

# YOGA AND ASTROLOGY: AN ATTEMPT TO DETERMINE THE POSITIONS

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Rendered from the original Russian

What is phenomenal about the contemporary world is a keen interest to esoteric knowledge, especially yoga and astrology which, being occult sciences, used to be zealously guarded against the uninitiated. India, the citadel of mystical teachings, has become a true Mecca for seekers. Under the pressure of active spiritual searching of thousands of aspirants from all over the world, the curtain shielding the secret doctrines was raised to a great extent, giving access to them. Yoga and astrology have become extremely popular in many countries of the globe. Still they continue to be a mystery, a kind of unfathomable sphinx for many people.

In the present short article I'd like to touch upon only one aspect, common and principal both for yoga and astrology – that of *influence* as a crucial factor in the life of man. This article in no way claims a scientific character. It's just a humble attempt to explain two positions in respect to one and the same universal phenomenon.

Astrology, as it is known traditionally, deals with the study of the influence of the planets of the Solar System on man. I would call such astrology rather a doctrine than a science. However, contemporary astrology has gone much farther. Now the sphere of its interests encompasses diagnostics and prognostication for the entire ecological system: «human being – environment», «organic life and environment» and even «non-organic forms of existence and environment», i.e. the influence of the nearest celestial bodies on the life of our planet in general and on man in particular. In this advanced state, it can, in my opinion, claim the status of science. But, in any case, astrology deals with *influence* and its methods study the *mechanisms* and *results* of influence; whereas Yoga is a path of *liberation from influence*, including that of planets and its methods in this or that way are directed to this goal.

Driven by karmic determination into the maze of earthly life, a human being is subject to the infinite multitude of most varied kinds of influence, mostly negative: external and internal, direct and indirect which now and again drive him into a dead-end. On choosing the path of Yoga, a spiritual seeker first of all, tries to weaken the influence of his own negative forces, i.e. evil qualities,

inclinations, habits and faults. Exercising control over his speech, emotions, thoughts and acts, he methodically, patiently «muffles», deters them and doesn't let them break loose. This, over the course of time, leads to changes in the character of a man, in the manner of his behavior and pattern of thinking. He becomes more tranquil, reasonable, patient, gentle, pleasant, etc. He simultaneously works on both the internal and external influences generated, as the yogic teaching asserts, by himself. To this end, thousands of years ago a code of special, first of all moral, rules (observances) for yoga disciples was worked out by Hindu sages and intended for disciplining a spiritual seeker and guarding him from any untoward events that could be provoked by wrong, from the yogic point of view, acts, words or even thoughts.

Unless there is such systematic and purposive work, no full-blooded evolution of a man is possible. Why do I use the adjective «full-blooded»? Because it's become a common convention to equal the evolution of man with the development of his intellect, to equal evolution with intellectualization. Yes, a well-developed intellect is a wonderful thing, indeed. We can hardly build a paradise on earth with half-wits around. But the so-called «patent intellectuals» – princes, barons and dukes of the refined intellectual kingdom of their own, for whom intellect is the alpha and omega, those are a pretty dangerous lot. Given an opportunity, they are apt to lead the world into a catastrophe due to their pretty well developed egotism and scholastic pride rather than benefit it.

Yoga is a way or means of attaining liberation. Liberation of what and from what? In the most general way – liberation of spirit from matter, or, in other words, liberation of mind, consciousness or soul from the chains of this world. Revered Swami Jyotirmayananda says, «*The world-process is an overgrowth in one's consciousness caused by Maya, and by shaking it, one attains Liberation. The whole project consists of shaking, uprooting, and finally removing it*». Moreover, each step on this way, as Swamiji teaches us can and should be viewed as a *process* of liberation.

In the Christian tradition, we actually observe a similar thing where the ultimate goal of man is the salvation of the soul. And such salvation is only subject to the condition of liberation of the soul of a believer from the influence of this world, i.e. from the same old, die-hard and enduring in the mind of man *materiality*. And the mission of religion, as far as I understand it, is just *to weaken the influence of this materiality on man*. It cannot directly lead one to God. Its function is different. But it can, as the age-long experience shows,

*re-orientate* a man from the mundane to the Divine and, by so doing, help *eliminate* or at least *weaken the influence* of the negative forces of this world on him – provided, of course, the believer himself assumes an active and wise position. (Though often while trying to liberate a man from one kind of chains, the institution of religion manages to put on him other kinds – the doctrinal and theological ones).

Let us take the Bible – the holy of holies of Christianity. What does it appeal to? For *separation* from this world. What does it teach? That this world and everything in it deserves contempt: «*Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the world of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world – the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does – comes not from the Father but from the world*» (1 John 2:15-16). Yes, just like that: «*Do not love the world or anything in the world*»! «*The lust*» and «*the boasting*». Here they are, the “devils” pestering our lives! And this viewpoint is hard to contest. In reality everything in this world turns around that and almost everything comes down to that. And Christianity is not alone in its fair, on the whole, appreciation of this world. But... this is one side. If we take into account the spiritual viewpoint, the fact that God is omnipresent and that «not a single thing in this visible material universe that exists without Him», as the enlightened sage, Swami Jyotirmaynanda, asserts, we must admit that the world is wonderful. That is another side. The conclusion that suggests itself is unequivocal – *this world is both awful and wonderful simultaneously*.

So, astrology studies *external* influences on man, in a very short range, determined exclusively by celestial bodies.

But *in reality*, planetary influences are only a secondary factor! It has a *consequence* but not a *cause*. The primary or determining factor is the *inner one* and its name is *karma*. It is a karma of a given individual that determines the optimal time for his birth, the optimal alignment and positions of celestial bodies. The historical context is what really governs the situation. It's easy to guess that under the «historical context», I imply *reincarnation*, the so-called metempsychosis, and the above arguments rest entirely on the basis of the mystic doctrine of reincarnation. Swami Jyotirmayananda says about it the following, «*It is a soul that chooses a time, a particular conjunction of an astrological condition, for the fructification of its Karmas. No one's destiny is determined by the*

*stars. Rather, every soul determines the time which is most propitious for its incarnation».*

Yes, everything has an impact on us, the planets included, *but it is we* who by means of our thoughts, words and acts bring all these influences to life. *It is we who determine* when and under what planets we are to be born. A good psychologist can give you fairly accurate characteristics of yourself after studying your background and environment. In a similar way, a good astrologer can quite accurately describe the milestones of your life and predict the most likely variants of development of your personality and of your worldly activities.

So, how should we treat astrology? Swami Jyotirmayananda gives, as he always does, a wise answer to this question: *«Your developments in life can be studied on the basis of astrology, but to rely completely upon astrological readings, shunning all self effort, is erroneous».*

Once, a long time ago, in an esoteric book I came across the following phrase: «A fool complies with the stars, a wise man governs them».

Whom to be? The choice is ours.