, who is much greater than the three earlier and divine Ramas put together. Sri Parasurama lacked tolerance and mercilessly eliminated the ruling class for twenty-one generations. Our fourth Rama, however, is patience and tolerance personified. Sri Dasaratha Rama vowed to rid the world of bestial rAkshasAs and carried out His vow effectively, resulting in a massacre of the race. The Fourth Rama, however, would not harm even an ant, leave alone cause distress to people, good or bad. Sri Balarama was known for His partiality to "madhu", with eyes reddish and demeanour affected by imbibing such beverages. Rama the Fourth, however, is purity personified, unaffected by baser instincts".

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## PART 4

### Miscellaneous Items

#### FOUR-LEGGED CREATURES:

Some may be under the mistaken impression that the Vedas are meant solely for human welfare. Not so-- Veda mantras invariably include four-legged creatures while praying for universal welfare—"Sanno astu dvipade sam chatushpade".

Speaking of the four-legged, which would you consider to be the greatest of animals? The Mahabharata tells us that it is the Cow—

**"Brahmano dvipadaam shreshtta: Gou: varishttaam chatushpadaam**

**Guru: gareeyasaam shreshtta: Putra: sparsavataam vara:"**

Sri Ramanuja's Sri Bhaashyam, his lucid commentary on the Brahma Sootraas, has four chapters and each of the chapters consists of four parts or Paadaas.

1. The first chapter shows up the Brahmam as the sole cause of creation, sustenance and destruction of the world.
2. The second chapter establishes Brahmam as the material and instrumental cause of this world.
3. While the third chapter describes the means of attaining the Lord,
4. The fourth defines and details the concept of salvation.

#### FOUR LETTERS:

All of us know how potent the eight-lettered Mantra, the Ashtaaksharam is and the glory of its purport. However, not all the eight letters are required to rid us of our sin and to enable our ascent to exalted worlds. Utterance of just





four of these letters, viz., "Narayana" would do the trick, avers the Bhaagavata Puraanam, recounting the story of Ajaamila. Though guilty of the vilest of sins, Ajaamila could ascend to the worlds above through the mere utterance of the name Narayana, not even addressed to the Lord, but merely to his son. Ajaamila was merely calling his son Narayana while drawing his last breath and this act was enough for him to be cured of all his sins and to be taken to Vishnulokam. Tongues which do not utter these four letters are not tongues at all, but mere worthless flesh, says the Silappadhikaaram—"Narayana ennaa naa enna naave".

### THE FOUR SACRED BOOKS:

Every Sri Vaishnava is expected to learn the contents of four sacred books, from an Acharya. These are Sri Ramanuja's commentaries on the Brahma Sutras (Sri Bhaashyam) and the Bhagavat Gita (Gita Bhaashyam, with Swami Desikan's gloss Taatparya Chandrika), commentaries on Sri Nammazhwar's glorious verses of Tiruvaaimozhi and Swami Desikan's magnum opus Srimad Rahasya Traya Saaram.

### SECULAR SIGNIFICANCE OF FOUR

To conclude this piece (at last) and before you conclude that the importance of Number 4 is only spiritual, let me point out its secular significance. According to Mathematicians, Four is the smallest complex number. Four is the smallest composite number that is equal to the sum of its prime factors. A circle divided by 4 makes right angles. Because of it, 4 is the base number of Plane Mathematics.

Four is the only number in the English language, for which the number of letters in its name is equal to the number itself.

This is also true in several other languages. Four is the sacred number of the Zia, an indigenous tribe located in the US State of New Mexico. The mammalian heart consists of four chambers.





Most vehicles have four wheels. Most furniture has four legs - tables, chairs, etc. Four is considered an unlucky number in Chinese, Korean and Japanese cultures because it sounds like the word "death" in the local language. Due to that, many numbered product lines skip the "four": e.g. Nokia Cell Phones (there is no series beginning with a 4).

The armed forces, in olden days, used to consist of four divisions—Ratha, Gaja, Turaga and Padaadi—The Chariot-borne forces, Elephant-borne fighters, the Cavalry and the Infantry, collectively known as the Chaturanga Sena.

Writers would agree that writing is not difficult per se--it is only the problems of choosing an appropriate beginning and a suitable ending that pose difficulty. Just as I was wondering how to wind up this article, there was a huge roar from my neighbour's TV, signifying the crowd's rapture over another World Cup boundary—four runs. As this appears to be a good exit point, let me stop here, though I have by no means exhausted the possibilities of Number Four.

Srimate Sri LakshmiNrisimha divya paduka sevaka

SrivanSatakopa Sri Narayana Yatindra Mahadesikaya nama:

dasan, sadagopan

