The Science Of Vedic Astrology
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The Vedic Science of Light

Ever since India's seers first observed the planets wandering amongst the stars and astutely deduced their influence upon our lives, astrology has been an inseparable helpmate of Hindu religious practices.

Astrology is the science of fathoming the influence of the sun, moon, planets and stars upon living creatures. It remains an integral part of Hinduism, as old as the religion itself and woven into all practices, Deities and symbols. In this four-page center section we will explore major aspects of this subtle art. Here and on page 14 we will learn about the origins and systems of Vedic astrology, its present-day exponents, its burgeoning popularity in the West, its impact upon traditional Western astrology and how to choose an astrologer. On pages 12 and 13 we'll discuss planetary influences upon the karma and dharma of an individual, how astrology can be best used, the ideal astrologer, what to expect from an astrological reading and how to respond to the advice given.

By Vamadeva Shastri

Vedic astrology is widely used in India today by all classes of people, from villagers to government leaders. It is used in Pakistan and Bangladesh, and aspects of it appear in Tibetan

astrology. Indian politicians frequently employ astrologers, including the present Prime Minister, P. V. Narasimha Rao. The very founding of the nation of India was done at midnight according to the Vedic rule that actions initiated at midday or midnight help cancel negative planetary influences for the day. The Government of India officially follows the Lahiri Ayanamsha for astrological calculations.

Probably the most important astrologer in modern India for bringing Vedic astrology back out into the open is Dr. B.V. Raman, who is now over eighty and still very active through his many books and his Astrological Magazine, the oldest and largest circulating journal on Vedic astrology. India contains the world's largest school of astrology, the Delhi school of Vedic astrology under my teacher, Sri K.N. Rao, which today has five hundred students and twenty teachers in its two-year program.

There are various prodigies of Vedic astrology as well. S.G. Karve of Bombay, a householder with six children, can determine the birth chart of a person through psychic insight alone and does not require the birth time of the person. He goes into a meditative state and tells the person the planetary positions in the horoscope. There are still astrologers in India who, given the birth time, can cast the entire chart in their head, without recourse to any books, having memorized the planetary tables and rates of motion. The complete process takes a number of hours, however. Many other great astrologers exist, but live and practice in relative obscurity. Much of astrology in India remains an oral tradition, and only a fraction of it has yet to be made available.

There are a number of special systems of Vedic astrology that yield very exact knowledge of a person's life. Some of these require the birth time of a person, others are records of destiny in the possession of the astrologer. Bhrigu Pandits can tell a person his name, his parents' names, his occupation, or where he has come from, along with detailed information about his life, character and destiny. While the Bhrigu Pandits in Hoshiapur (Punjab) are most famous, today a Bhrigu reader, Pandit Nathulal, of Karovi Bhilwara in Rajasthan, also has a very good reputation, not only for past events, which most Bhrigu pandits are accurate about, but about the future as well, which is more difficult to determine.

I myself visited a Surya Samhita astrologer in Bombay a few years ago. He came out with a sheaf of palm leaves for the day. After asking a few questions about the number of brothers and sisters in my family, he quickly came to a palm leaf that agreed with my life and then read out the main events of my life, accurate to the year. The manuscript he read from was in a South Indian script but the words were in Sanskrit, understanding which, I could verify the reading, as he translated the Sanskrit into English. He outlined the rest of my life up to the time of death, gave an overview of my last life and an indication of the result of this life. Then he added three pieces of advice that have proved invaluable for me.

Such experiences are not unusual with Vedic astrology. Nadis are special works giving precise astrological knowledge. They exist mainly in South India, and several works of this nature survive. Dr. B.V. Raman has a version of the Dhruva Nadi which divides the zodiac into 1,800 sections and has a specific indication for the results of the ascendant in each of these

sections, which requires a birth time accurate to less than one minute. Once the chart is rectified to the appropriate Nadi amsha, there are additional rules of interpretation that can provide much amazing knowledge. Such phenomena intimate the depth of Vedic astrology and explain its growing worldwide appeal.

Making the Western Transit

Vedic astrology, which has been slowly percolating into the West for many years, is now coming out into the open. It has arrived in two ways, first as part of the interest in yoga, Vedanta and related aspects of Hindu spirituality, second as part of the growing interest in astrology in general. The yoga group includes many people who are not astrologers but who believe in the system because of their contact with the spiritual teachings. The astrology group consists mainly of those interested in Vedic astrology for its astrological value and may otherwise have little knowledge of Hinduism. Naturally, there is an overlap between the two groups, and Vedic astrology often serves to draw people into other aspects of Hindu spirituality.

Vedic astrologers in the West consist of two groups: Westerners who have adopted Vedic astrology, and Vedic astrologers from India who have come to the West. Probably the most noted living in the West is Sri Chakrapani Ullal [see page 10]. He has been giving classes and consultations here for over twenty-five years. He was brought over by H.H. Swami Muktananda to give readings to his American disciples. He was recently noted as one of America's best astrologers in People

magazine.

Western books on Vedic astrology have begun appearing as well. First, in 1986, was James Braha's Ancient Hindu Astrology for the Modern Western Astrologer. Second was my own Astrology of the Seers: A Guide to Hindu/Vedic Astrology (1989) and Ronnie Gayle Dreyer's book, Indian Astrology. Others have followed as well. In 1992 the first American International Symposium on Vedic Astrology was held in the United States with over three hundred people attending.

Perhaps most notable of the spiritual teachers from India to the West who have emphasized astrology was Paramahansa Yogananda, who offers several anecdotes about astrology in his book Autobiography of a Yogi. His teacher, Sri Yukteswar, was himself an astrologer. The most important yogic group to emphasize astrology has been the TM movement of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, which has been offering classes in Jyotisha and bringing accomplished astrologers from India for many years.

Deepak Chopra, though now separated from TM, also uses Vedic astrology for his system of mantra meditation. Mata Amritanandamayi recommends that her disciples consult astrologers and have rituals performed to propitiate negative planetary influences, particularly Saturn and Rahu. Many other Hindu teachers do the same, now that Westerners know of Vedic astrology.

Comparing the Eastern and Western Systems

Vedic and Western astrology share a common heritage, as evidenced in part by the similarity of the zodiac signs in each [see illustrations below]. But they now differ in several ways. The Vedic system is more complicated, with many different types of charts and calculations to consider. A complete Vedic astrology printout may have ten or twenty pages just for the data alone.

Early Christianity soon rejected astrology, which was integral to the pagan religions the Christians were struggling against. Astrology was condemned in the 4th century ce by no less a person than Saint Augustine as totally antithetical to the Christian faith. Western astrology, its venerable tradition broken, later received some impetus from Islamic astrologers. But in the necessary compromises with these often hostile theologies, the karmic basis of astrology was lost. In the twentieth century Western astrology reoriented itself in a psychological and humanistic direction. This history makes Western and Vedic astrology profoundly different, far beyond variations in calculations.

Both systems use the same twelve signs of the zodiac: Aries (Mesha), Taurus (Vrishabha), Gemini (Mithuna), Cancer (Kartaka), Leo (Simha), Virgo (Kanya), Libra (Tula), Scorpio (Vrishchika), Sagittarius (Dhanus), Capricorn (Makara), Aquarius (Kumbha) and Pisces (Mina). They describe the signs in similar terms. However, they determine the signs differently and start them from different points. Western astrology is tropical, or reflects a temporal-seasonal model. It relates the beginning of Aries with the point of the vernal equinox. Vedic astrology is sidereal or reflects a spatial-stellar model. It relates the beginning of Aries with certain stars at the

beginning of that constellation. Because of the precession of the equinox, which causes the Earth to gradually tilt backwards in its orientation to the heavens, the equinoctial point moves slowly backward in the zodiac.

While the two zodiacs were identical around 300 ce, they have since been slowly diverging. The difference between the two zodiacs is called the ayanamsha. Most Vedic astrologers use the Lahiri ayanamsha which is presently about 24 degrees, and therefore places the equinox in about 6 degrees of Pisces. The shift between the two zodiacs causes the entire chart to move back about 24 degrees from the Western to the Vedic chart. The positions of most planets go back to the previous sign. This naturally results in a very different chart. It can be confusing for those used to their Western chart, particularly for the Sun sign, so emphasized in Western astrology, which is likely to change. "I used to be an Aries, now I'm a Pisces," is a common kind of complaint.

Both Vedic and Western Astrology recognize the seven planets: Sun, Moon, Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn, which they describe in similar terms. Vedic astrology also prominently uses the lunar nodes, which it calls Rahu and Ketu. The outer planets of Uranus, Neptune and Pluto are not part of classical Vedic astrology. Some Vedic astrologers use them today, though seldom to the extent that Western astrologers do.

Both systems use the twelve houses and interpret them similarly (though with variations). The main difference is calculation. The Vedic system makes the cusp the beginning of

the house, while Western astrology makes the cusp the middle of the house. This causes about half the planetary positions in the Vedic chart to move forward to the next house relative to the Western chart.

Both systems recognize the importance of aspects between the planets. However, there is a major difference in how aspects are calculated. Western astrology uses many different aspects calculated by degree. Vedic astrology recognizes only a few different aspects calculated by sign. In Western astrology aspects may be good or bad, but in the Vedic planets are good or bad, not their aspects.

Vedic astrology uses an additional 27-fold division of the zodiac by nakshatras (constellations). Personality traits are read more through the birthstar (nakshatra of the Moon) than by the Sun sign. The birthstar is used for naming a person, for determining proper timing of rituals, and for astrological forecasting. Nakshatra positions of planets are examined in the birth chart as well. The use of nakshatras is very important in Vedic astrology, on par with that of the signs.

Vedic astrology has many different systems of planetary periods called dashas. Most important is Vimshottari Dasha, a 120-year-long cycle of planetary positions based upon the birth nakshatra: but several other systems can be used as well. Up to fifty-four are known. These allow a great accuracy in predicting events in a person's life.

Because Vedic astrology is well known for its predictive

accuracy, some people think Vedic astrologers are psychics, but what they see is based upon a logical analysis of the chart. Some people believe that Western astrology is more spiritual and Vedic astrology more mundane because of Vedic astrology's predictive nature, and Western astrology's more psychological approach. Westerners, who have material affluence, like to ask spiritual questions of astrologers. Indians, coming from a poor country and for whom the right career, for example, may mean affluence or poverty, ask more mundane questions. Hindus also have many gurus, temples and ashrams to get answers from about spiritual questions and don't always consult an astrologer to do so. Vedic astrologers can be accurate, too, at predicting events of a spiritual nature, like the sadhana one should follow.

Vedic astrology is here to stay. It is alive and well in the modern world. Like yoga, and more recently Ayurveda, it is likely to become part of the world cultural and spiritual heritage. While modern science is still looking for its unitary field, which many scientists see as consciousness, Vedic astrology already shows us how that field works throughout our destiny and the entire movement of time.

Vamadeva Shastri was trained by Sri K.N. Rao. He was given the name Vamadeva by Avadhut Shastri in India and accepted as a family member. Known in the West as David Frawley, he is a well-known author of many books on Vedic subjects, Jyotish Kovid (from the Indian Council of Astrological Sciences), the director of the American Institute of Vedic Studies, President of the American Council of Vedic Astrology

May the Creator (Brahman), Preserver (Vishnu) and Destroyer (Siva) of the universe along with the Sun, Moon, Mars, Mercury, Jupiter, Venus, Saturn, Rahu and Ketu, grant me a good morning! Single Shloka Stotra to the Planets