

[It's About Time](#)

Category : [November 1998](#)

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MYSTIC ARTS

It's About Time

Hindu astrology has found a welcome reception in America as a growing number of Indian and native practitioners serve a increasingly astute clientele

Be it meditation, mantras, yoga, ayurvedic medicine, vastu architecture or--to go further back--the systematic study of language, ancient Vedic arts and sciences have slowly penetrated Western life. Among the least recognized of these divinely inspired intellectual colonizers is jyotish, Hindu astrology. Its introduction has picked up steam only in the last five or ten years, and it seems destined now to eventually displace the Western system of astrology--itself derived from the Greeks who took it from the Hindu system thousands of years ago. Prominent among jyotish's harbingers is Chakrapani Ullal, who arrived in America in 1979 as the personal astrologer of Swami Muktananda. A few years later, in 1981, Chakrapani set up practice in Southern California. Today he runs a thriving counseling service dealing with hundreds of clients a year, including major corporations. He's one of several cross-cultural facilitators who have inspired hundreds of Americans to pursue the divine art and many thousands to seek its wisdom.

Dennis Harness, for example, met Chakrapani in 1980 at

Swami Muktananda's ashram in Santa Monica, California. "It was a profound experience of being seen at a soul level," Harness told Hinduism Today. "During the session, many predictions for the future were made which have come to pass. Chakrapani told me that my profession would involve teaching, counseling, consulting and advising using astrology. At one point during the consultation he looked deeply into my eyes and said, 'I know your mind very well, perhaps better than you.'" Harness is one leader of the American Council of Vedic Astrology, a recently formed group representing about half the practitioners of Hindu astrology in America--several of whom have written and been featured in the sidebar stories to this article.

Unlike in India, astrology has been exiled to the margins of respectability in the West since the Middle Ages. Though rarely enforced, laws against "fortunetelling"--which includes astrology--exist today in many communities. Earlier in the century some of America's most prominent astrologers were arrested. When enemies of Nancy Reagan, wife of US President Ronald Reagan, wanted to get even with her, they exposed the fact she had been consulting an astrologer, Joan Quigley, throughout much of Reagan's presidency, and that his meetings of state were generally timed according to Quigley's advice. The First Lady was widely ridiculed in the media.

Two groups, normally at opposite ends of issues, vehemently attack astrology today: conservative Christians and crusading secular humanists--the former as a devilish art, the latter as superstitious balderdash. Nevertheless, astrology remains widely popular, and columns of advice appear in nearly every daily newspaper in the country.

The first Vedic astrologer arrived in America in 1946 in a book, not a boat. He was Sri Yukteswar, guru of Paramahansa Yogananda. Yukteswar was a major figure in Yogananda's hugely popular Autobiography of a Yogi, read by millions. "In this text," recounts American Vedic astrologer Gary Gomes, "many of those outside India got a taste of the power of astrology in India and the use of remedial measures such as gemstones."

Western astrologers were more or less aware of the Vedic system, either through Autobiography of a Yogi or by reading The Astrology Magazine, published by Dr. B.V. Raman of Bangalore, India. Some knew their own system had problems, that it was a truncated and inaccurate version of the more complete ancient astrology. So, in a return to their own roots, they invited Raman--a revered figure in India--to speak at a New York conference in 1959. He came before the 60s outbreak of spiritual fervor and the arrival of swamis from India, and to some extent he provided a groundwork for them. He reintroduced the concepts of karma and reincarnation to Western astrologers, fundamentals missing from their system. He's continued to visit--eight times up to 1993--and has seen many Westerners adopt the Vedic system under his guidance and inspiration.

In the 70s only a handful of Americans were trying to figure out the Vedic system, but then in the early 80s the Transcendental Meditation movement of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi and the International Society for Krishna Consciousness both began actively promoting Vedic astrology, along with other traditional Indian arts and sciences.

Freelance Indian astrologers have visited or immigrated to America also in the 70s and 80s to serve the immigrant Hindu community. Their numbers are not known; guesses range from fifty to several hundred, if priests practicing part-time are included. Serious, full-time American Vedic astrologers probably number about 50, according to Harness, and several hundred more are capable amateurs.

Many of those adopting the Hindu system were adepts at the Western system. The major difference, according to them, is that the main focus of the Western system is psychology, whereas in the Vedic system the focus is predictions. But there have always been businessmen, such as J.P. Morgan, the richest man of the 19th century, and politicians, such as the Reagans, who have made practical use of the science of light.

Some Vedic astrologers, Harness for example, use the system in conjunction with psychological counseling--citing a pattern set by the famed psychiatrist Carl Jung, who corresponded in the early 50s with B.V. Raman on the charts of difficult patients. Others, such as Chakrapani, Stephen Quong and Christina Collins-Hill, work in the business world. Asked about her clients, Christina commented, "Mostly I talk to their lawyers" --meaning she was involved in her client's crucial corporate dealings. Laxshmi Shankar Trivedi, an elder of the Gujarati community living in Fremont, California, counsels a few dozen businessmen. He provides the service of horary, the answer to a single question, based upon the moment it was asked, sometimes augmented by the inquirer's chart. Grateful clients amply reward him with a share of the profits his advice brings.

With astrology, there is a perennial question of credentials. Even in India, where there are degree programs (Trivedi has a masters in astrology) and certification tests (such as by the Indian Council of Astrological Sciences, founded by Raman), anyone may call himself an astrologer and start a practice. In America, Harness, Quong, Vamadeva Shastri and others held a symposium in 1992 with Raman as the key speaker. From this developed the American Council of Vedic Astrology, which encompasses perhaps half the practicing Vedic astrologers in the country and offers certification tests. This level of organization and training among the followers of the Indian system in the US has only developed within the last few years.

Astrologer K.N. Rao's tours and seminars in 1993 to 1995 opened new vistas of knowledge for the fledgling community in America, especially with regard to the dasa system and other more complex aspects of the Hindu science of the heavens. Unfortunately, Rao became unhappy with both his tour hosts and Americans in general. Unlike Raman, he arrived in a fairly decadent America. Raman came in the late 50s, when American life was still kind and gentle. "My personal experience," Rao told Hinduism Today reporter Rajiv Malik in a recent interview in New Delhi, "is that America is totally, one hundred percent, a mercenary country with all the ills of capitalism. Family life has broken down, and society has become totally dysfunctional." Rao is aghast at the lack of respect for parents, the loose sex life and the self-centeredness. Such observations--he himself confesses a lack of tact--and disagreements over money during his tours left him at odds with several prominent Vedic astrologers here. Raman made many of the same observations--though somewhat less heatedly--in his entertaining book, *Hindu Astrology and the West*. Rao's main complaint about the

astrologers was a lack of training--especially in the area of predictions, which he considers the heart of Hindu astrology. "There are some very good Americans who want to take the spiritual life very seriously and who are keen learners, but they are overly dependent on their computers and cannot do mental calculations. My advice is to first of all do worship."

Whatever the faults of the nascent group of Vedic astrologers in America, one must acknowledge the great personal sacrifice each has made to practice their art. Both association with astrology and Hinduism can lead to serious, even permanent rifts with parents, wives and family members--especially for those doing it full time. Even in ordinary life, announcing you are an astrologer does not enhance your social standing. Despite these obstacles, dozens of sincere individuals are working hard to learn the complex Vedic systems. Many mix Eastern and Western astrology, though Chakrapani and Quong attribute this to a lack of thorough familiarity with the Vedic system. Several say proudly they are Hindus. Those who do not cite a specific religion tend to follow an eclectic path, selecting beliefs and practices from various traditions. They may have been born as Christians, but have outgrown that belief system. Traditionally, according to Raman, Chakrapani, Rao and others, an astrologer who expects divine guidance should follow a sattvic, pure, lifestyle, and some are found lacking in this respect.

Vedic astrology may displace Western astrology, as Chakrapani predicts, but the greater impact is that these astrologers are spreading the core Hindu beliefs of karma and reincarnation among their clients--95% of whom are not Indians. They are also exponents of the efficacy of prayer,

sadhana (spiritual disciplines) and self-sacrifice to alter the course of a person's life.

Michael's Smart? Ask His Chart

As part of this story, Hinduism Today sent astrologers interviewed for the article the birthdate, time and place (and nothing else) of genius Michael Kearney, who entered high school at 5, graduated at 6 and at age 14 was the youngest person to ever receive a master's degree in America. We asked, "What is exceptional about this person?"

Of the seven responses we received by deadline, four were amazingly accurate. Among the readings: "highly intelligent, early educational advancement;" "excelled in academic studies, performed beyond their years;" "Unusual attainments in the form of education;" "great deal of creative talent being recognized now." The other three were not too close on the education, but indicated, among other traits, that Michael has a strong intuitive and spiritual nature--something we confirmed with his parents. Is there any other science which can know anything about a person, sight unseen?

The Great Cycles of Life

Understanding the rhythm of the dasas

Edith Hathaway took up Western astrology and hatha yoga in 1976, and Vedic astrology in 1988 under the initial tutelage of Vamadeva Shastri.

A dasa is a cycle or period of time. In Vedic astrology there are 55 different dasa systems, of which the Vimsottari is most

used. Vimsottari literally means "120," and refers to man's ideal 120-year lifespan, with various cycles, subcycles and sub-sub-cycles within it. These dasas are indicators of when the karmaphala, fruits of karma from past lives, will unfold. The sequence of the dasas is the same for everyone, but the starting point varies according to the individual chart, specifically the Moon's nakshatra. The duration of the mahadasas, or major cycles are: Sun, 6 years; Moon 10 years; Mars, 7; Rahu, 18; Jupiter, 16; Saturn, 19; Mercury, 17; Ketu, 7; and Venus, 20. Dasas unfold differently for each person, depending upon the birth chart.

An example close to me is that of the great Hindu saint, Ma Amritanandamayi, known as Ammachi. The first 19 years of her life--her Sun and Moon dasas--were extremely difficult. She was unnoticed, uncared for, treated as a domestic servant and completely misunderstood by her own family. The dasa sequence for Ammachi since age 19 has steadily improved the material conditions of her life, even as a satguru and Holy Mother. When she entered Rahu dasa in 1972, devotees came and her first ashram began. Typical for a spiritual master, her dasa sequence starts off with many difficulties, then improves dramatically. During her Saturn dasa, beginning in 2006, her influence should become extremely prominent.

Medical Astrology

To foresee problems and guide treatment

Vamadeva Shastri (Dr. David Frawley) divides his talents between astrology and ayurveda, writing, editing and teaching in both fields

Among the first questions an astrologer may hear from a new client is, "How is my health going to be?" or even, "How long am I going to live?" Medical astrology aims at assessing our health potential, our likely diseases, their possible cure and our life span, as well as potential emotional and mental problems. This system is intimately connected with ayurveda, the Vedic medicine.

All of us eventually get sick and die, so every chart has negative health potentials--a disturbing fact when dealing with those close to us. Proper analysis can show us when a person is likely to get sick and their potential for recovery. If a person has come down with a major illness and is entering into difficult planetary periods, the prognosis is not likely to be good. If the periods change to something positive, a quick recovery can be indicated. The chart can also show which treatment may work best for them--and especially when to schedule major surgery. Even wrong treatment can be predicted!

Remedial measures can promote health. Gems, mantras and rituals for planetary deities can make a real difference in the vitality of a person. Gems help fortify the pranic (energy) field and subtle body which is highly sensitive to cosmic rays. Mantras and rituals are good for problems caused by occult influences.

By providing early warning of impending negative planetary periods for our health, astrology gives us time to take precautions and offers methods to minimize the negative effects.

Right Timing

Working with, not against, the stars

Christina Collins-Hill began her practice of Western astrology in 1968 and incorporated the Vedic system in 1989. She assists a celebrity clientele and students and is a TM teacher.

Electional astrology (muhurta, "moment," in Sanskrit) selects a time for an action to commence by searching for positive future planetary placements. By doing this, we can relieve or correct difficult conditions in the natal chart which cause impediments to a desired objective. Spiritual muhurta includes timings for initiation, weddings, name-giving, etc. Material muhurta covers matters of education, business, surgery, travel, law, etc.

A client of mine, Mike Love, lead singer of the popular music group "The Beach Boys," approached me with the years-long dilemma that many of the songs that he had either written or co-written did not carry his name as the author. Through four years of litigation, we used muhurta for dates to file documents, arrange depositions, court dates, etc. When difficulties seemed inevitable, we used remedial measures, such as ayurvedic remedies to "cool down" the nature of the participants. The final results? The other band member admitted Mike wrote the songs.

Another client absolutely needed a passport immediately. Learning that it would take six weeks, he called me in distress. Using a muhurta that had a two-minute window of auspiciousness, I asked him to personally drive himself to the

passport office--not to send an employee--and hand in his request at the exact time. He received the passport in just three days!

One can learn the complex art of muhurta, but I recommend engaging the services of a competent astrologer for all important life moves.

Little Omens

Reading subtle signs

James Kelleher learned astrology in 1975 from M.K. Gandhi. He has pursued the practice full-time since 1980.

If an astrologer wants to know what is going to happen in the future, he can, rather than analyze a chart, look around for signs. An entire branch of Vedic astrology, called nemitta, is devoted to this subject. Omens, we are told, work because of the interconnectedness of all things.

A couple of years ago, I was invited to dinner, along with two other astrologers, by a popular lady-guru in Delhi. She asked us, "Will I return to India permanently?" Since my friends were accurately reading her chart, I would have nothing to add. So I scanned the room for signs. Suddenly, the guru asked the cook to bring three glasses of milk. Then an ex-consulate general to India came to visit. I had what I needed. When my turn came, I said, "The signs coinciding with this reading suggest that you will return to this country permanently in three years--indicated by the three glasses of milk and the consulate general's arrival"--a prediction later confirmed as accurate.

You don't have to be an astrologer to use nemitta. Birds, animals, the weather and other events can all give clues that will reveal your future. There is also a system called swara, based on which nostril is more clear at the time of a yes-no question. If on Sunday, Tuesday or Saturday, at the time of asking, the right nostril is more clear, then the answer is yes. If the left is the clearer one, then no. On Monday, Wednesday, Thursday or Friday it is reversed, left is yes, right is no. This may sound like mumbo jumbo, but it is based on esoteric principles related to the ida and the pingala, two types of subtle energy which run up the spine in different ways on different days of the week, and it works--as do other forms of omen reading.

Parenting by Dharma

Astrology's clues for good child rearing

Self-taught, Dennis Flaherty is certified in Western and Eastern astrology and uses both. He has been initiated into Sufism, TM and Kriya Yoga.

Instruction on the raising of children in Hinduism is quite different than in other faiths, because of the doctrine of reincarnation. Vedic astrology can benefit any family, Hindu or not, who shares this belief system.

First, an astrologer can identify for devout parents those times for conception more divinely ordained than others to bring an evolved and high-minded soul into their family.

Health of their newborn is then naturally the parent's foremost

concern. The child's chart will indicate areas of constitutional weakness and potential illness. In some cases balarishta yogas--negative karmas of the past with the potential to cut this life short--are seen. In all cases, including extreme ones, remedial measures are effective, especially the parent's prayers. This is not wishful thinking. I have personally seen miracles.

The astrologer can suggest appropriate education, based on the child's inclinations for profession. Spiritual inclinations may be seen and encouraged. Appropriate discipline can be recommended. For example, if the child has a strongly placed Saturn, verbal admonishment can bring about humbling results. If Mars is strong, physical chores constructively engage the child's nature, but corporal punishment will only negatively engage the Martian nature, further fueling samskaras of anger and potential violence. What is good for one child is not good for another. Raise the child according to his or her nature, not another's nature.

Financial Astrology

Getting as rich as destiny allows

Stephen Quong, Umananda, is a trained investment consultant, and since 1991 a full time Vedic astrologer specializing in finance.

Timing is everything in the world of business. Through a careful analysis of an individual's birthchart, an astrologer can predict not only a person's overall prospects to succeed in a specific field of endeavor, but outline the exact timetable when the favorable karmas of previous lifetimes which affect

finances become reactivated. He can also predict when increase is not likely, those times when a person should concentrate on preserving his present capital.

For example, one of my clients had opportunities in both aircraft leasing and the shipping business. Apparently, there was an immediate, appealing prospect in shipping, and none for several years in the aircraft leasing business. Nonetheless, my analysis indicated success for him only with airplanes, and in the near future at that. Trusting my advice, the individual continued in the aircraft business. He attained extraordinary success a short time later, while the shipping opportunities fell through.

The choosing of an auspicious time and date (muhurta) for a business meeting or court appointment can also make a significant difference in ensuring amicable or favorable outcomes.

Besides personal karmas for wealth, there are collective karmas which manifest as business cycles and overall increases or decreases in the stock market. There are many successful investors who use astrological analysis of cycles related to planetary placements, lunar phases, even sun spots and solar flares, as their primary basis for timing their trades.