

[How the Vedas Divide the Heavens](#)

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INSIGHT

How the Vedas Divide the Heavens

The ancient Hindus mapped the zodiac into 27 nakshatras and analyzed the impact on human behavior as the moon and planets moved through them

The nakshatras, central to Hindu astrology, are the subject of this month's four-page Insight section. Contributors to this introduction include Devendra Trivedi, B.V. Raman, Dennis Harness, Vamadeva Shastri and Linda Johnsen.

"What's your sign?" people in America ask, meaning, "What was the position of the Sun in the zodiac when you were born?" But in India, when the temple priest queries, "What's your nakshatra?" he wants to know the position of the Moon at your birth. The difference is not superficial. In Western astrology, the birth position of the Sun is considered paramount, while in Hindu astrology, the Moon's placement is most critical. While both systems use (with important differences) the zodiac, or rasi, division of twelve parts (Aries, Pisces, etc.), Hindus further refine this to 27 nakshatras--literally, "star clusters," also known as the "lunar mansions" (Ashvini, Bharani, etc.). The moon passes through all 27 in the course of a lunar month, at the rate of about one a day. The division is ancient. The list of the 27 nakshatras given in the Krishna Yajur Veda (Taittiriya Samhita 2.4.10) as part of the construction of the sacred fire

altar was likely recorded in the second millennium, bce. Each nakshatra is governed by a Vedic Deity--Krittika by Agni, Rohini by Prajapati, and so forth.

A nakshatra is male or female, as well as sattvic, rajasic or tamasic in nature. Sattva is the quality of spirituality and purity. Rajas is high-energy activity. Tamas has the basic quality of dullness, inertia and darkness. A specific symbol [see pages 28?29], animal species, sex, caste, temperament and primary motivation--dharma (life purpose), artha (wealth), kama (pleasure) and moksha (enlightenment)--is associated with each nakshatra. An individual is born when the Moon is in a nakshatra suited to his destined experiences of that lifetime. Astrological interpretations are based both on the nakshatra and the rasi [zodiac sign] of each planet, but for both the Moon and the planets it is the nakshatra which has the deeper effect.

Nakshatras are of primary importance in muhurtha, or electional astrology, estimating the optimal timing to undertake any new venture, such as starting a new business, building a new home or choosing an auspicious wedding date [See page 30].

Nakshatras (as well as rasis) mentioned in ancient texts provide clues of great historical value. In scriptures, such as the Vedas, Puranas and Mahabharata, are found references that at the equinox (or solstice), the Sun was in a particular nakshatra. Because of the precession of the equinoxes, the Sun slowly changes nakshatras at the equinox--so one can calculate backward to arrive at the date of the scripture accurate to within a few hundred years. For example, in the

Atharva Veda (19.7) and Shatapatha Brahmana, the solstice is in Magha, the period of 2700?1900bce. This fact is used to trace the beginning of the later Vedic age.

On the next two pages the 27 nakshatras are explored, how they relate to the 12 rasis and the basic qualities of a person born under each nakshatra.

27 Nakshatras

The Moon's location at birth along this ancient division of the ecliptic is, says Hindu astrology, a prime indication of a person's basic characteristics

The following is a condensed summary of the characteristics and tendencies of persons born when the Moon is located in each of the 27 nakshatras. Noted next to each nakshatra name is the star with which it is associated. There are 2 1/4 nakshatras per zodiac sign.

1. Ashvini (Beta Arietis): Passionate, impulsive, attractive and intelligent, people whose birth Moon is in Ashvini can also be headstrong and extravagant. They enjoy travel, are often skilled workers, and may have healing abilities. The Ashvins are Vedic gods of light, healing and inspiration.

2. Bharani (41 Arietis): Bharani folk are usually healthy, happy, skillful and conscientious. They also tend to be somewhat impatient and self-indulgent, and find it hard to forgive. Setbacks can shift their priorities from material preoccupation to spiritual transcendence.

3. Krittika (Alcyone 2-Pleiades): Krittika types are fiery, full of creative energy, highly ambitious, dedicated to divine service, self-motivated and "think big." They stand out in a crowd and can become quite famous. They're prone to eating too much.

4. Rohini (Aldebaran): Rohini gives a loving, truthful disposition, serenity, a sense of responsibility and a love of the arts, beauty and culture. If the Moon is afflicted, they may be prone to stubbornness, anger, selfishness and fault-finding.

5. Mrigashira (Lambda Orionis): Gentle, sensitive, highly perceptive, drawn to romance, music and the arts, Mrigashiras prefer a quiet, comfortable life, can be very hard working and are frequently drawn to spiritual life. Some are haunted by self-doubt or egoity.

6. Ardra (Betelgeuse 7): Full of vitality, good athletes, Ardras live life with enthusiasm and intensity. Sympathetic and helpful, they're often drawn to the study of esoteric laws. If the Moon is afflicted, they can be cruel, lashing out at others unfairly at times.

7. Punarvasu (Pollux 11): Good-natured, generous emotionally, prudent financially, content to live a relaxed, uncluttered life, self-disciplined, yet playful. They need to guard against complacency and watch their health. They make good friends.

8. Pushya (Delta Cancri): They are stable, easy going personalities, prosperous, well educated, popular, virtuous,

nice looking, forthright, intelligent and wise. Can be overly rigid, selfish and arrogant. Productive and caring people who make good teachers.

9. Ashlesha (Epsilon Hydrae): Self-reliant, excellent communicators, capable of great concentration and penetrating insight. Their candor can turn to tactlessness, and they may manipulate truth to protect themselves. Don't humiliate them; they will never forget it.

10. Magha (Alpha Leonis): Regal, ambitious, pleasure loving, physically strong, they easily rise to leadership positions, honor tradition and pursue noteworthy projects. They enjoy being served more than serving, and they can fall prey to a voracious desire for sex.

11. Purva Phalguni (Delta Leonis): Magnanimous, loyal, delightful conversationalists, earthy, attractive. They get their way without intimidating others. Often they are wanderers, drawn to the arts, and enjoy life to the full. The body is usually healthy, but the mind is so active and creative, they tend to leap before looking.

12. Uttara Phalguni (Beta Leonis): Likeable, generally well-to-do, earning substantial salaries through their exceptional intelligence. Make wonderful friends, and are always ready to help their companions. Success, courage and love of adventure may appear, but romantic escapades may lead to trouble.

13. Hasta (Delta Corvi): Hard working, industrious and exceptionally resourceful, they make fine artisans, specialists, business people and teachers, but are not often leaders. May display intelligence, a sharp wit and healing ability, also a lack of patience, and a determined effort to manipulate others for their own ends.

14. Chitra (Spica 16): Charming and stylishly dressed, drawn to anything new or out of the ordinary. Magnets to the opposite sex, often artistically gifted, they surround themselves with beautiful things. May at times become self-indulgent. These are intelligent, honest, efficient and never superficial people.

15. Svati (Arcturus 17): Independent, generally quiet, nice people who control themselves in public. They are helpful, pleasant conversationalists and rarely hold grudges. Like travel and strongly attracted to religion or philosophy. Sometimes they experience chronic discontent.

16. Vishakha (Alpha 2 Libra): Purposeful, forceful, commanding in appearance. Excellent public speakers who enjoy making money. Courage, ambition and one-pointedness carry them quickly to their goals. They revel in turmoil and enjoy a good argument.

17. Anuradha (Delta Scorpio): Well-to-do, they dislike austere lifestyles, but have a deep spiritual nature. They value family and friends, enjoy organizing projects and managing people. The less mature are prone to jealousy and depression.

18. Jyeshtha (Antares 18): Deeply passionate, able leaders, renowned for their adherence to virtue--and their testy temperaments! Generally cheerful, but quite irascible when provoked, they gladly fight to defend the helpless.

19. Mula (Lambda Scorpii): Set in their ways, clever, soft and happy disposition, but somewhat suspicious of other people's motivations. They tend to find their way to money, or money finds its way to them.

20. Purvashadha (Delta Sagittarii): Patient, independent minded, convincing in speech, proud, lucky in love, outgoing people who will stick with their friends. Value their own opinions over other's.

21. Uttarashadha (Pi Sagittarii): Popular, idealistic, influential, stable, introspective and ethical. Good both at starting projects and completing them. Drawn to work which uplifts others. The less mature may be lazy, easily distracted or stressed out.

22. Shravana (Altair 20): Intelligent, well-educated, and prosperous. A degree of fame usually comes their way. They love to learn, make good teachers and enjoy traveling. Often drawn to religious life, or a life of service, but they may become rigid or fanatical.

23. Dhanishtha (Alpha Delphini): Courageous, generous, often prosperous, upbeat, ambitious and with a universal outlook. They bring people together for a worthy cause. Not easily

fooled, they carefully analyze any proposition put to them. Can be aggressive, rash or overly conservative.

24. Satabhishak (Lambda Aquarii): Blunt but honest, disinclined to conform, almost always get their way. Drawn to fields requiring penetrating insight such as science or philosophy. Can become a mindless workaholic, private, hiding their real thoughts. Most devoted to service of humanity, whether recognized or not.

25. Purva Protopada (Beta Pegasi): Fine speakers, good business skills, can make money and hang onto it. Generally fairly serious people, yet may act impetuously or have a hard time sticking to a decision. The less mature can be phobic, cynical or may strike out vindictively at others.

26. Uttara Protopada (Gamma Pegasi): Well-balanced and ethical people, kindly, self-sacrificing, supportive, very convincing in discussions. They sincerely enjoy family life and like to help others. When conflicts or competition arise, they are likely to hold the winning hand. Young souls can be lazy, irresponsible and envious.

27. Revati (Zeta Piscium): Healthy, intelligent, with a sweet disposition and artistically gifted, they love people, wish harm to no one and nourish those in need. While they don't seek much for themselves, wealth and joy are often spontaneously bestowed on them. The less mature may display an inferiority complex, a servile nature, or fall prey to continual disappointments.

Nakshatras: Here with the Earth in the center is a diagram depicting the 12 rasis, or signs, of the zodiac surrounded by the 27 nakshatras, according to their relative location in the heavens as seen from the Earth. Each nakshatra is given a symbol related either to its subtle vibration or to the shape of a nearby constellation of stars. There are also four equal divisions of each nakshatra, making a total of 108 expressions of human nature.

ASTROLOGY

Stars Above, Life Below

Take advantage of the good times and dodge the bad

Nakshatras are a powerful means to find auspicious times for every imaginable human activity. They're also useful for avoiding actions on a day when results are likely to be frustrated. In order to find that date when the cosmic vibrations will be just perfect for you to make that big career move, buy a car or plant your garden, you need a panchangam --an astrological calendar--calculated for your region [see resources]. The Moon's nakshatra is the same all over the world at the same moment, but the human conventions of time zones and the international date line make the calendars produced in one place not applicable to another. Panchangam in hand, you can proceed to research dates according to the following recommendations. In general, activities will bear more productive fruit if the Moon is waxing, that is, moving in the brightest phase toward full moon day.

The nakshatras are divided into seven descriptive categories as follows:

Light: Ashvini, Pushya and Hasta are especially good constellations for travel, sports activities, doing healing work or administering medicines, opening a business, sales, trade and borrowing and repaying.

Soft: Mrigrashira, Chitra, Anuradha and Revati are excellent for learning music, dance and drama, performing auspicious ceremonies such as marriage, buying and wearing new clothes, the enjoyment of pleasure, romance, conception of a child and making of friends.

Fixed: Rohini, Uttara Phalguni, Uttara Ashadha, Uttara Proshadha are good for permanent works such as making vows or taking oaths of office, building homes and laying the foundations of cities, plowing the land, planting and purchasing farms.

Moveable: Purnarvasu, Svati, Shravana, Dhanishtha and Satabhishak are good for buying vehicles, for parades, gardening, change of residence or career, travel and other major life changes.

Sharp: Ardra, Aslesha, Jyeshtha and Mula. Their vibration contributes to separation from spouse or friends, argument, the working of black magic, exorcism, punishment and harm to others. These are good days for doing things requiring a harsh, strong or cutting force.

Dreadful: Bharani, Magha, Purva Phalguni, Purvashadha, and

Purva Proshadapada. All stir the mind, leading to evil deeds such as setting fires, poisoning and destruction, also imprisonment or confinement. Purva Proshadapada is good for repentance and penance.

Mixed: Kritika and Vishakha are best for mundane daily activities. Kritika can be good for fire ceremonies due to its deity, Agni. Excellent for meditation.

Dr. B.V. Raman, India's foremost astrologer, now in his 80s, writes that "the constellation of Pushya is the most favorable of all the nakshatras. It is said to neutralize almost all doshas or flaws arising out of a number of adverse combinations. Pushya, the constellation par excellence, has the power to overcome negative forces and assert its benefic nature. Despite all its positive influence, Pushya is still considered inauspicious for a marriage ceremony." The days from the third quarter of Dhanishtha, the 23rd nakshatra, to the end of Revati, the 27th, are unsuitable for any kind of auspicious work, except Uttara Proshadapada. Each nakshatra has a set of syllables which should be used to begin the name of a person born under that nakshatra. This gives a name in harmony with the person's nature, and also is an easy way to record one's nakshatra.

By consulting an astrologer, or studying books on the subject, one can determine auspicious times for celebrating samskaras, rites of passage for children, medical treatment, beginning of education, etc. This more complex analysis, involving your own birth chart, the location of the planets during the time period in question, can more precisely bring your desired aims into

harmony with universal energies--something that is not necessarily going to happen when you schedule activities only according to a convenient day of the week. Those who live by this ancient lunar calendar swear it empowers their life. One way to find out is to try it.

RESOURCES: PANCHANGAMS: HINDUISM TODAY HTTP://
www.HINDU.ORG/SCIENCES/PANCHANGAM.HTML; PALANI PANCHANG, 4831 PIPER STREET, FREMONT, CALIFORNIA 94538, USA. EDUCATIONAL SCIENCES CORPORATION OF AMERICA, PO BOX 88852 WORLD WAY CENTER, LOS ANGELES, CA 90009, USA, BOOKS: MYTHS AND SYMBOLS OF VEDIC ASTROLOGY, BY BEPIN BEHARI, PASSAGE PRESS, PO BOX 21713, SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH 84121-0713, USA; NAKSHATRAS BY DENNIS HARNESS P.O. BOX 2149, SEDONA, ARIZONA 86339 USA; NAKSHATRA, BY K.T. SHUBHAKARAN, SAGAR PUBLICATIONS, 72 JANPATH, VED MANSION, NEW DELHI 110 001 INDIA [ON THE TECHNICAL SIDE]; LIGHT ON LIFE, BY HART DEFOUW, AVAILABLE FROM JDR VENTURES, 918 DOUGLAS DRIVE, WOOSTER, OH 44691 USA.