

# *The Planetary Alphabet* *Reading Your Celestial Name* *by Dane Rudhyar*

**The Gospel of St. John opens with the often-quoted statement:** "In the beginning was the Word." Other religions also brought forth the idea that a universal cycle of existence begins with a divine utterance, a *Logos*. For the Hindu philosopher, this creative word was AUM; and every cycle began, as it were, in the sounding forth by some creative power of the AUM of the cycle — a tone which kept sounding changelessly at the core of all that existed during this life cycle. The sacred scriptures of Brahminical India, the Vedas, were said to constitute further developments of the AUM.

A word is composed of letters; and each letter, in the cosmological type of symbolism just mentioned, stands for a particular cosmic power — and even for a being embodying at a cosmic level this type of energy. Islam stresses greatly, in its esoteric aspect, the meaning of such "letters" of the creative word in the beginning and in this follows a universal tradition, of which we see the remnants in the Hindu *Tantra* and in the Hebrew *Kabbalah*. Words of many letters were arranged in the form of *mantrams* (sacred incantations), the most famous of which is the Hindu *Gayatri*, to be intoned at dawn as a salutation to the rising sun, whose light opens up a new day cycle. The American Zunis in Arizona have also a dawn ceremony in which at sunrise they are said to "hear" the vibrations of the first rays of sunlight; and their most sacred chants are apparently results of this experience of creative vibration.

Astrology can be considered as an expression of such an ancient tradition, for the birth-chart of an individual is the sacred name, the "word in the beginning," the individual mantram of this individual born at a particular time and a particular place on the globe. At the moment of his first breath, the basic rhythms of his total organism — blood circulation, breathing, and probably some sort of rhythm of nerve electricity (prana in Sanskrit) — are set. What sets them can be said to be some as yet mysterious power, the creative power that emanates from the entire solar system. The ceremony of baptism is a symbolical repetition of this fundamental sounding forth of the creative word at the moment of the first breath. A name is given to the infant.

Theoretically, this name should be in tune with the creative vibration of the birth-chart, for the latter constitutes the celestial name of the individual. But, alas, the parents who select the child's name do so because of personal likes or in order to please a close relative. The name which the child, thus, officially bears symbolizes his "ego" — i.e., the character which develops under the pressures of family, environment, religion, culture, etc. — while the birth-chart (the celestial name) refers to the true and basic individual selfhood of the

child, what the universal creative power poured into this organism at the very beginning of its cycle of individual existence.

The birth-chart is a word of which the planets are the letters. It may be said to be the resonance of the new-born organism to the powerful vibrations of the cosmic word and the acceptance by this organism of its particular place and function in the universe. The positions of the planets (Sun and Moon included) will change moment after moment through the life of the individual human being, and these changes will have a definite repercussion (as "transits") upon his development; yet the birth-chart remains throughout the life-cycle as an unchanging formula, as a fundamental name which represents the true individuality of this particular human being.

There are only ten planets used today in astrology — and a few subsidiary factors (like the Nodes and Parts) derived from planetary cycles of motions and interrelationships — but because human beings are integral parts of the earth and because our planet has a rhythm of its own represented by the zodiac, an immense number of possible combinations exist when the planets are referred to the twelve signs of the zodiac.

Each planet in our birth-chart is a letter of the cosmic word sounded forth through space at the moment of our first inhalation. But somewhat as in the Chinese language, words have different meanings if sounded at a low, an intermediary, or a high pitch; so (but do not take this analogy literally!) a planet in the sign Aries has a meaning which differs from the one it would have if in Cancer or Virgo. As each planet in a birth-chart (including the Sun and Moon among "planets") can be in one of the twelve signs of the zodiac — thus, can "sound forth" at twelve different levels or "itches" — this provides for an immense number of possible meanings.

A further degree of complexity is produced by the fact that a human being, as he is born, can find himself oriented in a theoretically infinite number of ways to the universe as a whole; because he is born at a point on the **surface** of the globe, the horizon of his birthplace at the time of his first breath establishes a basic dualism: the sky overhead and the solid earth which hides from him half of the celestial sphere. As the earth rotates, the east-west line of the horizon points about every four minutes (more or less, depending on the latitude of the birthplace) to new degrees of the zodiac. Horizon and meridian create four "angles," establishing a "cross" (or quadrature) which serves as a kind of framework within which the new-born's capacity for experience finds itself defined.

The basic factor in natal astrology is the pattern made by all the planets. Each planet represents a fundamental mode of activity: that is, an organic function, psychological as well as biological. The aspects between the planets describe the manner in which they interact, reinforcing or weakening each other, revealing a smooth type of cooperation between functional activities or indicating organic, psychosomatic tensions. The general distribution of the planets within the zodiac — whether, for instance, they are clustered within a small section of the zodiac or spread out more or less evenly through the sky — tells us a great deal about the meaning of this celestial word which constitutes the real

name of the individual person. The time at which a person is born with reference to the monthly lunation cycle — whether it is a New Moon, Crescent Moon, First Quarter, Full Moon, Last Quarter birth—gives us valuable information as to the character of the vital energies of the individual as he meets the challenges of everyday existence in a particular environment and as he progresses from childhood to old age.

The difficulty — a very great difficulty indeed — is to integrate the many kinds of information with which the astrological components of the birth-chart provide us. A child can learn to spell the letters of the word love. But to spell L-O-V-E does not tell the child the meaning of love until he has connected the word with his experience, either of his feeling of love or at least of how people around him who use the word behave or appear to feel when they say that they love. This is why the practice of astrology cannot in any way be separated from some degree of knowledge of the psychological and biological ways in which human beings operate.

While the birth-chart refers to forces of great dynamism, it is, nevertheless, only a **formula of relationship** and, thus, an abstraction. So is the chemical formula for dynamite or the famous formula of Einstein on which the atom bomb was based,  $E=MC^2$ , an abstraction. Unless we know what these algebraic letter symbols stand for, it does not tell us what we can expect or the nature of the concrete facts being thereby schematized.

So if we want to understand the factual meaning of a birth-chart — i.e., the type of personal behavior and character to which it refers — we have first of all to be thoroughly acquainted with the complexities and the subtleties of **human** nature and also with the environmental factors amidst which this particular life will seek to actualize its birth potential. The task is difficult indeed and requires not only a traditional knowledge of astrological techniques, but also a deep and keen sensitivity to human beings and a vast experience with the reactions and problems of modern individuals.

## The Planetary Alphabet

As astrology deals essentially with a ten-lettered alphabet, the first task of the would-be astrologer is to understand the character and meaning of each of the letters. The first way of approaching the problem such an understanding poses is to realize that some of the planets are like consonants, others like vowels. Consonants are those planets to which most astrologers attribute a more or less "malefic" nature — thus, Mars, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune, and Pluto. Actually, these planets are not, in any basic sense, malefic. They represent, however, energies which in various ways induce crises. The "Vowel" type of planets — Sun, Moon, Mercury, Venus, Jupiter — refer to the very substance and the enjoyment of life.

The vowels are the foundations of speech, and we find them emphasized in the language of races particularly at ease with life and with themselves. Where consonants are greatly stressed, psychological tensions are usually more in evidence — as, for instance, in the Polish language. Some primitive people use a variety of guttural sounds, clappings of

the tongues, etc., which tend to show that they are still close to the fears and passions of the jungle world.

The difference between vowels and consonants is particularly evident in singing. Consonants modify and, above all, project the vowel sounds with which they are associated — or, in other instances, terminate the vowel's vibrations. It may be significant that we have officially in many languages five vowels — A, E, I, O, U — and that I listed five vowel-like "benefic" planets.

One could almost certainly connect the Sun with A (the most basic of all vowel sounds, as in "father") and the Moon with O. E would refer to Mercury, I to Venus, and U to Jupiter; but, of course, in English we use much more than five vowel sounds. However, the different characteristics of the planets when located in different signs of the zodiac correspond to the various modifications of the basic vowel sounds. Also, the conjunctions of two planets may be related to the combination of two letters called diphthongs. The English "I" is actually a combination of the pure sound A and I (as these are pronounced in French, German, Italian); thus, it might symbolize a conjunction of the Sun and Venus. The French "je" (meaning I) stresses the vowel E, which I have related to Mercury; and this seems quite revealing in view of the intellectual emphasis in French culture.

One must obviously not try to apply too closely such a type of correspondence, even if an "occult" analysis of the words of any language in terms of their basic sounds and of their "roots" in basic tongues like Sanskrit is a fascinating study. The main point is that astrology is like a language. Every astrological chart is a word, and its component factors are like letters. On the one hand, the word has to be read letter after letter; but on the other hand, spelling the word is but the prelude to the real process which is the understanding of the meaning of the word **as a whole**.

We may change the illustration and say that birth-charts are the blueprints setting down in abstract lines and measurements the structure of the house that will be, the house of personality. But perhaps the best analogy is that which relates a birth-chart to those geometrical three-dimensional models of a molecule in which each of the component atoms of various basic elements is shown in its precise place and in relation to the others. A molecule is much like a factory in which complex chemical operations are performed by different substances or particles. In the astrological chart, we see every planet also performing a function. Jupiter expands, while Saturn contracts; Venus draws inward the results of experience, while Mars goes forth in outward-bound actions. Mercury registers, tabulates, classifies, and remembers; while Pluto, in some cases at least, shakes up and reorganizes the materials of our mind in response to collective or cosmic impulses, etc.

The functions operate at more than one level — i.e., the planets represent forces within the human personality which manifest not only as biological activities, but also on psychological drives and mental capacities. Mercury refers to the nervous system and its myriads of intercellular connections, but also to the intellect and its ability to remember and to abstract ideological systems from classified sense data. Venus deals with the reproductive

cells of the body, but also the artist's creative activity. Jupiter represents the liver and the pancreas, but also the capacity for assimilating the collective experiences of generations of human beings and for relating the individual to the universe and to the source of all life. Thus, religion comes under its sway. Saturn rules the bones of the body and the formation of red blood corpuscles within these bones, but also the ego of human beings and their need for security and order.

The fact that the planets in astrology refer to two related levels of existence is no stranger than the now well-known other fact that the sacred scriptures of antiquity were written in such a way that they had an esoteric (i.e., psycho-spiritual) meaning as well as an exoteric sense in which they dealt with more or less historical events or natural phenomena. The folklore of every country is likewise deeply symbolic; and stories in which human, supernatural, or semi-divine beings were exciting protagonists hide a great wealth of deeper meanings referring to man's inner life. The passage of the Sun every year through the twelve signs of the zodiac was the foundation on which the dramatic stories of gods or demi-gods and the twelve labors of Hercules were built.

All this refers to the vast **language of symbolism**; but astrology is susceptible to the most practical and efficacious type of application of symbolism, for it deals directly with the constitution and unfoldment of every man as an individual person day after day, year after year. It not only gives us the blueprints of our "house of personality," but it also tells us in general terms the schedule according to which the building of this house — our own personal life-will proceed; it reveals the expectable difficulties on the way and the moments of relaxation and enjoyment.

## The Meaning of the Planets

I will now sketch out briefly what each of these planets means in the language of astrology.

**THE SUN:** In a birth-chart, it represents the power that sustains the organic and spiritual development of the individual person. According to its zodiacal and natal house location, it reveals the nature of the basic vital energy and the types of experiences which enable the individual to tap the greatest amount of strength available to him and to reach the clearest realization of the basic purpose of his life. The Sabian Symbol of the degree on which the Sun is placed is also, in most cases, quite revealing, suggesting the character of this individual purpose or the keynote of the person's destiny.

**THE MOON:** It reveals the mode of operation (zodiacal sign) and the type of experiences (natal house) by using which a person is best able to adjust himself to the requirements of any biological and psychological situation. It represents man's capacity to adapt effectively to his environment — and, negatively, his passive subservience to outer conditions or inner moods. Where the Moon is located, there a person is most sensitive to change and is responsive to opportunities for growth.

**MERCURY:** The position of this planet in a zodiacal sign and natal house indicates the person's essential type of mental activity and the way he tends most naturally and spontaneously to associate the raw data of his existence (i.e., his sense perceptions) and to build, through such an associating or linking process, the concepts and mental images which control his thinking. Mercury refers to the nervous system because it is through the nerves that man relates himself to the outer world and that the interdependence of all the parts and functions of the body is made possible and effective in terms of the total person. Mercury is related to all electrical phenomena in the body and to memory or the storage of information. Whether it rises before or after the Sun on the day of birth, and whether it is "direct" or "retrograde" in its apparent motion in the sky, these are also important factors in ascertaining the character and efficiency of a person's mind.

**MARS:** This planet tells us how a person projects himself in action upon his environment. At the physical level, Mars refers to the muscular system, for every form of outward activity involves some muscular action — including reading a book. At the psychological level, Mars is related to the *libido*, popularized by Freud. Mars does not describe the character of the life energy, for this energy is represented by the Sun. Mars refers to the instrumentalities through which this energy is released, enabling man to accomplish his life purpose. Mars — unless it is retrograde — is a factor of pure spontaneity and eagerness. Its position informs us of a man's capacity for initiative and executive decisions; it describes the characteristic manner in which the individual meets everyday events.

**VENUS:** If Mars is oriented outward, Venus refers to all that brings inward for consideration and judgment the results of an experience. Venus is essentially the capacity to give value to everything a man encounters. Accordingly, the man will love or hate, is drawn toward the thing or person judged valuable and personality enhancing or runs away from it in fear, disgust, or boredom. In another sense, Venus represents the field of magnetic forces which holds the personality together; it represents the "archetype" of the personality and the deepest quality of the person's vibration. Venus is related to the arts because a society expresses through its arts and its culture the innermost character and quality of its collective identity. Venus refers also to the genetic cells (sperms and ova), for in these reside the self-perpetuating genetic character of an ancestral line of heredity.

**JUPITER:** In this largest of all planets, we see the symbol of whatever expands the individual and enables him to utilize most efficiently his innate wealth of biological and psychological resources. Because a man can only fulfill his vast potential of life and consciousness through cooperation with other men, Jupiter is the foundation of the social sense and of human fellowship. This fellowship can at first operate only within the narrow limits of kinship and similarity of life background and experiences. Thus, Jupiter functions originally as that power which holds a clan or a tribe together. Religion is a psychological expression of that power — so also is the respect for authority and the willingness to adopt

traditional patterns of behavior. Jupiter refers to wealth, for wealth is an indication of a person's ability to conform to social trends and to make the most of social opportunities. The position of Jupiter in the birth-chart indicates the nature of such a capacity for social action, enjoyment, and acquisition of prestige.

**SATURN:** This "cold" planet stabilizes and clearly defines a man's position in his social community. It refers to his name, to the signature or the numbers on his identifying cards. Society guarantees this identity but demands in exchange that the individual remain in his place and not intrude upon the identity of other members of the community. Thus, Saturn is the law, the police force, all set ways of personal or group behavior, and all rituals. The position of Saturn in a zodiacal sign and a natal house indicates the nature of the forces and circumstances or experiences which most rigidly individualize a person, in the sense that they set him apart from others — especially if this means a basic difference from the collective norm. Thus, where Saturn is located, there is the point of maximum isolation and susceptibility or sensitiveness, for it is the point of greatest weakness and of least sustainment by society, life, or God.

**URANUS:** This planet in a birth-chart indicates the type of energy and of experiences which will be most conducive to a radical transformation of the total personality — body and psyche. It informs us as to the nature and timing of crises in the life of an individual if that individual is not completely set and crystallized in Saturnian grooves of conformity. Uranus is the rebel and the liberator, Prometheus within every man who dares to be truly an individual.

**NEPTUNE:** It is the "universal solvent" of which the alchemists spoke and (more simply) the ocean. Neptune dissolves whatever Uranus has been able to loosen up. The narrower forms of stability and security which Saturn represents are dissolved by Neptune, and out of the "chaos" (or melting pot) of Neptune emerges at least the potentiality of vaster forms of organization: Neptunian federalism vs. Saturnian-Jupiterian provincialism — great mystic's realization of unity everywhere vs. the dogmas and set rituals of organized religions. Where Neptune is in the birth-chart, the individual is most vulnerable to the pressures of organized society and to some degree of "excommunication." Yet the individual could also find in Neptune's position a clue to the resolution of his basic inner conflicts, provided he can let go and allow "God" within him to show the way and direct him.

**PLUTO:** In its highest meaning, this newly discovered planet refers to the greatest contribution an individual person can make to his society or to humanity in general. But before he can make such an effectual and significant contribution, the individual must pass through experiences of at least relative psychological denudation and soul emptiness. Pluto is the symbol of the depths. The seed must fall into decaying masses of autumnal leaves and be lost before it can become, in due time, the basis for a new vegetation. The man who

is like a seed must learn that "where there is nothing, there is God." Some never learn and are lost, not fulfilling their destiny as seeds — i.e., as agents of humanity as a whole.

The complex relationship between these ten planets is expressed in terms of aspects they make to each other. All these aspects (or angular relationships) considered together constitute the over-all planetary pattern of the birth-chart. It is the word that was in the beginning — for the human being born at a particular time and in a particular locality on the earth's surface.