

THE SOUL AND FREE WILL

by Swami Abhayananda

Some of the keenest intellects of a few early civilizations recognized the correlation between the changing positions and patterns of the planets in our solar system and the changing mental and physical conditions of life on earth. As they learned by observation of the distinct nature of the effects associated with each planet, they ascribed to each a specific kind of influence, considering each of the heavenly bodies, including the sun and moon, to be embodiments of divine powers, or “gods”. These gods were both benevolent and mischievous, bestowing both blessings and calamities upon earth and her inhabitants. Each had its own personality and characteristics, and dealt with men on earth in ways compatible with their separate natures.

Today, of course, these beliefs are regarded by many as mere primitive superstitions, having no basis in fact whatsoever. But let us not be so hasty in our judgment of these early mythologizers. Over the centuries, the correlations between planetary patterns and specific psychological and physical effects on Earth have continued to be chronicled by observers of the heavenly dynamics, and much evidence has been accumulated to show a factual basis for these planetary myths of correspondence. Today, the notion of “gods” is frowned upon; instead, we like to call those various distinct energies associated with the planets “archetypes”, after Carl Jung, who utilized the term (originally coined by Plato) to speak of those intangible influences. This may also prove in time to be an inadequate term; but for now, we shall speak of the power of the gods as “archetypes”.

For a long time now, this study of the correspondence of the archetypal energies associated with the planets and the patterns of mental and physical changes on earth has gone by the name of *astrology*. It is fashionable among those “learned” in the universities to regard this study as having no scientific basis and as being merely a throwback to superstition and ignorance, appealing only to the indiscriminant and gullible masses. But we should remember the words of the great astrologer, Ptolemy, who warned, “It is a common practice with the vulgar to slander everything which is difficult of attainment.”¹ How, then, shall we define these *archetypes*? Here is what philosopher, astrologer, and author of the highly regarded affirmation of astrological principles, *Cosmos and Psyche*, Richard Tarnas, says:

Archetypes can be understood and described in many ways, and in fact much of the history of Western thought from Plato and Aristotle onward has been concerned with this very question. But for our present purposes, we can define an archetype as a universal principle or force that affects—impels, structures, permeates—the human psyche and human behavior on many levels ... Moreover, archetypes seem to work from both within and without, for they can express themselves as impulses and images from the interior psyche, yet also as events and situations in the external world.

Jung thought of archetypes as the basic constituents of the human psyche, shared cross-culturally by all human beings, and he regarded them as universal expressions of a collective unconscious. Much earlier, the Platonic tradition considered archetypes to be not only psychological but also cosmic and objective, as primordial forms of a Universal Mind that transcended the human psyche. Astrology would appear to support the Platonic view as well as the Jungian, since it gives evidence that Jungian archetypes are not only visible in human psychology, in human experience and behavior, but are also linked to the macrocosm itself—to the planets and their movements in the heavens. Astrology thus supports the ancient idea of an *anima mundi*, or world soul, in which the human psyche participates. From this perspective, what Jung called the collective unconscious can be viewed as being ultimately embedded within the cosmos itself.

The basic principle of astrology is that the planets have a fundamental cosmically based connection to specific archetypal forces or principles which influence human existence, and that the patterns formed by the planets in the heavens bear a meaningful correspondence to the patterns of human affairs on the Earth. In terms of individuals, the positions of the planets at the time and place of a person's birth are regarded as corresponding to the basic archetypal patterns of that person's life and character.²

According to this interpretation, the natal chart represents the psychological make-up or orientation of the individual at birth; and the ongoing progressions and transits reflect the changing modes of thought and experience occurring throughout one's present life. The position of the transiting planets therefore represents a sort of evolving map of the intricately changing network of our mental experience. But there must inevitably arise the question of *how* and by what means are the changing positions of the planets synchronously related to the human psyche. The changing aspects of transiting planets to the positions of planets existing at birth can clearly have no effect on a person unless those natal planetary positions are an integral part of the makeup of an individual's personal psyche. It seems that the position of the planets at birth is somehow

imprinted on that soul, and is in a way synonymous with the characteristics of that particular individual's psyche; so that, the transiting aspects to the planetary positions of the natal chart are relating to something integral to the individual. They are relating to the living psyche of the individual, which in turn is synonymous with the planetary arrangement existing at his/her birth.

If this interpretation of "planetary correspondences" is correct, then every individual born bears within itself the imprint and structure of the planetary arrangement existing at that very moment, and is in fact an embodiment of that planetary arrangement. And the movements of the planets, along with their changing relations to one another during the course of the life of the individual, are intimately correlated with the unfolding life and psyche of that individual. It is not that one is considered to be causing the other; they are regarded instead as merely correlated events in the universal unfoldment. They are merely two synchronous mirror images of the activity of the Divine Mind. Here, again, Richard Tarnas, on why astrology works:

It seems unlikely to me that the planets send out some kind of physical emanations that causally influence events in human life in a mechanistic way. The range of coincidences between planetary positions and human existence is just too vast, too experientially complex, too aesthetically subtle and endlessly creative to be explained by physical factors alone. I believe that a more plausible and comprehensive explanation is that the universe is informed and pervaded by a fundamental holistic patterning which extends through every level, so that a constant synchronicity or meaningful correlation exists between astronomical events and human events. This is represented in the basic esoteric axiom, "as above, so below," which reflects a universe all of whose parts are integrated into an intelligible whole.³

In dealing with astrological "influences" one needs, therefore, to take a universal all-inclusive perspective, and to recognize the truth of the fundamental dictum that "all things move together of one accord." From this perspective, the universe is the manifestation of the one Intelligence, the *Nous* or *Logos*; all is one integral life in which every entity and every action is interrelated, functioning as coordinated aspects of the universal expression. In such a view, the planets are merely "signs", indicators of prevailing influences or energies currently operating, and have no causal function. This view, also, asserts a marvelously complex and exquisite perfection in the unfolding of the universe, and underscores the existence of a Divine Intelligence in operation down through each member, upholding, activating, and supporting all. The individualized soul, the result of its

previously created karma, comes into the world at exactly the moment that the planetary arrangement mirrors the qualities of its being. What a truly extraordinary wonder of Divine creative perfection!

But should we gather, then, that we are wholly governed by these planetary energies (archetypes), that there is a cosmic determinism at work here that is inescapable? Should we believe that our sense of individual freedom is merely an illusion, and that we must unwittingly and unerringly follow the cosmic fiat as inscribed in the movements of the stars? And, perhaps most importantly, if there is, instead, a means by which each individual soul possesses a free and undetermined will, quite beyond the “meaningful correspondence” that exists between astronomical and human events, what is the explanation for such a free will?

The soul, or psyche, of each individual, though embodying the cosmic arrangement at the moment of its birth, and constituting the specific tenor and structure of the life of the individual, has at its core the eternal Consciousness which is the principle and primary element of its being, constituting its permanent Ground and Self, beyond all projected energies resulting from any temporary arrangements of the cosmic array. Therefore, the cosmic arrangement at the moment of our birth into this universe may constitute our temporal identity; but the One who projects this universe, and in whose Mind we exist, constitutes our eternal Identity. This eternal Identity remains throughout our existence, and is unaffected by any transient conditions, such as the planetary patterns of relationship appearing within the manifest universe.

The Neoplatonist conception, as put forward by Plotinus (205-270 C.E.), as well as the Vedantic conception, put forth in the Upanishads, satisfactorily explains this eternal Principle of freedom. The Divine Mind (*Nous* or *Brahma*), which is the active element of the Divine Consciousness, projects a coordinated Dream-world of immense vastness and complexity (the manifested *Cosmos* or *Maya*). Yet the source and heart of all existence, the substratum of Divine Consciousness, the Ground of the Soul (*the One* or *Brahman*), remains constant. It is independent of and unaffected by this surface play of universal phenomena; for the world of physical and mental phenomena is but an appearance, a sort of superimposition, on this substratum of Divine Consciousness. For most of us, the mind’s continuous display of this superimposition of both physical and psychological states synchronous with the positions and angular relationships of the planets is

extremely persuasive, becoming the primary basis of our psychologically perceived reality. But, through deep meditation or deliberate recollection, we are able to maintain identity with the Conscious substratum of Being, and able to view the ongoing parade of transient physical and mental conditions and images related to existing planetary energies as but the superimposed activities of that Conscious substratum.

Therefore, when we consider the correlation of planetary events and human events, we are not dealing with a straightforward cause-effect relationship. This is because we humans are of a two-fold nature; we are, in essence, identical with the divine Consciousness, our Divine Self, which assures us of a free will; and we are only secondarily products of the creative Power (*Nous* or *Brahma*) which begets the material body-mind complex along with its accompanying karmic tendencies. The winds of all the influences of all the planets may blow, but the Divine Self may yet remain unmoved, withholding and denying her consent to the influential powers; or better, she may use the influences of those planetary powers to her own Divine purposes, rather than to the merely pleasurable mental, physical and emotional activities to which they tend to incline. Conversely, if an individual's sense of the Divine Self is weak, the individual's will may be swayed by the mental and physical influences impinging on her, and surrender to their power. But, with a determined dependence on and identification with the Divine Self, the individual will has the free and final word on the course of the life it rules.

We are a combination, a duality, of identities: we are the Divine Self (*the One, Brahman*), and we are also distinctly individual souls by virtue of our embodiment. Our essence, the one Divine Consciousness, is the only true 'I' in all the universe and beyond; It is everyone's eternal Identity. But, by His mysterious Power of illusion (*Maya*), the Spirit born into this world as Soul takes on a limited set of characteristics as well, which constitutes one's limited temporal identity, otherwise known as the *jiva*, or individualized soul. According to that soul's previous mental tendencies, and in synchrony with the evolving motions of the planets and celestial bodies as they relate to the place on Earth where that soul takes birth, the characteristics of each soul are made manifest. The astrological interpretations of the planetary positions at one's birth can therefore be helpful indications of the soul characteristics of each person born.

The astrological natal chart is an authentic diagram of the individualized soul, but it says nothing of the Divine Identity, or Self, underlying the manifestation of that soul. The 'soul' is in essence the Divine as it appears within the dream-fabric of *Cosmos/Maya*. It partakes of both the Divine and the illusory—just as in a dream, we partake of both our true conscious selves and an illusory self. The analogy is exceedingly apt, as in both instances, we retain our fundamental reality, while operating in an illusory 'imaged' reality. The individual soul (or *astral* body), as portrayed in the astrological chart, is, to a great degree, who we are; and we operate in this life from the past karmic tendencies embodied in that natal chart. However, at a more fundamental level, we are identical with the Divine Self, which comprises our freedom to will and act from a level of consciousness beyond our soul properties and characteristics. The past karmic tendencies are very powerful in their influence; and they can lead us astray, unless we are able to identify with the Divine Self and turn those inherent tendencies to Divine purposes.

A recent example will suffice to illustrate this dual identity: A young man, a college student, named Seung-Hui Cho, went on a recent rampage, killing thirty-two of his classmates at a Virginia College. The young man's natal chart shows the difficult karmic limitation suggested by the Sun's square aspect to a close conjunction between Mars and Pluto. A predictably volatile and violent aspect indeed! Also, at the time of his birth, Jupiter was in exact conjunction with Neptune. Such natives have a tendency, if there are other conflicting factors, to "lose contact with reality and live in a world of private fantasy". This natal chart describes the soul characteristics under which this young man took birth. They were not conditions which were imposed from without; they were conditions previously forged in his own soul, and they describe the embedded tendencies (as depicted in the natal chart) which constituted the framework of his recent life.

But underneath this projected framework there stood the divine Consciousness, the free Will of the Self. Would he identify with that higher Soul Essence and be triumphant in overruling the limiting structure of his accumulated tendencies, or would the tendencies win out? We now know the terrible answer to that question. But we must acknowledge that, despite the overwhelming strength of the negative tendencies embodied in this soul, at his core, he was free to refuse assent to their promptings. The negative soul tendencies won out. They proved too deeply entrenched, too overwhelmingly reinforced in this present life, to be overcome; but we must

never doubt that, in his essential Being, he was free to choose. “The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, but in ourselves.”⁴

It is important to have a clear understanding not only of one’s Divine Ground, and to identify with one’s eternal Freedom, but one should also have a complete understanding of the makeup of one’s soul as indicated by the planetary pattern existing at birth, as well as of the nature and occurrence of the various changing planetary conditions as they manifest daily in our lives. An awareness of the archetypal energies currently prevailing in one’s life gives an extraordinary advantage in the timing and utilization of those specific energies for the enfolding of one’s potential to manifest and express the freedom of the Divine Will. As Richard Tarnas explains,

Astrology can serve to greatly increase personal freedom... Partly this is because awareness of the basic archetypal structures and patterns of meaning in one’s birth chart allows one to bring considerably more consciousness to the task of fulfilling one’s deepest potential, one’s authentic nature. But [also because] the more deeply we understand the archetypal forces that affect our lives, the more free we can be in dealing with them. If we are altogether unconscious of these potent forces, we are like puppets of the archetypes; we then act according to unconscious motivations without any possibility of our being intelligent agents interacting with these forces. To the exact extent that we are conscious of the archetypes, we can respond with greater autonomy and Self awareness.⁵

The soul is essentially identical with the transcendent Source of all, and is supremely, absolutely, free. In its transcendent aspect, it is always free, immutable and unaffected by the bodily conditions or worldly circumstances of individuals; however, when the soul identifies with the conditional, it is bound; it is subject to being carried along in the floodwaters of the archetypal forces of Nature. Only when it knows and identifies with the Divine Self, does it realize and manifest its true freedom. According to this understanding, a man is free insofar as he is cognizant of his essential identity with the Highest, and bound when he departs from the knowledge and awareness of his Divinity, identifying with the body/mind complex. He then succumbs to the rule of earthly necessity, and is moved willy-nilly by the causative forces inherent in Nature. He has the power, as the Divine Self, to will freely, unencumbered, uncompelled by circumstance; and, for that reason is responsible for his individual actions. All souls are linked by inclusion to the one Soul, and by extension to the Divine Mind; but only he who is cognizant, aware, of his Divine Identity, is truly free.

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NOTES AND REFERENCES:

1. *Tetrabiblos*, Book I, Ch. 1, from J.M. Ashmond, *Ptolemy's Tetrabiblos*, Chicago, Aries Press, 1936; p.1.

2. Richard Tarnas, Ph.D., *An Introduction to Archetypal Astrological Analysis*, pp. 2-3.

3. Richard Tarnas, Ph.D., *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4

4. William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*

5. Richard Tarnas, Ph.D., *An Introduction to Archetypal Astrological Analysis*, pp. 2-3

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