

# We Are All Made of Stars

Elements of Jyotish, the science of light.

By Tamiko Fischer

At difficult times the universe feels alive with signs and symbols pointing to our good discernment or poor judgment surrounding a decision or event: driving home after ending an unhealthy, draining relationship and feeling as though a luminous rainbow in the sky and remarkably clear traffic mirror a newly empowered inner life; or when the shrill noise of a carpenter's drill from a nearby office renovation mockingly punctuates a meeting with a demanding client.

During these heightened moments we may hear our own intuition plainly guiding us. On other days our internal guidance is less than lucid. At these times, a system like astrology offers a map of reality that can shed light on one's larger life path and provide eloquent, helpful information about the qualities coloring the atmosphere.

LA YOGA's monthly astrology forecast is based on the science of *Jyotish*, the traditional astrology of India. *Jyotish* is a Sanskrit word meaning 'the study of the lords of light.' In the West it is usually called Vedic Astrology.

One strength of this system is in daily forecasting, in which *Jyotish* reveals in practical detail the energies influencing our immediate environment and recognizes each day's most natural activities, allowing us to actively integrate the general mood present. This knowledge helps us center ourselves internally, pace ourselves well and channel our energies creatively and productively in the external world.

## The Sidereal Zodiac: "In the Beginning..."

At its foundation, *Jyotish* differs from Western astrology that uses the equinox-based tropical zodiac, with its use of the astronomically more accurate *sidereal* zodiac (*sidereal* meaning pertaining to the stars). In the West, we usually think the spring equinox on March 21 as marking the sun's entry into the zodiac's first sign of Aries but in actuality the sun doesn't enter this constellation until around

April 14. The reason for this difference lies in a slight wobble in the earth's rotation that has gradually caused the correlation between the sun's ingress into Aries with the start of spring to slip backwards over the centuries. By not calculating and adjusting for this there is a continual shift of the vernal equinox. Western astrology uses a symbolic zodiac based upon the sky as it appeared over 1,700 years ago. *Jyotish* continually makes adjustment for this phenomenon known as the precession of the equinoxes, maintaining the true calculation of planets against their backdrop of stars.

## Classical Jyotish has six specific branches:

- **Gola:** observational astronomy, our direct perception of the planets and stars.
- **Ganita:** astronomical and astrological mathematical calculation.
- **Jataka:** birth or natal astrology; interpretation of the personal horoscope.
- **Prashna:** answering questions based upon casting the chart for the moment when a question is asked; called "horary astrology."
- **Muhurta:** Choosing astrologically favorable times for any action; called "electional astrology."
- **Nimitta:** Shamanic interpretation of the natural world.

The most widely known and requested is *Jataka* or the study of a person's birth chart. This natal astrology is psychologically revealing and often astonishing in its predictive power. It vividly describes the unique, changing qualities of one's personality, important life lessons and likely future events.

The astrology of daily forecasting makes up the branch known as *Muhurta*. Since our efforts tend to produce results according to the planetary configurations under which they are initiated, this science aims to recognize the best season, day and time to perform activities and set intentions of all kinds. In India, honoring *Muhurta* is important for foundational life

events. These include: the time when an infant first receives solid food, when a person embarks upon a new educational path, and when a person would decide to receive spiritual initiation, get married, moving into a new home or start a business. *Muhurta* also includes the practice of choosing favorable days for routine activities like travel, meetings or socializing to facilitate centered, clear action and harmonious experiences.

## The Panchanga:

### The Daily Forecast of Vedic Astrology

In India, the almanac known as the *panchanga* is widely consulted for daily astrology. *Panchanga* means five limbs, and its elements give information about the relationship between the Sun and Moon, the luminaries influential in creating our daily atmosphere.

The *panchanga* or five limbs are:

- 1) *Weekday (Vara)*
- 2) *Lunar day (Tithi)*
- 3) *Lunar half-day (Karana)*
- 4) *The moon's position in a Nakshatra, "lunar mansion" or "star"*
- 5) *The joining together of the degree positions of the sun and the moon (Yoga)*

Of these, the most important considerations are the weekday (*vara*), lunar day (*tithi*) and *nakshatra*, the factors that most strongly color the fundamental qualities of the day.

The weekday's role is often considered in how a specific planet rules each day: the sun rules Sunday, the Moon Monday, Mars Tuesday and so on. It is ideal to perform tasks similar to each planet's characteristics on its corresponding day. Mercury, planet of intellect and eloquence makes Wednesday a natural day for meetings and presentations. Jupiter, planet of higher knowledge, children and general good fortune makes Thursday an excellent day for receiving spiritual teachings and making important commitments related to children. Venus, planet of romance,

leisure and culture naturally supports these enjoyments on Friday. Saturn, the planet of delays, misfortune and mature responsibility governs Saturday, making this an ideal day for retreat, rest and receiving Ayurvedic treatments like oil massage, but not the first choice for scheduling major joyful beginnings like marriage.

The *Tithi* (lunar day) describes the brightness and waxing or waning of the Moon. The moon represents *manas* or the emotional, sensory mind. Each of the Moon's 30 phases indicates changeable energies that render the mind introspective, extroverted, stable, unsteady, gentle or severe. In the West, we see this concept in our recognition of the full moon as a time of high energy – for better or for worse!

### The Glory of the Moon

The *nakshatra* is one of the profound glories of *Jyotish*. These 27 lunar constellations of the Vedic zodiac measure 13 degrees and 20 minutes, corresponding roughly to one day's movement of the Moon. Each night the Moon radiates the unique *shakti* or creative energy of

the *nakshatra* where it sits, coloring the mood on Earth. Each *nakshatra* contains layers of symbolic imagery and numerous characteristics such as soft, severe, upward moving or downward moving. In *Muhurta*, the *nakshatra* is of great importance in understanding the natural qualities of each day. Some *nakshatras* are gentle, supporting light, sweet activities like socializing and romance. Harsh or practical *nakshatras* support tasks with a no-nonsense dynamic. Moveable *nakshatras* support travel, while fixed ones support creating foundations and long-term planning.

In the monthly *Jyotish* forecast, the most favorable days are often those when the Moon is in one of the especially auspicious *nakshatras* such as the upward-moving, charismatic and creative *Rohini Nakshatra* (Lord Krishna's *nakshatra*). Underlying the more intense days is often one of the severe or sharp stars such as the harsh *Ardra Nakshatra*, whose symbol is a teardrop, and whose deity is Rudra, god of destruction. Sharp stars may not be good for a carefree, breezy day, but can still be beneficial for actions that require a

sharp, tough-love energy, such as engaging in a necessary confrontation or detaching from a relationship.

In natal astrology, the *nakshatra* of one's Moon reveals much about one's temperament, life lessons, personal relationships and even profession. In India, people regularly inquire about each other's *Janna Nakshatra* (the *nakshatra* in which your Moon is placed in your birth chart) much in the way we ask about Sun signs. In matchmaking, a couple's *nakshatras* are significant for determining whether they are likely to share agreeable emotions and goals.


These elements of *Jyotish* at first might seem foreign and esoteric to Western tastes, perhaps in the same way that yoga and Ayurveda might have seemed exotic to those who after some introduction now seamlessly appreciate their morning neti-pot ritual and daily round of Sun Salutations. Nevertheless, this divine science is worth getting to know as an inspired system for supporting a harmonious, balanced life and a clear practical path.

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