

# What is Astrology? What is the Essence of Astrology? <sup>1</sup>

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## COMMENTS ON VEDIC ASTROLOGY

In the Vedic tradition of India, astrology is the 6<sup>th</sup> limb of the *Vedas*, each limb called a *Vedanga*. **Jyotish** is the Sanskrit word for Vedic astrology. It means literally: “science of light.” It is the remover of the darkness of ignorance, also the eye of divine knowledge that is considered pure, supreme, and exalted. Not surprisingly, *Jyotish* is considered “the eye of the *Vedas*.” Its value is in giving us the capacity to see the past, present, and future.

Astrology is considered the most important of the *Vedangas*, and of the *shruti* – wisdom which was originally heard by the ancient seers and transmitted as oral knowledge, intended to be chanted and learned in verses called *shlokas*. Not originally intended to be written, or to be learned from written language, it was an oral tradition, called *guru-shishta*. Vedic astrology began to be in written form only about six centuries ago, when sage Parashara wrote the first codified standard text, called the *Brihat Parasara Hora Sastra*. We probably do not have the full text of the verses, as some of them may have been lost. However, there is a momentum building in our era to translate many ancient Sanskrit texts.

Parashara describes astrology as “the supreme limb of the *Vedas*” and with three divisions: *Hora*, *Ganita*, and *Samhita*. **1) Samhita** deals with collectivity or multitudes. It includes weather forecasts, agricultural trends, political forecasts, government, national or international events. *Samhita* includes study of the Vedic New Year and all the Solar Ingresses, especially *Mesha Sankranta* (Solar Ingress into Aries). **2) Ganita** (or *Siddhanta*) is astronomy, or the mathematical aspects of astrology. The *Surya Siddhanta* is among the most important treatises on *Ganita*. **3) Hora** deals with individual horoscopes, or natal charts (*Jataka*), also *muhurtha*, or electional astrology, the astrological study of events.

Vedic astrology has no word per se for “planet.” The Sanskrit word used is *graha* – which means “that which seizes you.” Thus the power of the Sanskrit language immediately captures what all astrologers know to be true: A planet is not just a rock orbiting around the Sun or the earth. It is an entity or a force that has a tremendous effect on one’s existence here on earth. The placements

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<sup>1</sup> Edith delivered excerpts of the above text as a part of a panel of astrologers addressing these questions at the ISAR biennial conference, Indian Lakes Resort, Bloomingdale, IL, Aug. 17-21, 2005. ISAR is the International Society for Astrological Research. In alphabetical order, the 12 panelists on Aug. 19, 2005 included: Nick Champion, John Frawley, Demetra George, Ray Grasse, Lynda Hill, Rob Hand, Edith Hathaway, Joe Landwehr, Tad Mann, Roxanna Muise, Alan Oken, and Glenn Perry. Moderator was David Cochrane. (As the only Vedic astrologer on the panel, Edith described the Vedic view of astrology.)

of the planets in the heavens then describe the likely nature and destiny of each one of us, individually and collectively.

When the energies of the living being and the planet coincide or collide, your Karma is expressed. (The *graha* is also considered a living being in the Vedic tradition.) The *grahas* are alive and energetic. Nothing is dead according to Vedic astrology. However, the *grahas* are not causing the events. Instead, when the karmic energy of the individual collides with the planetary movement, the karma of the person or the collective brings out the result. The emphasis that the *Vedas* place on Karma is another fundamental supposition for understanding astrology, at least in the Vedic tradition.

According to that tradition, the effect of the *graha* and/or its passage through the zodiac is related specifically to the karma that any living being (whether individual or collective) has accumulated over many life times. The fruits of that karma will come due at specific moments in time, and the fullness or the severity will depend upon the karma that has accrued. Unique to Vedic astrology, the *Dasa* systems are a major key to describing fructification of karma, its likely content and timing. The *Dasas* start unfolding from the birth moment.

*Kala Purusha* means Time Personified. The zodiac is also called the *Kala Purusha*. It is as if each person's body is stretched out over time and space, creating the zodiac for that individual, thus their birth chart. This is part of the transmitted knowledge, not all of it easily available to us, but part of the ancient wisdom narrating the meaning of the heavens for inhabitants of the earth.

Vedic astrology does not speak about cosmic rays so much as the aliveness of these *grahas*, and their ability to affect each of us. Thus, in his esteemed work, *Brihat Jataka*, the great sage Varaha Mihira opens Chapter one with this verse: "May the Sun give us speech, who by his light illumines the Moon..."

The Moon's position tells us how we are likely to respond to our destiny by the habitual patterns of our mind. Vedic astrology sees many deities underlining the powers of the planets in their various manifestations, especially as they traverse the 27 *nakshatras* (the 27 mansions of the Moon, each one 13 degrees 20 minutes of arc, also coinciding with the average daily speed of the Moon). The planetary deities governing the 7 physical planets) can be invoked to cure afflictions from the respective planets:<sup>2</sup>

Sun: Agni (fire)  
 Moon: Varuna (water)  
 Mars: Subramanya (Lord Shiva's son following Ganesha)

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<sup>2</sup> This is as listed in *Brihat Parasara Hora Sastra*, Vol. 1, Ch. 3, v. 18.

Mercury: Maha Vishnu  
 Jupiter: Indra  
 Venus: Sachi Devi (consort of Lord Indra)  
 Saturn: Brahma

Classic Vedic astrology uses 9 classical planets, the 7 physical ones described above, plus the two lunar nodes, Rahu and Ketu, considered “shadowy planets.” They cause the eclipse of the Moon and Sun, respectively. The unfolding cycles are defined in terms of planets passing through the 12 signs and through the 27 *nakshatras*, interacting or not interacting with each other. Note that in the ancient Vedic texts, only the *nakshatras* were mentioned, not the zodiacal signs. This draws our attention even more to an astrology originating from a predominantly Lunar culture, whereas the West is more of a Solar culture.

In his *Autobiography of a Yogi*, Paramahansa Yogananda inferred that astrology is the best road map you are likely to have. He says: “ It is only when a traveler has reached his goal that he is justified in discarding his maps.” Astrology can indeed illuminate the way from the past to the present to the future, with some parts of your destiny more fixed than other parts.

### **GENERAL COMMENTS ON ASTROLOGY, ITS BASIS & ITS HISTORY**

Scientifically, astrology can be explained numerous ways. One is by the **Law of Correspondences**, central to Hermetic theory, which says that everything in nature has its parallel in the human being and in human affairs. In the macrocosm may be found the microcosm and vice versa. This was a well known principle from the early Christian era through to the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, kept alive for a few more centuries by almanacs and by works such as Nicholas Culpeper’s *The English Physician Enlarged*, a work published in 1653 describing medicinal plants and their associations with certain planets – and generally preserving the medicine-astrology traditions.

Astrology is the scientific study and application of the language of the heavenly bodies. Through the use of mathematics and astronomy, we can map these heavenly bodies and place them into a horoscope. Whether the Sun, Moon, planets and stars themselves actually influence terrestrial phenomena, or whether they only indicate such phenomena through their various positions in the heavens – this debate is inconsequential.

It is important to understand that astrology is beyond causality: the principle that says cause must precede and account for effect. Reality structures and probability patterns common to astrology show us that it is as if space and time are not only folding in on each other but spiraling around each other in ways that make present, past, and future simultaneous. Such is the fluidity and spiraling

nature of time and space. Quantum physics has its own Space-time-path interpretations. They study electrons being scattered backwards in time, and positrons going forward in time, and call them "Electron Space-Time paths," and "World lines for an electron." In astrology, planetary patterns can be used to describe how individuals and whole generations will tend to experience certain events that are happening now and throughout our lives.

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