

Should I Trust My Astrologer?

By Dinesh S. Parakh

The proper answer is, “it depends”. Make no mistake, *jyotisha** (loosely translated as ‘Indian astrology’; a more accurate translation would be ‘Indian divination’) is real and it can be one of the most amazing things you will ever encounter in your life (for example, just ask anyone who has ever had an experience with a true *naadi-jyotishi* (a particular type of *jyotisha*). But it is also true that finding a properly trained *jyotishi* (a practitioner of *jyotisha*) is usually not a simple matter of searching in your local telephone book.

Why do we seek out *jyotishis*? The answer is simple: life can be difficult, and often we feel lost, helpless, and even hopeless. A *jyotishi* represents an ability to tap into a higher source of wisdom to guide our lives. Why then does astrology have a sometimes unsavoury reputation, and why then do some astrologers so frequently get it wrong?

Because the subject of *jyotisha* is so vast and complex, and because it touches on our most intimate natures, it is easy for unscrupulous or deluded people to take advantage of others. Everybody wants to know about their money, career, family, relationships, children, health, etc. If someone claims to be able to shed light on these things, we sometimes trust them too easily – or we dismiss them out of hand as complete charlatans. Neither approach is helpful. The truth is that there are people of astonishing predictive ability, but it is also true that they are few and far between. As my *jyotisha* teacher’s teacher once said, it is no joke to try to recreate a three dimensional human life from a two dimensional piece of paper.

Jyotisha is one of the six *vedangas*, or limbs of the Vedas: literally, it is the “eyes” of the Veda. If you believe in Hinduism and the authority of the Veda, then it is illogical to accept one *vedanga* while dismissing another: *jyotisha* must be as valid as *vyakarana* (Vedic grammar) or *chhandas* (Vedic metre).

Jyotisha is also a *vidya*. A *vidya* is not an academic body of knowledge but rather a sacred body of knowledge – knowledge that has an element of transcendence inherent, and knowledge whose purpose is to reach the Ultimate. Subjects such as *jyotisha*, *ayurveda* (the science of life and health), *yoga* (or any of the other *shad-darsanas* like *vedanta*, *samkhya*, etc.), *gandharva-veda* (*shastriya sangeet* or Indian classical music), etc. all qualify as *vidyas*, or sacred sciences.

What is important to note is that the traditional period of study to master a *vidya* is a full 12 years. This is not 12 years of university. This is 12 years of living with or near a proper and qualified *guru*, and studying, one-on-one, on a daily basis (as beautifully encapsulated in the mantra *om sahana vavatu...*). We do have classically trained musicians alive today who have gone through this process, but how many *jyotishis* do you know who have engaged in this type of study? It is possible to get a four year university degree in *jyotisha*, and those so trained may have a degree of skill. However, pieces of paper from academic institutions cannot certify competence in a sacred subject. True mastery of a *vidya* demands one’s life – or indeed, more than one life.

“It is impossible to cross the ocean of astrology even with a favourable breeze blowing,” said Varahamihira, a great *daivajna* (an honorific accorded to great *jyotishis*, literally, “knower of the

mind of God”) of yore and one of the *navaratnas* (nine jewels) of the court of the glorious King Vikramaditya. This quote is not meant to discourage, but rather to remind one to be aware of the enormity of this subject.

The subject of *vyotisha* is *adrishta* or “That Which is Not Seen”, in reference to the unseen *karmic* influences guiding and directing our lives. *Karma* is often understood by many people to be a “reaction,” in the sense of “I have bad *karma*.” However, *karma* actually means “action”—and for every action, there is a reaction. *Karma* is what we have done, are doing and will do. Hindus divide *karma* into four broad categories. *Sanchita* is all of the accumulated *karmas* of an individual soul over all lifetimes; the entire *karma-shaya* (storehouse or repository of all accumulated *karmas*) so to speak. *Prarabdha* is *karma* that is coming to fruition in this lifetime. *Kriyamana karma* is inaugurated actions, what you are presently doing or have done in this lifetime. And *agama karma* is impending actions, future planned actions. A normal astrological chart, or *kundali* only shows one of these four types, *prarabdha karma*. Some hints on *kriyamana karma* can be obtained by *vyotisis* from another limb of *vyotisha* called *prashna*. Sometimes gifted Tantric *vyotisis* can get glimpses of *sanchita* and *agama karma* directly from the *karma-shaya*. But it is likely *sanchita* and *agama karma* that the Bhagavad Gita is referring to in chapter 4, verse 17: *gahana karmano gatih*: roughly, ‘the ways of *karma* are unfathomable.’ *Vyotisha* helps to make some of “That Which is Not Seen”, seeable and understandable.

Vyotisha itself is divided into six limbs, namely, *gola* (observational and spherical astronomy), *ganita* (astronomical calculation), *jataka* (birth or natal astrology – what most of us associate with astrology), *prashna* (question or horary astrology), *muhurta* (moment or electional astrology), and *nimitta* (loosely translated to the study of omens). *Vyotisha* is further enriched and informed by its sister disciplines such as *hasta samudrika shastra* (hand analysis), *lakshana shastra* (analysis of markings on the body), *anka shastra* (numerology), *vastu shastra* (science of geometry and placement), etc. – all of these are intimately related to and inform one another. A good *vyotishi* has ideally mastered several limbs of *vyotisha* as well as one or more of the sister disciplines, and uses these tools to triangulate as necessary at the time of the reading.

Vyotisha is both an art and a science. It is a science because there is a methodology that can be studied and mastered, to an extent. But it is an art because the ‘operator’ is central – and the operator has to be well trained in order for the science to find full flower. Surgery, like other classical professions, is both art and science as well. No matter how well a surgeon scored in his examinations, the best surgeons have an ineffable ‘knack’ for their art – and these are the ones we seek out. Similarly, the most accurate *vyotishis* are not those with the most encyclopaedic memories, but those that have learned to integrate what they know into the structure of their lives.

So essentially, *vyotisha* is a vast subject, a subject fit for many lifetimes of study, and frankly, one of the best ways to pass the time between birth and death. It is not a hobby, and it cannot be done by computers. It is a *sadhana* or spiritual discipline which is intimately linked to the *sampradaya* (tradition) from which it comes. A properly trained *vyotishi* living a proper life can expect to be accurate over 70% of the time. How many sciences do you know that have such a high rate of accuracy? (To quote the late great economist, John Kenneth Galbraith, “The only function of economic forecasting is to make astrology look respectable.”) The closer a *vyotishi* is to enlightenment, the more accurate he/she will be. But even the greatest *vyotishis* are not 100%

accurate, for then they would not be human but rather Divine. *Karma* is a moving target, and only Omniscience can hit the mark all the time.

So, if you can find a *jyotishi* who has studied in the traditional method, for a minimum prescribed period of time, who has mastered the six limbs of *jyotisha*, who lives according to *yama & niyama* (yogic code of conduct) and cultivates spiritual awareness—and you catch him on a good day, when *maya shakti* (forces of creative power) is flowing—then yes, you should trust him/her and indeed, you may be astounded! Such people do exist—and if your *karmas* are so arranged, you may even meet one of them. But in this day and age, such paragons of the *jyotir-vidya* are rare. Not to fear. Even if your *jyotishi* does not meet all of these criteria, as long as he/she has an awareness of what should be aspired to, makes an attempt to cultivate these qualities and lifestyle, it might be sufficient to put your *jyotishi* heads and shoulders above others who care little for the spiritual context in which *jyotisha* exists.

And what happens when you meet an authentic *jyotishi*? Consider yourself truly blessed, for their penetrating insights go far beyond the relatively useless mental analytical processes with which we burden our days and our souls. We are not the mind, and a *jyotishi*'s insights come from someplace much deeper and more profound than the mind. They touch an individual's *adrishta*, and can offer guidance and advice of inestimable value. When you receive such advice, the best thing that you can do is properly value it and respect the source from which it comes. Thus, *jyotisha*, like all *vidyas* are of immeasurable worth to society—a gift of the Divine to those of us on the mortal plane.

But please do not forget: no matter what a *jyotishi* predicts, we never lose the capacity to act and to modify our *karmas*. India tends towards the extreme of fatalism, while the West tends to the other extreme of free will. Again, the truth lies somewhere in between: fate and free will co-exist in the same sphere. The *dharmic* mode of existence is to understand one's duty, and then go about fulfilling that duty regardless of what one may know or not know about the future. The outcome of the great war in the Mahabharata was a foregone conclusion before the battles commenced, yet everyone nonetheless had to play their allotted roles.

I hope that this short article has piqued your interest for learning more about this vast alternative universe which has always been and will always be India's true greatness. Two excellent starting points for furthering your studies are:

Autobiography of a Yogi, by Paramahansa Yogananda

Light on Life: An Introduction to the Astrology of India, by Hart de Fouw and Robert Svoboda

My humblest *pranaams* to all of my teachers. Any errors in this article are mine alone.

*I have used loose English transliteration, not conventional academic transliteration. Also, all English translations are very rough equivalents of the Sanskrit.