

# CELESTIAL NAVIGATIONS

## A Philosophical Introduction to Esoteric Astrology As a Path of Self-Mastery

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### What is Astrology?

From a permacultural perspective, astrology is stellar ecology — an ecology of the stars. It considers the one environment we all share, no matter who we are or where we live, the sky above us, turning slowly round once per day. We all live under the same ever-changing planetary patterns.

Astrology maps what we all have in common, it assumes unity.

Planetary patterns look slightly different depending upon the angles from which they are viewed. As each place on Earth is unique and has its own particular beauty, so too each planetary pattern is unique, when viewed from a particular place on earth.

Astrology respects diversity, it honors uniqueness.

To study the stars is both to behold Earth as the center of the universe and to recognize Earth as one member of one tiny solar system in the Milky Way galaxy — and beyond. Astrology, the study of the stars, is a universal language, perhaps even a divine language — the language the gods would use had they need for words.

### Astrology Is a Language

Whenever I go to a party, someone asks me, “Why do you believe in astrology?” I answer them with another question, “Why do you believe in English?”

Astrology is not a belief system; it’s a language. Like any language, astrology can be used to make true — or false — statements. Taken as a whole, however, languages are not “true” or “false.” We use them — or abuse them; we learn them or leave them alone.

## **Astrology and Belief Systems**

Even though astrology is not a belief system, those who speak this language do have belief systems. There is no “neutral” or “objective” understanding of astrology. Anyone who uses this language does so within his or her own particular perspective, or world-view.

There are two main belief-systems associated with the language of astrology, one which denies free will and the other which assumes it.

Most people identify astrology with “fatalism,” which denies free will. This is the belief system wherein responsibility for one’s life is placed upon something else besides the self. Thus, some say, “the stars” (the planets) determine both who they are, and what’s going to happen to them day by day.

Astrology can also be associated with another belief system, known by a number of different names, such as “esoteric,” “occult,” or “metaphysical.” (By the way, the word “occult” here, does not refer to anything deep, dark, or mysterious. It simply means “hidden,” or that which is not immediately obvious.) Whereas fatalism denies free will, esotericism gives it back to us — totally. Indeed, you are entirely responsible for yourself — who you were in the past, who you are now, and who you choose to become in the future.

Within the esoteric point of view, you are composed of three principles: body, mind, and soul. Body and mind are mortal, they live and die. The soul is immortal, it existed before you were born, and it will exist after you die . . . forever.

The esoteric belief-system assumes reincarnation, the idea that your soul lives many lives, each of them a stepping stone, the lessons it contains helping your soul in its evolution towards perfection.

Free will, within the esoteric point of view, is a function of your soul. The soul chooses the life.

Your soul chooses both the moment and the place of birth, and therefore the specific physical and social environment into which you were born — including your body and mind, your parents,

your brothers and sisters; the soul chooses your genetic stream, in other words, the flow of qualities of all kinds inherited from generation to generation. The soul also chooses your tendencies to health or disease, the lessons this particular life has to offer, and the talents which help you learn them.

Fatalism frequently ignores the soul. It tends to see us as puppets in a play, mechanical, with no inward direction of our own, pulled by strings external to our beings for no apparent reason.

Esotericism, on the other hand, assumes that you as a soul are a spiritual being evolving towards perfection, through the process of freely choosing, and then learning, from the experiences of your many Earth lives.

Within fatalism, the causes of human thoughts, words and deeds are assumed to be external. Within esotericism those causes are recognized as internal, a part of your own nature. Esotericism assumes that we create our own realities; it focuses on a specific inner potential which pushes for development throughout a given lifetime.

### **The Birthchart Is a Destiny Pattern**

The astrological birthchart maps the planetary pattern in the heavens during one particular moment shown from one particular place on earth. This moment is also the destiny pattern of the person born then and there. In other words, your birthchart locates you as an individual in time and space and indicates the direction your life will take.

As above, so below. As within, so without.

The universe is always changing, it does not repeat itself. Therefore, each pattern is unique, and each person born under a particular pattern is also unique, unrepeatable. You are the only person on earth to ever have your specific pattern. (Even identical twins are born in different bodies, and at slightly different times.) There is nobody in the world like you. Therefore, there are no models, no one to tell you how to think, what to do, who to become. Each of us entering the Earth plane does so as a seed, a tiny concentrated unit of potentiality destined to express itself, to develop itself fully, according to its own unique laws, unfolding its own glorious individuality.

We are free — to become precisely ourselves, fulfilling our entire potential.

### **“Old” Souls and “Young” Souls**

How successful a soul will be in following through with the birth destiny chosen depends upon both the continued use of free will and upon the level of understanding the soul has gained through previous lives. How “old” the soul is, how many times it has already incarnated, is not something an astrologer can understand by simply looking at a birthchart. (However, to a seasoned astrologer, the pattern in the birthchart does offer clues.)

An old soul is capable of expressing his/her birthchart with more “awareness” than a young soul can. What a young soul might call “fate” — a sense of being tossed about by uncontrollable circumstances — an older soul will recognize as individual destiny. Older souls have experienced and “suffered” enough to understand that whatever is going on outside mirrors what’s happening inside. As above, so below. As within, so without.

The older soul realizes: whatever are the circumstances we find ourselves in, we have attracted these to us as mirrors. That’s what they are for! To show us what’s going on inside us! Outer happenings symbolize inner events. To change our circumstances is, first, to change our minds. We create our own realities. No one else, and no thing else, not even “the stars,” is responsible for the way we live our lives.

In response to fatalists who claim that the planets “cause” us to behave in certain ways, I would say with Edgar Cayce, it is more likely we humans “cause” the planets to act in certain ways! We are much more powerful than we think. Thoughts act as laser beams. They cut through space. They cross vast distances. They carve out the courses of the planets. And — what’s even more extraordinary — the courses of our lives. It is we who are responsible. Able, to respond!

### **Astrology Is A Symbolic Language**

Astrological “words” are “symbols.” Each of them generates an immense range of meaning. It’s as if the symbol were a sun, and its meanings are the rays, radiating out from that central symbolic nucleus. This nucleus itself is mysterious. The essence of a symbol

cannot be defined. It remains mysterious, much like a dream is mysterious.

No matter how definite our attempts to rationally understand our dreams, to make them make sense, there is always something left over, an irreducible core that eludes any of our attempts at understanding and continues to yield a rich harvest of meaning. That which is symbolic in nature is larger, fuller than any of our attempts to limit it to literal definition.

Symbols are gifts of the spirit. They ask to be appreciated, not boxed in. And to do this, we must switch from left to right brain. We must relax, into our intuitive, dreaming, receptive, symbolic selves.

Within this context, we may ask, what am I really supposed to accomplish before I die? What is the meaning and purpose of my life? These questions then become the dynamically pulsating center around which all lesser concerns revolve as constellations. A meditation upon the birthchart orients us towards a continuous and ever-deepening resonance with our life purpose, and encourages us to live fully, to live impeccably, to live our lives as if they mattered.

## **Introduction to Interpretation**

In order to follow this path of self-mastery via the language of astrology, one must learn certain technical rules for interpreting the birthchart.

While learning the technical rules however, please keep in mind that the birthchart yields its meaning more fully to intuition than to any system of technical analysis. Indeed, it is the intuition itself which must be trained. As Einstein once said, “'luck' comes to the prepared mind.” As a concert pianist appears to play the most technical and complex pieces effortlessly, so too, the student of astrology must train for years to be able to focus the intuition precisely and then recognize the manner in which a birth pattern is being enacted.

Astrology is the study of space and time and their relations to one another, considering circles and cycles, structures and processes. As a discipline it is formal, abstract, and mathematical. From this

point of view the birthchart is merely an arrangement of points upon the plane of a circle.

The birthchart maps the blueprint, or essential structure, of one's life. The continuing cycles of the planets as they act upon birth planet positions over time correlate with one's life as a process.

The art of astrology consists in relating the abstract discipline to the concrete lived experiences of human beings.

We humans are complex and mysterious creatures. It is appropriate then, that astrology is perhaps the most complex and mysterious language ever invented to describe human character and experience.

In what follows, I will introduce certain astrological concepts as if they were separable from their original context. Keep in mind however, that ultimately, everything in the birthchart must be understood in relation to everything else! For example, if one has a Sagittarian Sun, this must be understood in relation to the placement of the Moon and the other planets, the Ascendant, the signs and houses planets occupy, geometrical aspects among all the planets, as well as the geometrical pattern of the birthchart as a whole. The birthchart is so complicated that it contains unlimited points of possible reference. What to look for depends both on tradition and training as well as on personal expectations.

### **Horizontal and Vertical: Ascendant and Midheaven**

The birthchart as a whole is both a “map” of the heavens, and a circular “mandala,” a graphic representation of wholeness. The symbols inside the circle of the birthchart represent planetary energies. The birth moment and place are represented by the two central coordinates of the chart, the horizontal line and the vertical line. These two crossed lines and other spokes in the wheel frame the “houses,” numbered counterclockwise from 1 to 12, starting with the Ascendant, as particular areas of life experience where planetary energies are located.

The horizontal line on the chart represents the actual horizon at the moment of birth. When you were born, all the planets above that line were above the visible horizon of the earth and all the planets below that line were below the horizon. “Above,” symbolically, represents day, light, publicity, objectivity, detachment — you in

relation to the world. “Below” represents night, darkness, privacy, subjectivity, attachment — you in relation to yourself.

The vertical line is known as the “meridian.” Planets located left of this line represent those energies through which you work out your destiny independently of others. In this half of the chart you create your own circumstances. Planets located to the right of the meridian represent those energies through which you work out your destiny in concert with others. In this half of the chart you respond to circumstances already created.

Remember, the birthchart is a representation of who you are. And the energies of the universe flow through you. The circumference of the chart represents the boundary system of the self, which “contains” the ten planetary energies. These energies interact with the world outside you through their relation to the two “outlets” of the birthchart. These outlets are called the “Ascendant” and the “Midheaven.”

The Ascendant is the “personal” outlet, and is located at the left end of the horizontal line. The Midheaven is the “impersonal” outlet and is located at the top end of the vertical line. (Think of these “outlets” as nozzles on a garden hose, used to spray water in different ways. The settings of these “nozzles” are determined by the particular astrological signs they occupy.)

The Ascendant, or rising sign, represents that point of the eastern horizon “rising” at the moment of your birth. The Ascendant represents both your personality and the environment. Your personality is that part of your self which you show to the world — your persona, coming from the Greek word meaning “mask”; it also represents your face, your body, and the way you express yourself through it. The Ascendant is not your real self, but your self-image, as well as the image you show to others. The “environment,” also represented by the Ascendant, includes the circumstances and situations in which you find yourself moment by moment.

At the other end of the horizontal line is the Descendant. As at the Ascendant you dynamically project your personality into the world, so at the Descendant the world is magnetically attracted to you. The Descendant signifies partnership. Planets found here often seem to describe qualities of your partner, whether personal or professional. It may also signify your opponents, who are partners of another kind.

The horizontal line is the symbol for the theme of the self in relation to the other in our daily lives. As we project ourselves into the world, so do we attract others who reflect our own projections.

At right angles to the horizontal line is the vertical line, the two ends of which are called the Midheaven (at the top) and the Immum Coeli (at the bottom).

The Midheaven, the topmost point of the chart, is the other outlet which allows your inner energies to interact with the world. Whereas the Ascendant is a personal outlet, describing your personality's interchange with the immediate environment, the Midheaven outlet is impersonal, showing what you are here for, the purpose, or conscious intent of incarnation. It is the most public position in the chart, and signifies your eventual achievement or lack of it, noting recognition and notoriety, honor and dishonor.

The Midheaven usually signifies your career, the role you play in society. Once you have begun to "individuate" however, the Midheaven then describes your calling, what you must do to fulfill your calling, what the universe needs of this particular entity.

Directly opposite to the Midheaven is the Immum Coeli, at the very bottom of the chart. As the Midheaven represents what you are reaching for, so the Immum Coeli represents the foundation upon which you stand. Home and family, the very roots of the self. This is where you put your feet on the ground. The Immum Coeli symbolizes the most private part of your self, and constitutes the ground of your being.

The vertical line then, stands for the private in relation to the public theme in our lives. As we plant our feet on the ground, so can we reach for the stars.

### **Planets, Signs, and Houses**

There are three different types of astrological symbols shown on the birthchart: planets, signs, and houses.

The astrological symbols for the "planets" stand for specific spiritual energies or principles. Astrology identifies ten different planetary energies operating within you, the eight known planets plus Sun and Moon.

The same planet operates differently depending on which “sign” it occupies. Think of the planet as a “verb” and the sign it is in as an “adverb,” modifying it, making it behave in a certain manner. (For example, the verb for Mars might be expressed as “to act.” If, in a chart, Mars is placed in the sign of Cancer, it would indicate action expressed “emotionally.”)

Each sign represents one phase of the astrological journey encompassing the totality of human experience. There are twelve signs, or, phases, of that journey. Each sign occupies a thirty degree segment of the circular zodiac, 360 degrees. (The “zodiac,” by the way, is the pathway of the Sun, Moon, and planets, and lies like an invisible belt around the earth.)

As there are twelve signs, so there are twelve houses. Each house is a wedge-shaped space running counterclockwise from the Ascendant (first house). Houses are areas of experience within which the planets operate. Established through the daily rotation of the earth, houses indicate earthly affairs, circumstances and situations.

If you map the signs onto the houses, starting with Aries and the first house going counterclockwise, each sign and house carries something of the same meaning. Thus, Aries naturally rules the first house, Taurus the second, and so on.

The more planets in any one house, the more the affairs of that house are emphasized.

In sum, planets are the symbols inside the circle. Signs are the symbols outside the circle. Houses are the wedge-shaped spaces starting from the Ascendant and running counterclockwise.

### **Elements and Qualities (Modes)**

Each astrological sign belongs to one of four “elements” and one of three “qualities” (sometimes called “modes”). The four elements are fire, earth, air and water. The three qualities are cardinal, fixed, and mutable.

Think of the natural meanings of the four elements and you will understand them astrologically. “Fire” is fiery, forceful, exuberant, inspirational; “Earth” is down-to-earth, practical, grounded, territorial; “Air” circulates, communicates, is mental, detached,

and can be long-winded; and “Water” is emotional, resonant, sensitive, full of feeling.

Of the qualities (modes), “Cardinal” is active, enterprising, initiating; “Fixed” is stable, resistant to change, stubborn; and “Mutable” is changeable, adaptable, mercurial.

## **Planetary Rulers**

Each sign is “ruled” by at least one planet; and some planets rule two signs. A planet in its “ruler” is thought to be particularly powerful because the meaning of the planet is similar to the meaning of the sign; thus the planet can act naturally, with no interference or resistance. The ruler of the sign on the Ascendant is often said to rule the whole chart.

## **Planetary Aspects**

I began my study of astrology in 1974. Working alone, I devoured the literature, pouring over what seemed to be an endless stream of unrelated details. Then one day, feeling thoroughly confused, I walked into a book store in California, and saw, tacked to the wall, a birthchart with what are called the astrological “aspects” drawn in as colored lines, linking the planets to one another. I stopped walking, and stood staring at this picture, transfixed.

I wish I could share with you what those few minutes meant to me. It was a real revelation. Aspects, I realized intuitively, were the key to a deeper, more wholistic understanding of the birthchart. They show how a person’s energies can operate as an integrated system.

To understand the system, first, be aware that the center of the chart represents Earth — with you on it. From the point of view of this center, taken as the third point from which any two planets are viewed, the astrological aspects indicate the geometrical relations of those planets.

Planets relate either harmoniously or inharmoniously, depending on two things: first, the natures of the planets involved (for example, Mars and Saturn relate differently than Venus and the Moon); secondly, on the type of aspect involved (that is, each aspect, depending on the degree of its angle, has its own symbolic interpretation.) Each aspect has an “orb allowance,” that is, a range of variation from exactness, of up to ten degrees, again depending

on the particular aspect and planets involved. The closer an aspect is to exactness, the more compelling its influence in the life.

There are five major aspects:  $0^\circ$  (conjunction),  $60^\circ$  (sextile),  $90^\circ$  (square),  $120^\circ$  (trine), and  $180^\circ$  (opposition).

The “conjunction” is the most powerful aspect, and the only one easily seen in the nighttime sky: two planets conjunct are joined together by an aspect of zero degrees. Conjunctions link two or more energies together so closely that they intensify one another, as a mutual echo chamber. This aspect provides focus, concentration and intensity in a particular area. The conjunction can also be too intense, however, in which case it becomes frustrating or confusing, again, depending upon the energies involved. Four or more energies conjunct are called a “stellium,” in which case the sign and house involved are extremely emphasized in the life.

Another important aspect is the “opposition.” Oppositions connect two planets 180 degrees apart. Two or more energies are linked through polarity, providing seemingly contradictory urges. The tendency for many of us is to identify with one of the energies at the expense of the other. When we do this, the unacknowledged energy is repressed. What is repressed eventually surfaces, usually first appearing by projection, as if belonging to some person or situation in the outer world. We then tend to experience that energy as something coming at us (and usually, as something or someone we don’t like), rather than recognizing it as a mirror we have attracted to show us a part of our inner life that has been rejected. Oppositions are resolved as we acknowledge and recognize two apparently contradictory sides of our own nature. Ultimately, oppositions stretch us, they expand our horizons, give us perspective; we come to understand that every coin has two sides. Truth is a point — of view.

The “square” is an aspect of 90 degrees. Squares link two or more energies acting at cross-purposes. They generate friction by rubbing each other the wrong way. Squares are enormously productive. Unlike oppositions, energies “squared off” to one another are both felt simultaneously. Squares present challenges. The mutual discomfort of the energies involved requires change. At least one of them has to move, to adjust, to temper, or refine its action.

The opposition and the square are both known as “difficult” aspects. In esoteric astrology difficult aspects are to be welcomed as opportunities.

Difficult aspects promote consciousness. They demand that we become acutely aware of how we use them. Until we learn to use them constructively, we tend to run up against similar difficulties over and over again. These aspects provoke tension, inner uncertainty, anxiety, frustration, conflict, suffering. They force us to change, to develop ourselves, to evolve to our full potential. The more tension, the more potential. The more difficult the chart, the greater its developmental, evolutionary capacity.

“Trines,” 120°, and “sextiles,” 60°, are aspects of ease and synthesis, harmonizing and integrating the energies involved. Trines and sextiles show our talents, what we discover we know how to do with almost no effort. They support us during times of crisis provided by difficult aspects, and often, are discovered only in crisis, otherwise lying latent and unused.

## **The Art of Forecasting**

Traditionally, the art of astrology has been thought of as a means of forecasting the future. However, whereas future planetary positions can be known and interpreted, it is important to remember that astrology cannot predict particular events with certainty. Exactly what is going to happen to us at any one time depends both upon circumstances we have attracted into our lives from past thoughts and action, and upon continued use of free will in the current situation.

What astrology can do is to help us understand the nature of the energies currently activated, typical ways these energies sometimes work out in life, and the specific timing involved.

## **Progressions and Transits**

Planets in the birthchart exist as “tendencies,” they work like “time-release capsules,” their energies releasing via the triggering effect of what are called “progressions” and “transits.”

Progressions (called “secondary progressions”) are based on the idea that each day of life symbolically equals one year. The first

day equals the first year, the second day the second year, and so on. The positions of the planets on the thirtieth day of life then, say something about what the thirtieth year of life will be like, and indicate long term trends.

Transits signify the actual movements of the planets in geometrical relation to the stationary positions of the planets' locations at birth. The most important transits are those with longer cycles — Saturn, Uranus, Neptune, and Pluto. These move so slowly they stay long enough in one place to have a significant effect on the life.

The most important aspects made by either progressions or transits are the difficult ones,  $0^\circ$ ,  $90^\circ$  and  $180^\circ$ . Sometimes these aspects coincide with the awakening of latent or long repressed energies which then rise to the surface. In this case we are forced for the first time to confront a previously unacknowledged part of ourselves. Other times, these aspects coincide with times when a more or less long-standing situation in either the inner or outer world becomes so acutely uncomfortable that something, finally, must be done to change it.

Transits of Saturn over a certain degree area last up to a year. Those of Uranus, Neptune, and Pluto can last three years or more. Usually, the most difficult period is when the transit begins. This is when we are most likely to experience its “negative” effects. The key is acceptance, a recognition that whatever is happening is both necessary and meaningful. Difficult times in our lives spur us on. Without them, we wouldn't stop and look at what we are doing, wouldn't experience the need for change. That these transits last for several years correlates with the difficulty of the change involved, indicating how long it actually takes to learn a particular lesson. Then, usually, by the time the transit completes itself we are quite used to it, and have expanded our awareness and adjusted our lives accordingly.

Difficult progressions and transits are times of crisis. The word “crisis,” in Chinese, has two meanings: one, “to decide,” and the other, “dangerous opportunity.”

A difficult progression or transit is a dangerous opportunity to decide to increase understanding of ourselves. Such a decision sets in motion the inner cause of an outer event. Difficult progressions and transits provide us with the timing for the gradual revelation of our inner natures throughout our lifetimes.

## Two Kinds of “Time”

So far we’ve discussed some of the basic components of the astrological language. Now we’re going to talk about one major way in which this language can be used. But first, an introduction to two kinds of “time,” linear and cyclical.

Linear time is conceived as a straight line, going in one direction, forwards, from the past into the future. This kind of time is an illusion, artificial, a human invention, the product of civilization and measured by clocks.

Cyclical time, on the other hand, is the time nature uses, as reflected in the cycles of the seasons, the alteration of day and night, the female monthly menstrual flow, the nine-month cycle of human pregnancy, and so on. Each of our own lives is its own cycle, from birth to death, from dust to dust.

Linear time is conceived as absolute. There is only one time, and we all set our clocks to that same standard “correct” time. Cyclical time, on the other hand, is manifold. As there are many cycles, so too there are many times, each of them with a beginning, a middle, and an end, which in turn, becomes a new beginning. In cyclical time things return to their origins, over and over again. “To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heavens.”

Each time we experience the fullness of one entire cycle for the first time, we are launched into a new dimension — the space of a cycle larger than the one we have just completed. And each time we do this, we shift our perspective, and transform, completely, in order to be able to encompass this new world. A good example here, is the changeover from childhood to puberty. Before puberty, there is no way we can understand the new world we will someday enter. After puberty begins, there is no way we can explain to our younger friends what is going on inside us. This same kind of transformation occurs at various times in our lives.

Think of yourself as the exact center of the universe. Standing on earth, you are surrounded by the orbits of the planets, moving in invisible concentric rings, the smaller ones nesting inside the larger, out from that center. Each planetary orbit defines the boundary system of a particular dimension or sphere of experience.

Your task, while on earth, is to expand your consciousness, to gradually encompass these larger and larger “frames of reference,”

these greater and greater dimensions of awareness. You do this, by living, through time. It is precisely your experience of time which allows you to enter, and master, these many worlds.

Each planet takes a certain amount of time to return to the original position it held at your birth. The first return of any planet to its original birth position is a significant event. It marks the time when that energy has now fully encompassed its basic orbit and sphere of influence. As it continues its circular path, that energy then becomes a “constant,” an established part of your inner life. Your consciousness and experience then move beyond that planet and begin to attune to the next planet out, which has not yet completed its first cycle.

Before a planet returns, it absorbs our attention. There seems to be no end to its influence, it goes on forever. After it returns, we have already learned the basic lesson it has to offer. (Venus, for example, teaches the lesson of relating, Mercury of thinking and talking, Mars of independence.) After the first return, further cycles of any planet are used to continue the new habit, and to refine that habit in various ways. (Just as a child only has to learn to walk once; from then on, walking is part of daily life. With a few months, that child learns to run, and may go on to dance, ice skate, or do gymnastics. All of these skills are refinements of the child’s basic ability to walk.)

After we have completed the first cycle of any planetary energy, we no longer need to focus on it in quite the same way. Our attention is drawn elsewhere; we begin to be fascinated by something larger, more complex, something that will take even more time to master.

Our experience of the cycles of what are called the “inner planets” — from the Moon to Saturn — is a developmental process, from birth to approximately thirty years of age.

### **Life as a Developmental Process**

The Moon has approximately a 30-day cycle. Saturn has approximately a 30-year cycle. In between these two extremes lie the cycles of Venus, Mercury, Sun, Mars, and Jupiter. We can experience the full cycles of all six of these energies at least once during an average lifetime. Therefore each of their influences can be known to us, as a whole; we can incorporate each of them fully, into our lives.

The Moon has a 30-day cycle. Before you were a month old, your cries and movements were somewhat random, very difficult for your mother to understand. After you completed one Moon cycle — when you were one month old — your behavior began to become more predictable — you were beginning to cry in different ways now, to show different needs. What was really happening is you were beginning to get control of your feelings, so that you could manipulate your environment in different ways according to your different needs and desires.

The Moon is the symbol for our instinctive needs, our emotions, and the subconscious conditioning stemming from infancy and early childhood. Your feeling nature, your needy self, and the way you were nurtured when young are all represented by the Moon.

The first return of each planetary energy can be understood in the same way as that of the Moon. Once again, the first time that energy returns, the meaning of that energy as a whole can be incorporated into the life.

Venus and Mercury both have cycles shorter than one year. Mercury's cycle is 88 days; Venus cycle is 225 days. Mercury represents your ability to communicate, through language and gesture. Venus represents your preferences, what you like and dislike. Both these functions had established themselves within you before you were one year old.

The cycle of the Sun is one year. By the time of the first birthday, the child has left infancy for toddlerhood, and has developed the ability to communicate and indicate what he or she likes or dislikes. His or her basic nature is now established and can be recognized.

Mars is a two-year cycle; it takes approximately two years for Mars to complete one full cycle. Mars symbolizes our vital energy, our courage and independence, all of which are characteristic of the so-called "terrible two's," that period in your life when your most common words were "me," "Mine," and "NO!"

In sum, between birth and two years, five different energies complete their first cycles: Moon, Venus, Mercury, Sun, and Mars. This coincides with our common sense idea that people change most during the first two years of life.

Not until you were twelve years old did the next cycle click in, and that was the energy of Jupiter, symbolizing the values and attitudes you adopted as a member of a community larger than your immediate family. Twelve years is the period of time right before puberty sets in, when you switched allegiance from family values to peer values.

The final cycle we can experience as a whole within one typical lifetime is that of Saturn, somewhere between 28 and 30 years. (By the way, puberty, and its rebellion against authority, is symbolized by Saturn's half-cycle, somewhere between 14 and 15 years.)

### **The “Saturn Return”**

The first Saturn Return is potentially the most important turning point in a person's entire life. Before the first Saturn cycle completes itself, our lives seem to offer unlimited options. They seem as if they will go on forever. We tend to feel immortal. — Remember when you used to feel like that, remember when you had all the time in the world? — During the year or two before Saturn completes its first cycle a shift begins. What was formerly endless now begins to look decidedly finite. Whereas before we were trying to look and act older, to be taken “seriously,” now we *are* older, we can see it in our faces, feel it in our bones. And our life, we now realize, is serious, serious business. We discover our time is limited (one of the meanings of Saturn is “limitation”), and that we had better decide exactly what we want to accomplish in the time we have left. (Some other meanings for Saturn are “seriousness,” “plans,” “goals,” and “time.”)

The completion of the first Saturn cycle represents that time when we are primed to take stock in our lives for the first time. We look at our lives as a whole. We assess what we have and have not accomplished — and whether or not what we have accomplished has been worth the effort! We scrutinize the authorities and the rules by which we have been living — and decide which of them, if any, we will continue to obey. Tentatively, we move towards full autonomy, towards taking real responsibility for ourselves. We begin to make the first of those decisions which will determine the course of our lives for the next thirty years.

During the first cycle of Saturn we evaluate ourselves by comparing ourselves to others. During the second cycle we measure ourselves against our own “inner potential.” As the first Saturn cycle was the cycle of adjustment to social “reality,” so the

second cycle, when consciously enacted, becomes the cycle of productivity, during which we establish an individual identity, and, for those who seek to evolve further, when we undergo the (Jungian) process of “individuation.”

The third cycle of Saturn begins somewhere between the ages of 56 and 60, and was, in ages past, recognized as the cycle of wisdom. This makes sense because, obviously, once a person has lived through two long Saturn cycles he or she has experienced much of what life has to offer and gained hard-won acceptance of the way things are.

During the first Saturn cycle, we operate in time, linear time, endless, our future wide open. After the first Saturn return our experience of “time” subtly changes. We have now lived through a large part of our life and felt how, in a very real sense, it circled back on itself. We “started over” at 30; we began again, this time consciously, knowing that each thought, each word, each deed has consequences, and shapes our course irrevocably. Our formative years are over now; it is time to build the “forms” that reflect “who we think we are.”

Having completed this long cycle for the first time, we have been “launched” again, and besides igniting the cycle that will result in our own personal “identity,” the self-image we show to the world, we can now also begin to attune to the next larger sphere of planetary influence. But this time there is little possibility of completion. The next cycle out is Uranus, 84 years long. We can catch a glimpse of eternity as we are propelled into our thirties, and tap into a dimension of timelessness: the “eternal now,” that which exists beyond linear time, beyond the world of form. From now on we can live in the world in a different manner. No longer identifying with the forms of that world, or even, with our own form nature, we can now be “in the world, but not of it.” We may stop time, at any moment, and hear the universe sing. Observe the cosmic drama. Take part in the dance of life.

From an esoteric point of view, the first Saturn return is a sacred rite of initiation.

Before its first return, the Saturn energy operates like a wall, a kind of force field, keeping us from venturing out beyond what society teaches us is real. By limiting our horizons, it also assures that we will build a social construct, an individual ego. Through the time-

span of one Saturn cycle, we learn to function as a separate and recognizable entity in the social world.

After Saturn's first return, this same Saturn energy can now function as a gateway, or channel, allowing energies from beyond that force field to now enter the life in a way that does not "destroy" the ego.

Jung called this the "process of individuation" In esoteric astrology this process refers to the individual's growing awareness of the Self as Soul.

Those individuals who consciously choose to start over at the first Saturn return are making a decision to transcend their social conditioning, the limitations of their personal egos. This decision frees them to encounter a universe much larger than the one society presently accepts.

Most people do not take this step.

For most people, Saturn serves as a wall their entire lives, separating the inside from the outside. Clinging to their individual "identities," they shield themselves from any experience which might threaten who they think they are. This can make for a very lonely life.

One meaning of Saturn is acceptance of necessity, including the fact that not everyone grows at the same rate of speed. As an old Hindu saying goes, "You can't rip the skin off the snake. The snake sheds its skin when it's ready to." To everything there is a season.

Those few who do step beyond the "ring-pass-not" of Saturn find themselves in another world. A world never before seen. A world governed by different laws. A world wherein the individual soul is recognized as both the very center of the universe and at the same time one infinitesimal speck in an immense and glorious creation. A world of paradox, where nothing is as it seems, and everything is more, much more than can be imagined.

This world is symbolized by the cycles of what are called the three "outer" planets, Uranus, Neptune and Pluto, with cycles of 84, 165 and 248 years respectively.

### **The Outer Planets: Uranus, Neptune, Pluto**

With the possible exception of Uranus, the cycles of the outer planets are longer than our lifetimes. We cannot complete full cycles of them; therefore, we cannot fully understand them, control them, predict them, repeat them, or incorporate them into our lives. These energies remain forever mysterious to us; they speak of nature and her laws, deeper and vaster than our scientific culture has mastered.

Since these energies take so long to complete their cycles, they remain in one place a long time. Both their positions and the patterns they make with one another serve as astrological “signatures” for specific generations, and their sign changes and aspects to one another signify shifts in the zeitgeist. In other words, the outer planets represent the energies of the evolving, collective unconscious mind, and signify, usually, mass conditions and events.

But not always.

Those few individuals who have the courage to move beyond time, beyond the Saturn boundary system, become increasingly aware of the energies of the outer planets. They are learning to trust the universe — and their own unconscious minds. They move beyond reason — to mystery, to magic, to miracle . . . to continuous transformation.

In order to interact with these energies creatively we must release our identification with the ego, and allow the soul to take over. Within this new focus, the ego becomes transparent, something to be seen through.

Rather than being something we identify with, that by which we recognize ourselves, our “self-image,” the ego then functions as an instrument, or servant, helping the soul achieve its ends while on earth. Serving as a channel, a discipline, Saturn connects heaven to earth, and helps us in our new-found capacity to both surrender to and transmit higher forces.

As the ego’s need is service to self, so the soul’s need is service to others. Individuals who have expanded their awareness beyond the limitations of Saturn realize that they are meant to serve the rest of humanity and the planet itself in this most difficult and magnificent passage into the new age, beyond ego, beyond war, beyond separation.

## **Summary**

When understood and practiced from within the esoteric world-view, astrology has the capacity to serve as a universal language, bonding us to one another. This ecology of the stars can both help us to appreciate the wealth of untapped potential lying inside each of us, and to accept and encourage the richness of our diversity.

Used as a predictive art, astrology teaches us to tune in to our own natures, to become one with what is and what is unfolding. By pointing out times when energies wax and wane, astrology helps us to describe the possibilities of any particular moment. It encourages achievement during times of high potential and teaches patience when energies lie fallow.

Here we sense intimations of the eternal message: peace on Earth, good will to all. As each of us learns to express our original natures fully, naturally, then the life force within us will flow freely and there will be harmony within. Coming to peace within ourselves, we will find it easy and natural to harmonize with others, to demonstrate good will.

Astrology is stellar ecology. Astrology is a language, a universal, divine language. Pray we reconsider her, and her extraordinary offering to the human spirit, so that the famous Pythagorean “harmony of the spheres” can be echoed, here on Earth.

And what a joy that will be!

