

## THE CELESTIAL DYNAMICS OF GRACE <sup>1</sup>

by Swami Abhayananda

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Nearly ten years had passed since my experience of enlightenment in the Santa Cruz mountains, when I began to be interested in the peculiar claims of astrology, and came to have an understanding of the “celestial dynamics,” not only of my own personal characteristics, but of all the ordinary and extraordinary day-to-day transient conditions of the mind, the body, and the soul. There were, no doubt, some “celestial influences” accompanying that dawning interest in astrological correspondences, but all I knew was that I had become fascinated with the clearly meaningful connections between my own natal planetary positions and my personal characteristics and fluctuating mental states; and as I eagerly consumed what literature I found on the subject, I became more and more convinced of the validity of the astrological principle of correspondence between the planetary positions and the varying conditions of my psyche.

According to the principles of astrology, one can discover the secrets of a soul’s unique characteristics (the psychology of a personality) by drawing a map of the heavens as it appeared at the exact moment and place of birth, which serves as a sort of blueprint of that particular soul. But how, when, and in what sequence the events of the person’s adventure on earth will take place is told in the *progressions* of the planets (one day in the ephemeris represents one year in the life), and by the daily *transits* (actual transitory positions) of the Sun, moon and planets as they pass through and relate to the natal map.

All of the planets move (transit) through the twelve signs of the zodiac which comprise the 360° of the ecliptic; some slowly, some more rapidly. The Sun moves approximately one degree per day, and the moon one degree approximately every two hours. The outer planets take weeks or months to move through a degree. But always the overall architecture of this “atom” which we call the solar system is altering its design moment by moment. And we, who are within the confines of this “atom” are continually experiencing the changes in our

own energy-patterns according to, and corresponding with, the changes in the angles from which the various planets and stars relate to us.

This implies, of course, that *everything* that happens to us in our lives will be accompanied by a planetary arrangement, which, in its relationship to the positions of the planets at the moment of our birth, will symbolize that event. One day, it occurred to me that, if these principles were true, there would have to have been a configuration in the progressed and transiting positions of the planets on the night of my “mystical experience” that was significantly extraordinary. In other words, that Divine experience which we refer to as “*grace*” must also have been signified in the planetary patterns in effect for me on that very night.

This was a mind-boggling concept that was to stand many of my most cherished presumptions on their heads. In order to explain why this should be so, let me take a moment to describe some of those presumptions regarding that mysterious thing called “*grace*,” which is, from the standpoint of its recipient, a new and radical change in consciousness, and, subsequently, in the personality, which arises seemingly from out of nowhere:

From the moment my soul first awakened with “spiritual” understanding, and the love and desire for God first entered my heart, I had attributed that awakening to God’s grace. And there was no question in my mind that my later, “mystical,” experience was the gift of grace, for there was absolutely no denying the fact that this experience had been *given* to me. I had not earned it; I had practiced no technique, no method; by no means could I be said to have produced it. There was no other word to describe this gift other than “*grace*.”

Traditionally, grace—the grace of God—was thought of as the freely given intercession of God to a humbled soul, lifting it momentarily to mergence in the universal Consciousness. In this experience, the false, but insistent, illusion of a separate soul-identity, or ego, is dissolved, and the Divine Intelligence, which is the infinite and eternal Self of all, is revealed. How

could the illusory, individual self imagine that it had accomplished this feat? Let those who think they can accomplish it do so. When the Self is realized, that separate self is no longer even there! The eternal Self appears only at its demise. And it has not the ability to slay itself; it is only the divine revelation of God that, in an instant, dissolves that tenacious illusory ego. It is grace.

Listen to what that enlightened 15th-century monk, Thomas á Kempis, had to say about grace:

When spiritual comfort is sent to you of God, take it meekly and give thanks humbly for it. But know for certain that it is of the great goodness of God that it is sent to you, and not of your deserving. And see that you are not lifted up therefore unto pride, nor that you joy much thereof, nor presume vainly therein, but rather that you be the more meek for so noble a gift, and the more watchful and fearful in all your works; for that time will pass away, and the time of temptation will shortly follow after. When comfort is withdrawn, despair not therefore, but meekly and patiently await the visitation of God, for He is able and of sufficient power to give you more grace and more spiritual comfort than you had first.

Such alteration of grace is no new thing, and no strange thing to those who have had experience in the way of God; for in all great saints and in all lovers of God similar alteration has often been found.

... If almighty God has done thus with holy saints, it is not for us, weak and feeble persons, to despair, though we sometimes have fervor of spirit, and are sometimes left cold and void of devotion. *The Spirit comes and goes according to His pleasure*, and therefore Job said: "Lord, Thou graciously visitest Thy lover in the morning, that is to say, in the time of comfort; and suddenly Thou provest him in withdrawing such comforts from him."

...He who knows the comforts that come through the gift of grace and knows also how sharp and painful the absenting of grace is, shall not dare think that any goodness comes of himself; but he shall openly confess that of himself he is very poor and naked of all virtue.<sup>2</sup>

What Thomas said conformed to my own experience. The fervor of devotion was not always the same; it came and went,

apparently according to its own pleasure. Likewise, the clarity of understanding was sometimes absent, and at other times inspiration seemed to flood my mind with the wisdom of God. One day I might be filled with love and fervor; another day I might be dry or lethargic, or physically energetic, or contemplative. One day I might be bubbling with creative energy; another day I would be dry as a bone. There was no telling what kind of inner state each day would bring.

The experience of union, or Unity, had come to me only once. Why on that day, at that time? I could only explain it, as Thomas á Kempis did, as God's inexplicable grace. But now I was beginning to understand something of the celestial dynamics of grace, i.e., the principles of astrological correspondence. And so I drew up a chart for that night of November 18, 1966.

What a revelation it was when I beheld that chart! The correspondence was undeniable. Here before my eyes was clear and unequivocal proof of the "science" of astral correspondences. Any impartial astrologer viewing the progressions and transits to my natal chart which occurred on that evening would have to acknowledge that this was indeed a night of destiny, an undeniably magical night of mystical vision, a once-in-a-lifetime night of incredible potential for the meeting with God. The extraordinary emphasis on the planetary position of Neptune (known as the planet of mystical experience) at that particular time is eloquently conclusive.

If—as many people think—there is really no correlation between the planets and the human psyche, then what an extraordinarily grand coincidence it was, what a marvelous accident of nature, that at the same moment that I was experiencing the Godhead, the planets were proclaiming it in the heavens! I think any reasonable person with even a little astrological acumen, on viewing the "influences" in effect for me that night, would have to acknowledge that the significant planetary picture at the time of my "enlightenment experience" does, in fact, seem to provide evidence of the validity of the contents of that experience, confirming that all things do indeed

“move together of one accord,” that nothing happens that is not ordained to happen, that the universe is one coordinated Whole.

But, along with the excitement of discovery and validation which I felt on viewing this chart, there was a nagging question that left me baffled and confused: If this “mystical experience” was described in the heavens since the beginning of time, and therefore entirely predestined, where was “grace”? Where was the freely-given gift of God that I had experienced as occurring at just that moment? If everything was strictly predetermined, where was grace and free will and the possibility of spiritual endeavor?

Where was choice or merit or virtue? Where was blame or culpability? And where was the hope or possibility of “spiritual experience” for those in whose astrological forecast the prerequisite planetary conditions were *not* present? If God’s universe is merely the mechanistic unfolding of an undeviating script, then are we all merely mechanical pawns, and our trials and triumphs, our perseverings and defeats, merely dramatic plot-twists in a story that’s already written, typeset and published?

It is important to emphasize at this time that the planets, in themselves, do not have the power to *cause* either good or ill-fortune, though many (including myself) habitually speak of “planetary influences” as though they were *independent causes* determining our fate. In ancient times, of course, as planetary configurations were seen to correspond to definite kinds of psychological and behavioral effects, the naive supposed that planets were therefore independent forces, responsible for the destiny of man. Each planet was fitted out with its own individual personality, and was assumed to have independent power to affect events on earth. This was the basis for the myths of the “gods.”

The great Roman mystic, Plotinus, writing in the 3rd century C.E. on the subject of *Are The Stars Causes?*, noted that a belief in the independent power of the planets is “tenable only by minds ignorant of the [true] nature of a Universe which has a

ruling Principle and a First Cause operative downward through every member.”<sup>3</sup> He explained:

Each [planetary] entity takes its origin from one Principle and, therefore, while executing its own function, works in with every other member of that All. ... And there is nothing undesigned, nothing of chance, in all the process: all is one scheme of differentiation, starting from the First Cause and working itself out in a continuous progression of effects.<sup>4</sup>

This perfectly unfolding progression of effects from the one all-ruling Cause is clearly seen by all who have been graced with “the vision of God.” It is that “vision” which is the experiential basis for the assertion that “all things move together of one accord”; that “assent is given throughout the universe to every falling grain.” Still, the question of *how* the transiting “planetary influences” operate, i.e., by what process Neptune or any other planet transmits to individual souls its effects, is a legitimate one. And the matter of how *progressions* operate (which are not even present-time events, but “symbols” of planetary events already past) is even more perplexing. These questions cannot be answered by present-day knowledge, but many astrologers guess that something like the following is the case:

As the planets of the solar system change their angles to one another and thus rearrange the structural design of the entire system and its relationship to the design at one’s nativity, there is a corresponding change in the pattern of conscious energy (*Shakti*) which makes up our psychic and phenomenal reality. The energy-pattern (produced by the angular positions of the Sun, Moon and planets), which exists at the time of an individual’s birth, corresponds to the conscious energy-pattern, or aggregation of qualities, of that individual soul. And the subsequent alterations of the planetary positions after that moment spell out in decipherable terms his or her destiny.

It seems to me, however, that the search for a *cause-effect* relationship between the transits and progressions of planets and the lives of individual souls on earth is indicative of

humanity's long-standing mistaken view of reality. Plotinus saw in the 2nd century what is true eternally—that there is *one* Cause, and all else is Its effects. The planets do not focus beneficent or malevolent rays or forces in our direction; they do not put forth any fields of influence that impinge on us at all. In short, they are not causes at all, but merely *signs* of the activity of the one Cause, which is God, revealed to those who can read them.

I believe it is very important to understand that, although the planets *signal* psychic and physical events experienced on earth, they are not themselves responsible; they are not the *cause*, but are only coincident effects synchronous with the effects perceived upon earthly life. In short, the “influences” of the planets are really the influences of the unbroken Whole, manifesting locally as specific patterns of relationships. The planets do not determine our fate; they merely reveal it. Our lives are determined by the One in whom the planets move. This is a view consistent with the view of Plotinus, and I believe it will be consistent with the enlightened understanding of the future.

The evolution of the soul occurs over many lifetimes, with its summit being the full openness to self-surrender in the Love of God, and the subsequent realization of its supreme Identity. And because the evolution of the universe reflects the evolution of each soul, the stellar and planetary positions, which signal that soul's enlightenment, will coincide perfectly with that moment in the soul's evolutionary summit. And the question of whether it is the soul's evolutionary struggle or the planetary alignments, which brings about enlightenment must be answered, “Neither.” They are coordinated events in the unfolding of God's cosmic drama; both events are simultaneous effects of the one Cause, occurring in Himself in the ordered unfoldment of His will. All is one coordinated whole, and all that occurs within it is a manifestation of His grace.

The complexity of such a universe—a universe in which the destiny of each succeeding manifestation of a soul on earth is in synchronization with the ongoing motions of planetary

bodies—is indeed beyond our present ability to conceive or visualize. Nonetheless, we must acknowledge that it is impossible to separate the birth of any individual from the cosmic conditions in which it occurs. For the universe is an integral Whole, and every event in it is in interlocking agreement with every other; not even the tiniest, most seemingly insignificant, event may be considered as an isolated phenomenon.

Within this Whole, where “all things move together of one accord,” the division of small-scale events into categories of *cause* and *effect* is imaginary and has no real meaning. For it is the Lord, God, *Shiva*, Self—call Him what you will—who, by means of His Power of Will (*Shakti*), is the sole Cause of the entire manifested array of the cosmos and therefore of every single event which takes place within it. This truth is seen clearly and unmistakably in the unitive experience of the mystic.

Here are the charts drawn up for the time and place of my mystical experience: The first chart, chart A, is the chart of the *transiting* planetary arrangement in effect at the time of my “experience of unity.” The lines connecting those planets in *opposition* (180°) *trine* (120°), and *sextile* (60°) aspects to each other show the angular relationships between these transiting planets. This, in itself, is a remarkable configuration. But to fully appreciate the significance of this transiting planetary arrangement, it must be seen in relationship to the positions of the planets at my birth as well as the *progressed* chart.

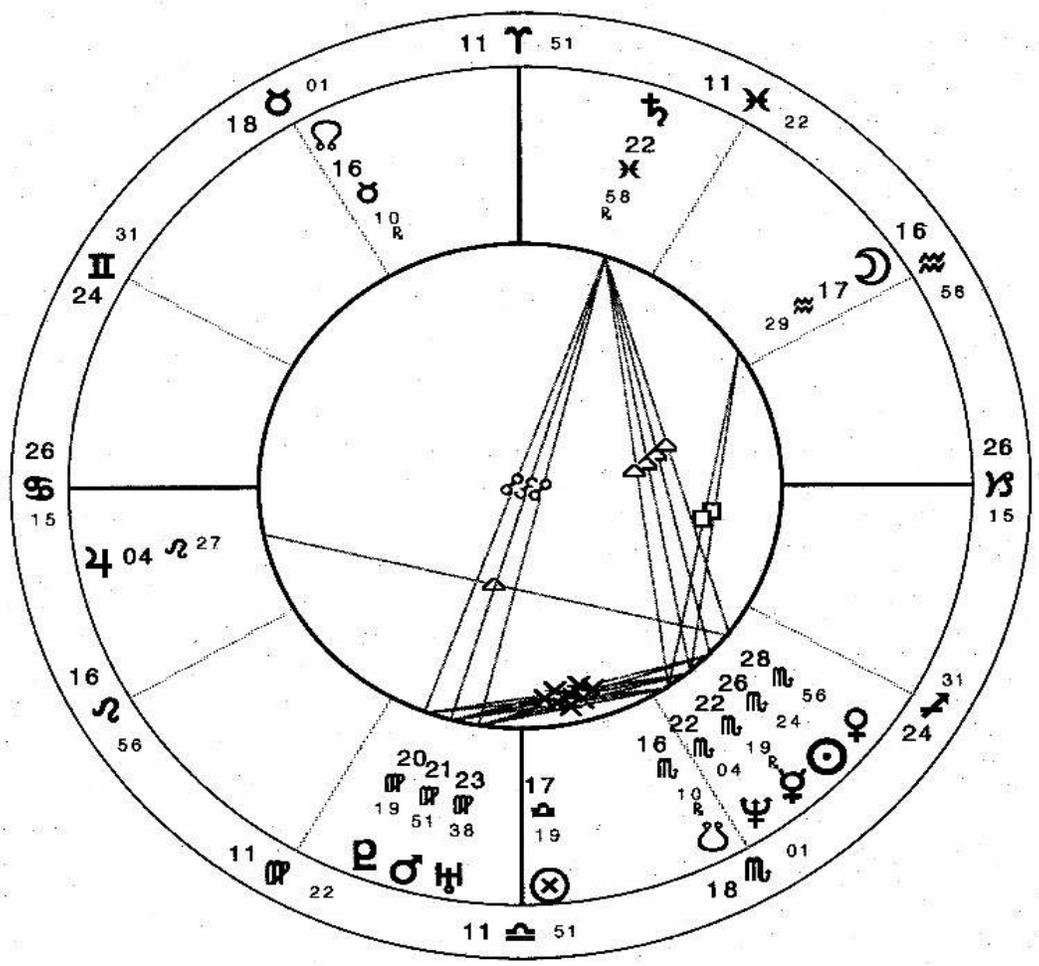
Chart B is a composite chart, showing the positions of the planets in my natal chart and my progressed chart, shown in consecutive wheels. In the center wheel, my *natal* chart, calculated for 6:01 P.M., August 14, 1938, at Indianapolis, Indiana; and in the outer wheel, the chart for the progressed planets at 9:00 P.M., November 18, 1966, at Santa Cruz, California.

In Chart C, one can see the natal chart and the transiting chart for the same time and place pictured in consecutive wheels.

CHART A

**Stan TroutTrans.**

Nov 18 1966      9:00 PM PST  
Santa Cruz      California  
38N00      121W53  
Nov 19 1966      05:00:00 GMT  
Tropical      Placidus      True Node

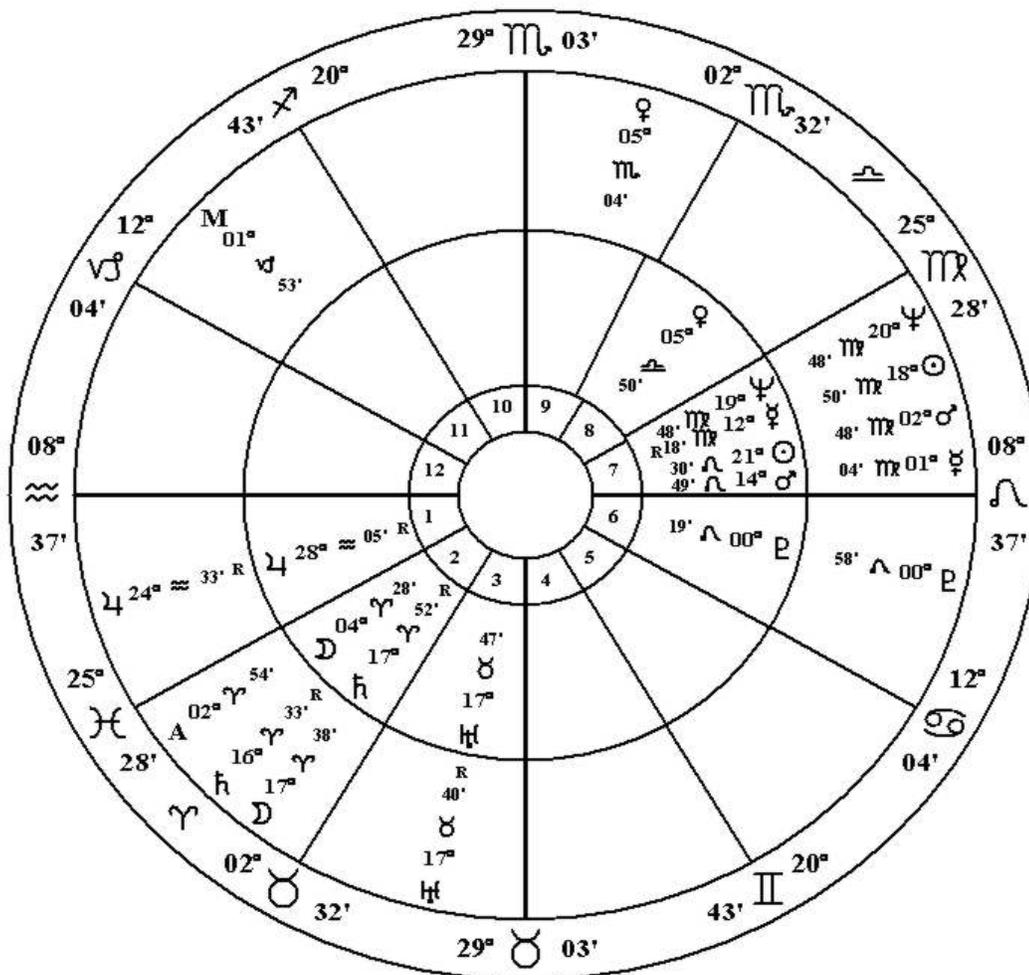


### Chart B

Inner Chart  
**Stan Trout**  
 Sunday, August 14, 1938 6:01:00 PM  
 Indianapolis, Indiana  
 Time Zone: 06:00 (CST)  
 Longitude: 086° W 09' 29"  
 Latitude: 39° N 46' 06"

House Cusps based on chart of Stan Trout

Outer Chart  
**Trout Stan Prg to 11/18/1966**  
 Sunday, September 11, 1938  
 2ndary Prog, Solar Arc MC  
 Santa Cruz, California

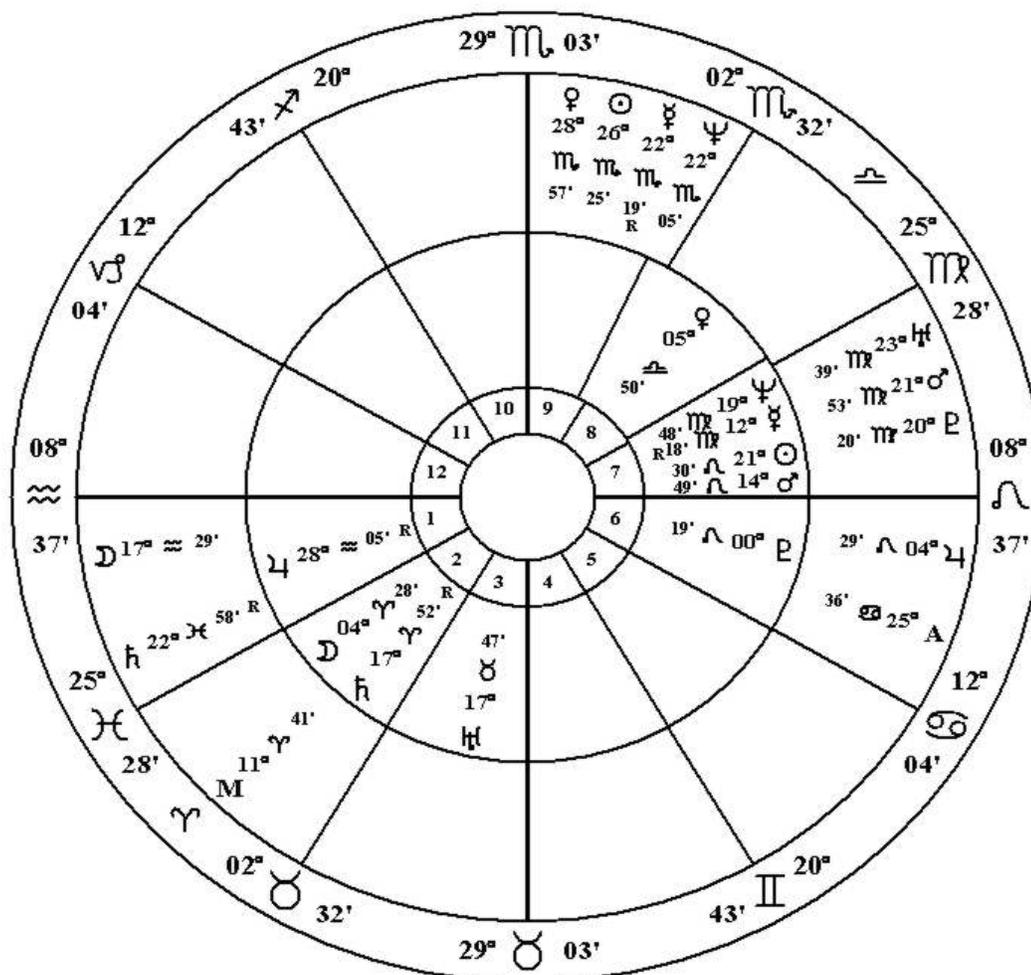


### Chart C

Inner Chart  
**Stan Trout**  
 Sunday, August 14, 1938 6:01:00 PM  
 Indianapolis, Indiana  
 Time Zone: 06:00 (CST)  
 Longitude: 086° W 09' 29"  
 Latitude: 39° N 46' 06"

House Cusps based on chart of Stan Trout

Outer Chart  
**Stan Trout**  
 Friday, November 18, 1966 9:00:00 PM  
 Santa Cruz, California  
 Time Zone: 08:00 (PST)  
 Longitude: 122° W 01' 47"  
 Latitude: 36° N 58' 27"



*Natal Aspects:*

Sun conjunct Mars  
Sun trine Saturn  
Sun square Uranus  
Mercury trine Uranus  
Mercury conjunct Neptune  
Mars square Uranus  
Saturn semisextile Uranus  
Uranus trine Neptune

*Progressed Aspects (to natal planets):*

Moon conjunct Saturn (exact)  
Moon semisextile Uranus (exact)  
Sun conjunct Neptune (exact)

*Transiting Aspects (to natal planets):*

Moon sextile Saturn (exact)  
Moon square Uranus (exact)  
Sun conjunct Midheaven  
Mercury square Sun (exact)  
Mercury conjunct North Node (exact)  
Venus conjunct Midheaven (exact)  
Venus square Jupiter (exact)  
Mars conjunct Neptune  
Jupiter trine Moon (exact)  
Uranus conjunct Neptune  
Neptune conjunct North Node (exact)  
Neptune square Sun (exact)  
Pluto conjunct Neptune (exact)

*Note:* planets within 1° aspect are considered to be exact.

In examining the composite of charts in Chart B, the first thing that stands out to the trained eye is the highly significant progression of both the Sun and the Moon (middle wheel) to exact conjunctions with natal planets (center wheel). The Moon's progression to an exact conjunction to my natal Saturn is a conjunction which occurs only once every twenty-eight to thirty years; while the Sun's progression to the natal position of Neptune occurs in one's chart only if one's natal Sun position is within 60° or so, clockwise, of Neptune's position—and then, only once in a lifetime. The likelihood of both the Sun and Moon forming progressed conjunctions to (major) natal planets simultaneously is obviously very remote, and when it *does* occur, is highly significant of an extraordinary event.

Neptune, to which the progressed Sun is conjoined, figures quite prominently in my natal chart, as it forms there a conjunction to Mercury and a trine to Uranus. In my early deliberations about my own chart, I had come to look on it as a representation of a certain mental receptivity to poetic inspiration. But Neptune represents much more than that; with beneficial aspects from other planets it can represent an access to the very subtlest of spiritual realms. One astrologer, Robert Hand, who is a recognized authority on astrological symbols, says about Neptune:

Neptune symbolizes the truth and divinity perceived by mystics. (*Keep in mind that the planet is an agent or a representation of an energy, not the source of the energy.*) At the highest level, Neptune represents Nirvana, where all individuality is merged into an infinite oneness of being and consciousness.<sup>5</sup>

In Chart C, you will notice that the massive conjunction of transiting Mars-Uranus-Pluto (outer wheel) is precisely over my natal Neptune, along with the progressed Sun, and that the conjunction of transiting Mercury-Neptune is precisely over my natal North Node of the Moon. There were, on that night of November 18, 1966, two exact conjunctions of *progressed* planets to natal planets, and ten exact aspects of *transiting* planets to natal positions, five of which were conjunctions. The concentration of energy over my natal Neptune position

was clearly intense—intense enough for even a thick-headed person like myself to catch a glimpse of God.

If it could be shown that, in all cases, the mystical experience of Unity coincided with progressed solar and/or lunar aspects to Neptune in the charts of the experiencers, we would be in possession of a neatly consistent formula for anticipating mystical experience. However, that does not seem always to be the case. When one examines the charts of known mystics of the past progressed to the date of their transcendent experience, one encounters a very inconsistent collection of varied influences, although aspects to the natal Neptune position do seem to figure strongly.

For example, in the chart of Sri Aurobindo (born August 15, 1872), at the time of his reported enlightenment (January 15, 1908) the progressed moon is exactly conjunct his natal Neptune, and the progressed Sun is exactly quincunx Neptune's position. In the chart of Sri Ramakrishna (born February 18, 1836), progressed to the date of his first *samadhi* at the age of twenty-nine (February 1, 1865), the progressed moon is exactly sextile his natal Neptune's position, while there are no major aspects from the progressed Sun. And in the progressed chart of Sri Ramana Maharshi (born December 30, 1879), who became enlightened at the age of sixteen (September 15, 1896), the progressed moon is 3° past a conjunction with natal Jupiter, and the progressed Sun makes only one aspect: a trine to natal Pluto. Even with so brief a sampling, it is clear that there is a wide range of variation in the progressed solar and lunar aspects occurring at the time of enlightenment.

Strangely enough, the one modern mystic whose progressed aspects at the time of his enlightenment most closely resemble the planetary aspects present in my own enlightenment chart is someone who was personally known to me—Swami Muktananda.

Muktananda's natal horoscope reveals him to have been an immensely powerful personality, but it only hints at the tremendous personal power he came to possess through the

legacy of *shaktipat* transmitted to him by his guru, Nityananda, and through his lifelong retention of that power. He was totally unique in his masterful attainment, and his life of sharing his spiritual realizations was also amazing and unique; but *his experience of the Self was the common experience of all the enlightened.*

While our paths to enlightenment, our visions, our circumstances, personalities and destinies (as symbolized in our individual horoscopes) were very different, the enlightenment experience which revealed the eternal Self to Muktananda was identical (by definition) with that which I experienced. What's more, the planetary signifiers of enlightenment were nearly identical in both our cases.

Despite the unique elements of Muktananda's *sadhana*, which differed considerably from my own experience, both of our actual enlightenment experiences, though nearly ten years apart, coincided with a strong aspect of the progressed moon to one of the outer natal planets, at the same time that *the progressed Sun was forming an exact conjunction with the natal position of Neptune.* There was also, at the time, an extraordinary and significant array of transiting planets in the heavens in both cases. Here is Chart D, showing the positions of the transiting planets on the day of Muktananda's enlightenment (determined to be July 30, 1957):

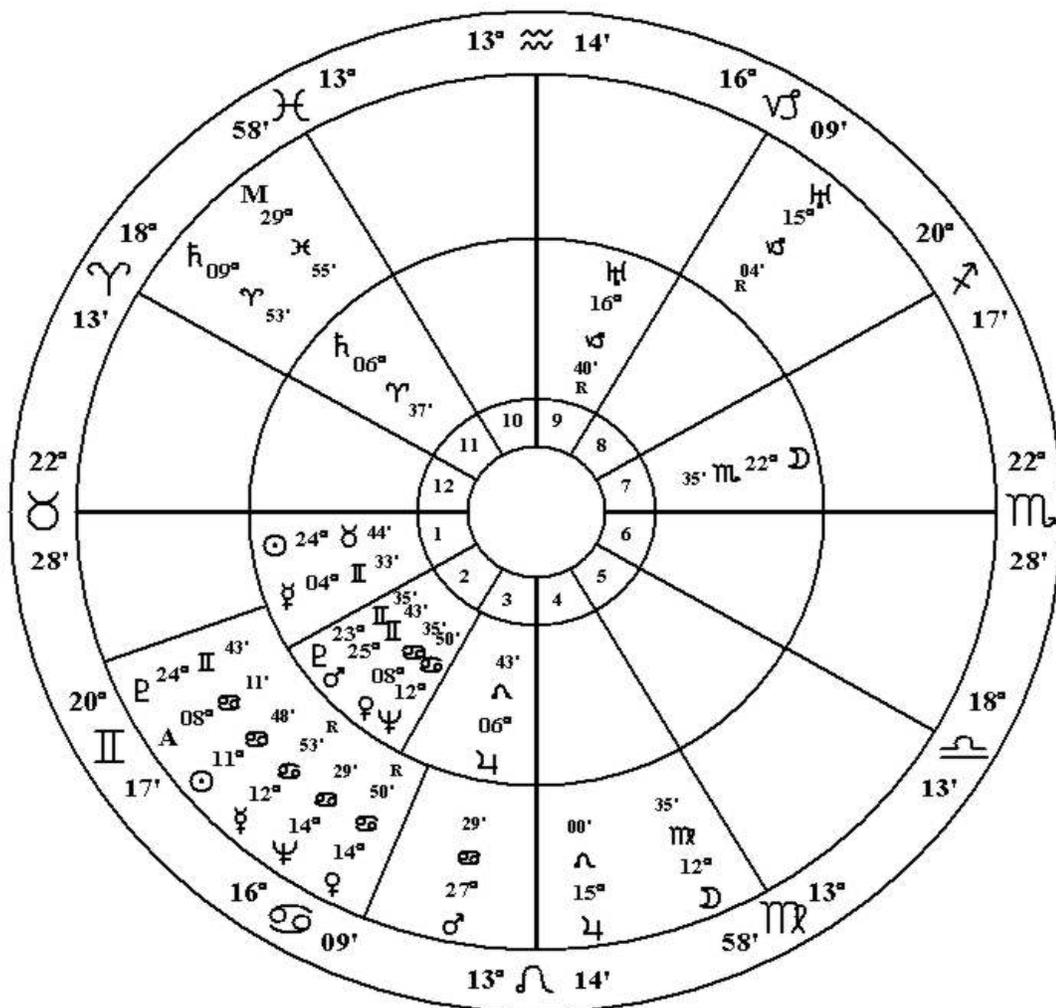


### Chart E

Inner Chart  
**Swami Muktananda**  
 Saturday, May 16, 1908 6:00:00 AM  
 Mangalore, India  
 Time Zone: -05:30 (IST)  
 Longitude: 074° E 53'  
 Latitude: 12° N 52'

House Cusps based on chart of Swami Muktananda

Outer Chart  
**Muktananda\_Swami Prg to 7/30/1957**  
 Saturday, July 04, 1908  
 2ndary Prog, Solar Arc MC  
 Yeola, India



### Chart F

Inner Chart

**Swami Muktananda**

Saturday, May 16, 1908 6:00:00 AM

Mangalore, India

Time Zone: -05:30 (IST)

Longitude: 074° E 53'

Latitude: 12° N 52'

House Cusps based on chart of Swami Muktananda

Outer Chart

**Swami Muktananda**

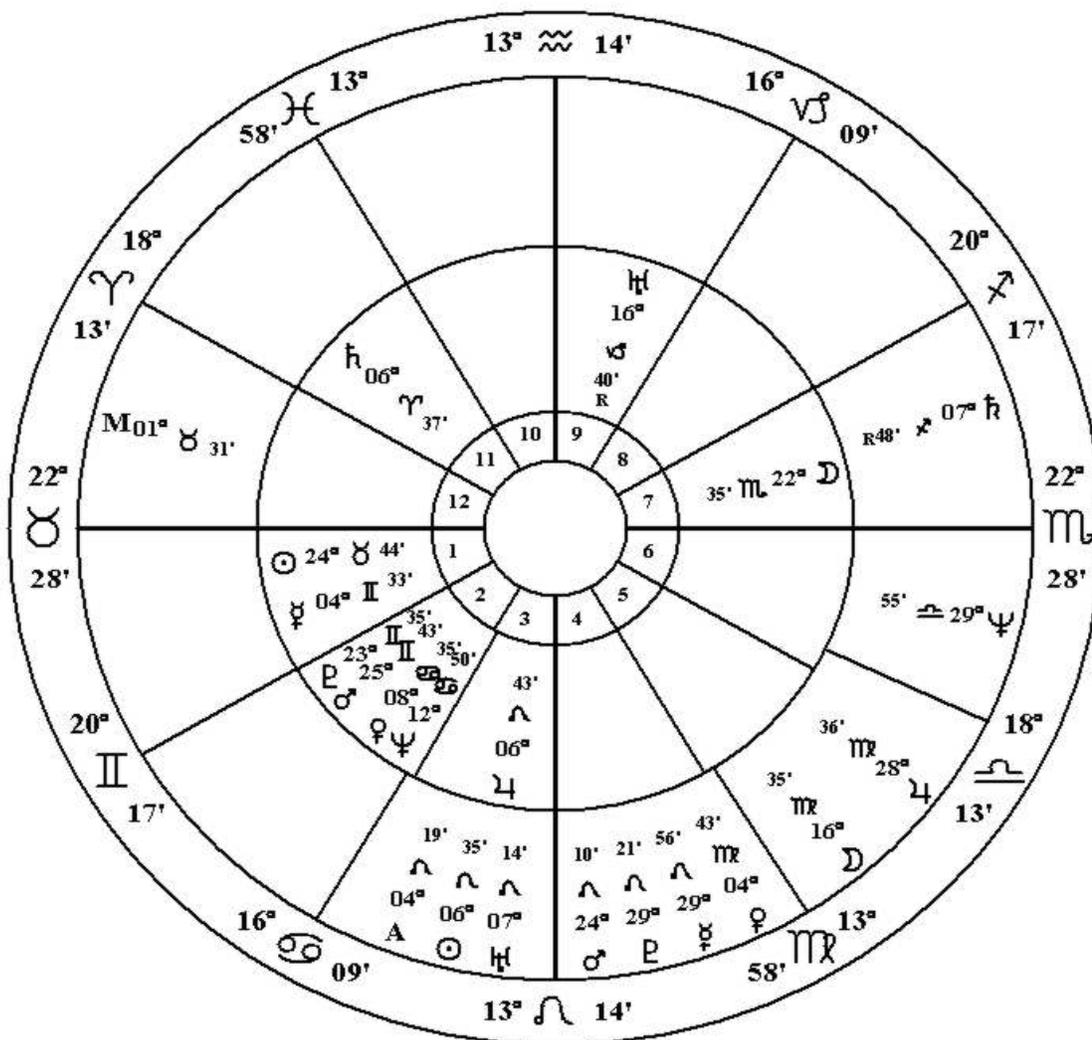
Tuesday, July 30, 1957 6:00:00 AM

Yeola, India

Time Zone: -05:30 (IST)

Longitude: 074° E 29'

Latitude: 20° N 02'



*Natal Aspects:*

Sun conjunct Ascendant  
 Sun opposite moon  
 Mercury sextile Jupiter  
 Venus conjunct Neptune  
 Venus square Saturn  
 Mars conjunct Pluto  
 Jupiter trine Saturn (exact)  
 Uranus opposite Neptune

*Progressed Aspects (to natal planets):*

Sun-Mercury conjunct Neptune (exact)  
 Moon sextile Neptune (exact)  
 Jupiter quincunx Uranus

*Transiting Aspects (to natal planets):*

Sun-Uranus conjunct Jupiter  
 Sun-Uranus trine Saturn  
 Moon-Jupiter trine Sun (moon exact)  
 Mars-Pluto square Sun  
 Saturn trine Jupiter  
 Saturn trine Saturn

*Note:* Planets within 1° aspect are considered to be exact.

In Muktananda's *natal* chart, notice the powerful stellium of planets in the 2nd House, along with the Sun-moon opposition closely conjunct the 1st-7th House cusps. Mars conjunct Pluto, and Venus conjunct Neptune give some indication of his spiritual evolution and the great forcefulness of his personal energy. Jupiter in the 3rd House shows his learning and speaking ability, and Uranus on the 9th House cusp relates both

to his advanced philosophical views and his amazingly broad travels.

The *progressed* chart shows the progressed Sun and Mercury in exact conjunction with his natal Neptune, and the progressed Moon in exact sextile to natal Neptune. In addition to these highly significant aspects, Jupiter is progressed to an exact quincunx to natal Uranus.

The *transiting* aspects are equally notable: a transiting Sun-Uranus conjunction is conjunct natal Jupiter, trining natal Saturn, while transiting Saturn is forming a grand trine with natal Saturn and Jupiter. A transiting Moon-Jupiter conjunction is trining the natal Sun, while transiting Mars, Pluto, and Mercury are in close square to that natal Sun position. All in all, it is a remarkable set of circumstances, signaling a remarkable occurrence. Clearly, it is *as* uniquely powerful a set of progressed and transiting aspects as those which occurred in relation to my own chart in November of 1966.

It is my opinion that this discovery of the correlation of celestial dynamics and mystical experience is a breakthrough in knowledge comparable to those brought about by Copernicus and Galileo, and has the potential to revolutionize our understanding of “spiritual” experience. However, it requires so bold a departure from traditional ways of thinking that it is unlikely to have a great influence on the understanding of any but the most discerning. In fact, many so-called “spiritual teachers” will find this information embarrassing and will reject it, for it makes a folly of their contention that it is practices and techniques which bring about Self-realization. For without God’s celestial grace, without the timing of God’s heavenly motions unfolding in one’s life, no illumination will come.

The present-day understanding of how astrology ‘works’ is as far from a comprehensive resolution as is the science of microphysics. It was a mystery to the ancients, and it is a mystery today (although the concept of the immediate interconnectedness of everything within “the unbroken Whole” put forward by the physicist, David Bohm, hints at the way

ahead). And while “the science” of the astrology of enlightenment is in its infancy today, I am hopeful that the data that is here provided will point the way to greater exploration and understanding of the relation of astronomical phenomena to mystical experience in the years to come.

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#### NOTES AND REFERENCES:

1.            This article is a compilation of excerpts from my book, *The Supreme Self*, London, O Books, 2005.
2.            Abhayananda, Swami., *Thomas á Kempis: On The Love of God*, Olympia, Wash., Atma Books, 1992; pp. 74-75, 78
3.            Plotinus, *Enneads*, II:3:6
4.            *Ibid.*, II:3:7
5.            Robert Hand, *Astrological Symbols*, Rockfort, Mass, Para Research, Inc.; 1980.

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