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Astrologers Tell Time With a Bigger Watch

the Editor

Believing nothing, the skeptic is blind; believing everything, the naif is lame. Somewhere between the two lies the lauded land of viveka, discrimination, which neither doubts every inexplicable phenomenon nor swallows every unexamined statement. In this issue we explore the uncanny Vedic technology of Jyotisha, that hoary knowledge, derived from secondary Vedic texts, which embraces both astronomy and astrology. It's about time.

Ronald Reagan, when President of the United States, confounded the White House staff and embarrassed aides by having his itinerary and major meetings scheduled in careful consultation with his wife's astrologer in California. Scoffing staffers counted it pure silliness, others thought it merely impolitic of him, maybe because of the implication that he wasn't totally in charge or that a Christian would so publically propound such things.

Mr. Reagan is not a lone heretic. Queen Elizabeth I, a virgo, consulted the stars. Galileo, the Italian mathematician and

astronomer, cast charts on the side, as did the German celestial scientist Johannes Kepler. Britian's Princess Diane followed the stars, and many Hollywood stars do the same. Ditto with Carl Jung and American millionnaire J.P. Morgan. That said, astrology still is not anywhere near as important in the Western world as in Asia. A 1990 poll of Americans found that while nearly 30% of Christians in America believe in astrology and read their horoscope weekly, only 5% had personally consulted an astrologer. Like so many other things, astrology in the Occident is about personal things--about me and mine, my spiritual progress, my love life and business success. In the Orient these concerns are not absent, but larger concerns dominate. Astrology in India is about auspiciousness, about connections, about sacred timing and being in a flow with the ebb and tide of divine forces. This universalizing approach to astrology gives the science a maturity that it tends to lack in the West, where it is seen as a frivolous, campy diversion for lonely souls trying to get a grip on their out-of-control life.

Astrology is a part of Vedic self-understanding. We look to the stars to see ourselves better, to discover the mysteries that lie all about and within us. In Rita dharma, that heavenly cosmic orderliness, stars are more than massive conglomerates of molecules or fiery furnaces fleeting afar. They are entities, potent presences that affect us despite their distances. There are, of course, many Hindus today who pooh-pooh such notions. "Stuff and nonsense," they will cry, "What thoughtful person can accept that stars, so remote, influence life on earth?"

Indeed, comes the astrologer's retort, what thoughtful person

would deny the powerful tides a faraway moon drags across our planet, or gainsay the not-so-subtle solar forces that are the very stuff of life here? "Ah, but go out another few thousand light years and tell us what petty influences persist," our doubter might challenge. The adroit jyotisha shastri, sensing his opponent's momentary advantage, does the politically correct thing--he unilaterally changes the rules of engagement. "That is precisely the kind of mechanistic, externalized approach that the East deplores," he offers, declaring that these forces, the stars and planets themselves, are not "out there," but "in here," within the consciousness of each one. The outside is a reflection of the within, and we create it from moment to moment. If it is within us, then it is certainly affected by us and we by it, if two can be assumed for the moment. Check and mate.

The astrologer is something of a tribal shaman. Ideally, he or she is the one among us with special insight, with a wider vision that lifts awareness beyond our little world, connecting us to the canopy above, expanding perception beyond the narrow sliver of time in which we live by bringing past lives and actions into the now. You could say that astrologers tell time with a bigger watch.

The genuine astrologer is, in a sense, a time navigator. He teaches that time is not all colorless and neutral, the same in all directions. Time has its eddies, its waxing and waning, its preferential ways--and in that sense is much like the oceans. No ship's captain worth his hardtack would consider the sea a uniform body of water, everywhere equal and indifferent to his passage. No, the sea is alive with idle doldrums and treacherous tempests, and, yes, dangers worthy of anticipation

To the astrologer, time is like that sea, with similar moods and forces, some propelling us swiftly forward, others opposing our well-plotted progress. How foolhardy the seaman who keeps his canvas unfurled in a storm or stows his sails when the good winds blow. Time is a kind of moral wind, blowing now this way, now that. As a ship's captain heeds the chart reckoned by his navigator as to course, winds and tides, so our life's journey benefits from periodically examining another chart, our astrologer's appraisal of protean time's patterned flow.