

THE HOUSE OF THE ASTROLOGERS

Lynn Bootes
Sept 17, 2020
for ACVA journal

Is this the right time to study Jyotish, the great ancient art of Vedic astrology? If so, with whom and where? Am I suited for such study? How do I find a teacher? These are the sorts of questions that you, a prospective student, might be asking just now. This article is not meant to provide the definitive answer to all these great questions, but merely to give you a personal perspective, as it was for me at the beginning and at various stages in the process of becoming an astrologer, a scholar and finally a teacher. If my words are helpful to you, the reader, in sorting out your own perspectives, then I will have done my job.

Is this the right time? There is no question that when the world as a whole is facing huge changes and crisis, as we are now, that is a good time to study Jyotish. Fifty years ago, as a high school student in 1970, I took a short course in Western astrology. I felt weighed down by the convulsions of change which upset the tidy prosperous world of post-war California: the Cold War, the Civil Rights struggle, Vietnam, computers, and the New Age movement. I was encouraged by the sense of a continuity with an ancient study with thousands of years of tradition – a thought which helped me put the changes I saw in perspective. I learned about Great Ages of Time, and the shorter cycles of Jupiter and Saturn and their influence on society. I dived into Western astrology, as at the time there was no general awareness among Americans of Jyotish, but when I came to it in 2006, I was ready to appreciate the greater richness from the continuous tradition carried forth in India.

In 2020, a number of the great cycles have combined to happen together in a short time period. Many people have heard of the twenty-year cycle which seems to affect the lives of US Presidents elected in years divisible by twenty. Astrologers know this is in fact the 20-year cycle of the slowest of the visible planets, Jupiter and Saturn, coming together in the same zodiac sign. In fact, astrologers have written about such conjunctions for thousands of years – in past times they would signal a change to a new king. Less well known is that over a period of 60 years, the conjunction comes back to the same sign, and there are additional cycles having to do with multiples of this 20 year cycle of Jupiter and Saturn. We are now closing in on another one of these cosmic get-togethers: Jupiter and Saturn coming together in the sign of Capricorn * in 2021. For Americans, and for others around the world who are affected by the actions of the United States, the patterns set in place in the coming election will reverberate for decades. There are additional cycles in play: the cycles of Solar and Lunar Eclipses, and on a more immediate note, the red planet Mars, traditionally associated with conflict, passion and anger, is in retrograde. Even though the planets never really stop their forward motion, from the point of view on Earth they appear to move backwards at times in retrograde motion. This fall, Mars appears to have parked itself in one part of the sky and will be staying there from our point of view for many months.

If you have wondered about such things and are also curious about the other cycles affecting the world as a whole, Vedic astrology will teach you about the underlying great cycles, the Yugas. Jyotish is but one “arm of the Vedas,” an application of the great Indian texts which have survived and been passed down over vast periods of time. Unlike the Western concept of time as linear, the Vedas spoke of cycles of time billions of years long, the great Yugas, and their divisions. They spoke of cycles of destruction and renewal. Some have had an introduction to these concepts having grown up in India or in a Hindu family or through study of Yoga or Ayurveda or the Sanskrit classics. For others, the study

of Jyotish may be your introduction to this vast ocean of beauty and insight. You will be introduced to the beauty and mystery of the Nakshatras, the traditional 27 stars of the lunar zodiac of India, each of which has a rich lore of deities and meanings.

What does Jyotish say about the changes happening in my own life? Most people come to the study of Jyotish with a desire and need for a vocabulary sufficient to describe the mysteries of incarnation as a particular individual in a particular life. Whether it was a family convulsion, an illness, an unexplained and seemingly miraculous gift or talent, or a burning need to accomplish something, all astrologers have a story of this sort. The fundamental premise of natal astrology, the birth horoscope, is that there is a parallel of symbolic connection between the great events of location of planets and stars in the sky (or other events) and the flavor and characteristics of events in our own little personal worlds. This “synchronicity,” to use a word coined by Carl Jung, who studied astrology, repeats an aphorism preserved over millennia - “as above, so below.” At the moment the human infant emerges from the mother and takes its first breath, the individual takes up their own life and karma. The astrologer, looking at the birth chart, will see the same planets, zodiac signs, and places on earth in each life, but the combination for this individual is unique and never repeats.

As a beginning astrology student years ago, I experienced such curiosity about myself and others. Having a rich language to describe humans was liberating, particularly because it was built upon a model of diversity and complexity. Mars in Capricorn might have a spectrum of traits which could be developed or worked with – this was so much better than the psychological model based on “normal” versus disease.

Much later, when I took up Jyotish, I found that this intricate system, preserved over thousands of years, is so precise. At first, in 2006, as a Western astrologer, I was skeptical, particularly over the differences in how the twelve signs of the Zodiac are divided. * So, as a test, I took out charts from my collection and found that it was as if I had gone from a toy telescope to high power binoculars! As a final test, I asked a master astrologer to read for me my young son's chart. I was blown away by the accuracy of the reading by someone who knew no details of me and my son. He warned me of some significant changes coming based upon the movements of Rahu and Ketu (the Lunar nodes or Eclipse points) and of dasha changes (the Vimshottari Dasha system of timing unique to Vedic Astrology). Within a month these changes had come to pass, and I soon decided I would make the effort to learn Jyotish with ACVA.

Am I suited to the study of Jyotish?

The most essential qualities are ones of intent and character. Here I quote from the first chapter of the most widely used text the *Brihat Parasara Hora Shastra* Chapter 1, verses 7 and 8:

“The teachings of this science of Astrology is to be given only to the students who are good and peacefully disposed who honour the preceptors and elders, who speak only truth and who are God-fearing. It is only in this way that good will follow. The teachings of this science, again, should not be given to an unwilling student, to an atheist and to a crafty person.” (translation from Sanskrit by Girish Chand Sharma)

That said, one must be willing to devote substantial time and effort. Aside from a certain amount of memorization, one must be willing to practice and think through combinations of factors until they become second nature, much as one does with any new language. There is a certain kind of process called synthesis – of combining many elements together into a whole – which is essential. One has to

be willing and able to hold seemingly contradictory statements in one's mind until the bigger picture emerges.

In past times, before computer calculation software, one had to have a certain proficiency in mathematical calculation to cast a chart. Even now, when a touch of a button will accomplish this, one needs to have a grasp of the functioning of the Solar System, and some proficiency with mental arithmetic will speed things along.

For those who did not grow up hearing and pronouncing the names of stars, planets and zodiac signs in Sanskrit or related languages, the vocabulary can be a mouthful! For me, it was a delightful entree into the vast ocean of the Vedic tradition and the wonders of India and led me to a burning desire to learn more.

How do I find a teacher?

In the past the best way to find a teacher was to be born into the family of an astrologer, or else to find one who was accepting students and most likely reside in his house as one would with a guru. If one picks up a traditional textbook, such as Parasara, this is evident in the structure. The opening chapter begins with an invocation to the deity, followed by the admonitions about the characteristics of a student, and then gives a lecture on the relation of astrology to the Vedas and fundamental concepts. The second chapter gives the nine planets as incarnations of Vishnu. Then come chapters on the planets and zodiac signs. After that it becomes increasingly technical, and the beginning student will be lost without a guide. If one were an infant or small child in such a household, one would learn the mantras and names of planets and signs as one learned to speak, on the knees of the parent. Then, one would learn the divisional charts and how to calculate at the same stage one would be learning arithmetic. My thought is this process gave the family of the astrologer the exact sorts of activities to keep the bright young mind busy until reaching a certain degree of maturity when the youthful astrologer might be trusted to listen in to some consultations. The adult learner would prove himself by working diligently at these lessons while the guru would have time to judge the student's motivation and character.

What does this mean for the potential ACVA student? First, I have met some brilliant and determined people who have tried to make sense of Jyotish by study on-line without benefit of a guide. The limitations of this approach are soon evident. It is easy to be confused by different details of approach by different teachers, much as one can be confused learning mathematics if one does not stick to a certain system. Second, jyotish is about and for people, and there is no substitute for a consistent relationship with a teacher while learning how to apply it. Why waste the precious time allotted to us fruitlessly going in circles when a teacher can promptly answer your questions? Third, there is the joy of connecting with those who can transmit the “rasa”, the vital juices of jyotish as a living art. Fourth, ACVA has been working as an online college for a number of years and brings you the opportunity to engage with a number of master teachers on a proven platform. You also have the opportunity to learn alongside fellow students who often enough become lifelong friends.

If, like me, you began with Western astrology, you may have spent a lot of time wandering about confused by wide variances of practice. ACVA in contrast offers the “core curriculum” of traditional Vedic astrology that all practitioners recognize. After graduation, many of our students go on to engage in additional study with particular teachers to master advanced technique – in fact, astrologers love to do this because they love to learn something new. But after study at ACVA, you will have a firm foundation of skill which will be recognized by all Vedic astrologers. In 2020, when so much of routine life has shut down or been upended by COVID, ACVA is ready with proven online

learning and personal connections.

* Jyotish, Vedic astrology, divides the 12 signs of the Zodiac based upon the constellations as seen in the sky (Sidereal Zodiac). If one has grown up in Western astrology, one is familiar with a different way to mark the signs, called Tropical, in which the divisions of the signs is based upon the seasons. About 2,000 years ago, when many texts were written, these two were identical. In the West, the fall of the Roman Empire meant that a lot of learning was lost and European astrologers failed to note the slow Precession of the Equinoxes, a 26,000 year cycle. In India, there was no collapse of civilization and astronomers and astrologers had been noting Precession for thousands of years and stuck to the Sidereal Zodiac. The two now differ by 24 degrees of longitude. The coming Jupiter/Saturn conjunction in 2021 will be in Capricorn in the Sidereal Zodiac used by Jyotisha, while Western astrologers describe it as being in Aquarius.