

Karma, Free Will and Astrology

By Egon Eklund

After pondering the question of whether there's any truth to astrology, the next question often relates to whether astrology implies that everything is predestined and whether we truly have free will. This inevitable philosophical question is difficult to answer. The most common answer is that there is free will regarding the way that we choose to work within the parameters of our astrological makeup, but we can attempt a more complete explanation.

To get a more complete picture, we start at the point when the Soul decides to embark on a new physical incarnation, which happens a considerable time before actual physical birth. First, the Soul's impulse sets in motion the process of attracting matter on the mental plane to form the mental body for the coming incarnation. This process is continued on the astral plane and then on the etheric. All this is done with much overlapping, but when the etheric body begins to be ready, the physical birth is near, because there is now a structure of mental, astral and etheric forms knit together.

We are not in a position to understand this pre-birth creative process clearly, because we are here already, living inside our physical bodies and working on the physical plane. But we get two important facts from this "picture." When a Soul sends down a projection from causal levels, it implies a *restriction*, because only certain kinds of matter can be built in during a given incarnation. The Soul cannot give the whole of its contents – not all at once. Not only would it be impossible to embody its totality on the physical plane, but the teaching value of limitation would also be lost, because we learn by experiencing restrictions in certain areas of our life that force us to pay closer attention to them. Also, karma is applied through these restrictions, because a certain type of form does predestine us to a certain kind of life. Secondly, we are told that the main direction of a person's life is defined in advance by the Soul according to its purpose for a given incarnation, although the outcome or results cannot be known before the life on the physical plane is lived through. A Soul gives only a portion of its splendor to this projection, although, in a way, the whole Soul is present all the time. On its own plane the Soul knows, includes and gathers much more than can be understood by a physical being, even if it happens to be an evolved being.

At physical birth there is a kind of electrical charge when breathing starts. This charge is very etheric in nature, because the etheric body is the link between the physical and higher planes. At the same time it maintains a healthy, vital and regulated condition in the body, for which reason it is also known as the "health aura."

Before we can examine the degree of free will of a person or a group, a few astrological assertions or teachings must be explained. The first one relates to astrological periodicities or life stages. As we know, life is a process of growing and maturing, and this process is influenced by various astrological factors. The Moon is an active influence from birth; then Mercury begins its active role at the age of seven. The Sun begins to influence the life at age 14, Venus at 21, Mars at 28 and Jupiter at 35, at which time a human being begins to build his consciousness as a full-grown citizen of his or her society. Saturn becomes active at age 42, Uranus at 49, Neptune at 56 and the rest of one's life may pertain to Pluto. In all, each period lasts approximately 14 years.

Some overlapping occurs in this process, and there are differences of opinion as to the length of each period. Some astrologers say that each period is seven years and others say ten years. But it is really a building process, and these periods build upon each other and are cumulative in effect. The planetary energies and forces of the later stages can begin to influence earlier in life, but the

influence is not so conscious and there is less activation. For instance, a child may seem older than its years and demonstrate maturity in his or her behavior if Saturn is rising at birth. And a child with Neptune rising may show considerable psychic sensitivity, which when activated in childhood could cause problems. It is safer if a child can be given space to grow soundly and normally (up to the age of 21, theoretically) before this kind of development occurs. We see this also in Cancer natives where the rulers are the Moon and then Neptune. First, form building should occur and then development through that form. But there are a few exceptions to this rule. Mozart, who had Mercury and the Sun opposed by Neptune and the Moon in conjunction with Pluto on his chart, began to compose and play quite early in life. But we could add that he also died quite early.

It is quite normal to experience more mystical or occult planetary influences at an older age, from the age of 49 onwards. Between the ages of 27 to 29 many people experience an energetic new beginning, and a new building process may be started in one's personal life. Mars is activated at the age of 28, and after seven years a modification often occurs in what was begun earlier, or the inner conscious attitude may be changing.

Now we come to another astrological teaching of considerable importance: *A human being becomes sensitive to different forms of energy according to the inner stage of development.* An affinity to certain influences might be lacking, because the forms in the bodies cannot respond to these influences. This is a question of Soul development, which the Tibetan discusses in relation to the sign of Virgo, the supreme sign of building through forms. In this case the influence would only prepare the way for response in a future incarnation. This beautifully illustrates the idea that all possibilities are present in an incarnation, but making use of it depends on the free will of those forms.

How sensitive is the etheric body to certain influences? In the case of Mozart there was substantial sensitivity. This ability to respond to planetary influence occurs with all the planets, but this is especially so in regard to the influences of Uranus, Neptune and Pluto. I have found that very often those who are interested in mystical or occult matters have Uranus, Neptune or Pluto in a pronounced position on their charts. The fact that one may be predisposed to planetary influence stresses the occult importance of first building the proper forms before becoming sensitive to new connections or influences. We have to build a sound foundation before continuing to build according to the heavenly models.

Inner development as it impacts sensitivity to influence also relates to the astrological teaching about aspects and their influences, or about the degrees between planets. In the interpretation of oppositions and squares between heavenly bodies, difficulty, stress and tension are often denoted; the Tibetan uses the word *process* for squares and the word *possibility* for triangles. In any case, squares or oppositions do not always mean difficulties in real life. There might be tension, but the inner situation may be handled in a constructive way, leading to constructive action afterwards when the square becomes a triangle or a sextile (60 degrees) in the onward movement of the stars.

Some people can deal with the tension, and this strengthens their ability to handle it, and others cannot. Some people are more receptive to new things and lessons and learn faster than others, and thus can handle a square or an opposition more quickly and more constructively. This is a question of Soul-personality integration, which should be taken into consideration before interpretation, as the Tibetan so clearly states. But squares and oppositions can be difficult even for more developed people and almost impossible for a prideful person. In any case, many mistakes can be made in the astrological interpretation of squares and oppositions if the astrologer does not personally know the subject of the chart. Also, a person may become confused or stressed under the influence of a square

because he can only see one side of the situation, and there is no detachment from it. If a person is able to see and handle all aspects of it, then something new is learned from this square; he is no longer a slave to its influence. But, to be honest, I think that every one of us has been in situations where we can see the situation clearly enough, but it still requires dealing with the stress and difficulty of an attachment to outcomes. However, it is through the cross that we grow, and a cross is formed of four squares.

Let us now look at the question of free will versus predestination. When we have a charted horoscope containing certain signs and planetary positions, what does it mean? These planetary positions are, of course, important for the subject of that chart, and we have to remember that it is the subject of the chart who must deal with them. But do these positions predetermine one's outcome in life? No, and there are many reasons for this:

First, the person may have already lived through many incarnations and learned a lot. Thus there may be a readiness for certain realizations and responses that are not made apparent by the chart, meaning that the person may not have to go through what is indicated there. He or she may even show traits that are not indicated by the chart at all. Nevertheless, this person will still have to learn to handle new combinations of energies in relation to those that are already appropriated. Very often those signs that are not present on a chart may already be quite strongly developed. Let us take Hitler as an example. According to the Tibetan he had a Leo Soul, but on his chart only Saturn was in Leo at the zenith, which in itself is quite descriptive of his influence and fate, but cannot explain all his personal force. Thus, when we try to interpret a particular point or position on the chart, we must remember that one particular point does not have an isolated effect, and the explanations derived from that point are only relatively or partly right. The synthetic wholeness and interplay of all the influences must be taken into consideration, while still trying to make the analysis as concrete as possible.

Second, the country we are born into also colors our reactions in relation to our horoscope. The interpretation will be different for a person born in Finland from one born in Saudi Arabia; the racial heritage in these two countries is very different. Collective pressure can be so strong that individual response to a particular planetary influence will tend more in one direction than another. No one exists in a vacuum!

Third, our immediate environment influences our outcomes quite a bit. The archetypal roles that we play in our respective environments and our modes of communication with people and groups impel us to respond in a very personal way to many different situations. For example, the archetypal reactions of a man or a woman are so different that astrologers need to find out the sex of the subject before constructing the chart.

Fourth, various degrees of preparedness are demonstrated under different life situations. Some situations may be easily handled by a particular subject, but not by another. If you are called to fight for your country, but you have very "peaceful" influences in your chart, the outcome will be different from the chart of a "warrior" type. Thus outer circumstances will call forth different results from two similar charts.

Fifth, it can even happen that one's environment and the prevailing *modus operandi* can prevent a certain theme from developing, or else it can cause the theme to work out too quickly.

From all the above, we can understand why astrological influences develop and work out in many different ways. For example, a configuration that might give an inclination toward antisocial

behavior may not work out that way at all. Many factors influence the way a particular subject develops within the configuration of his or her chart. This is not to say that it wouldn't be worthwhile to have one's chart interpreted. In fact, it is important because it *focuses the present life and gives it direction*.

Although direction and focus are defined before birth, I have tried to emphasize that there is *relative* free will for every human being during physical incarnation. It can only be "relative," because we are parts of greater wholes, and star positions definitely give us certain behavior patterns and inner energies that cannot be changed at will. For example, Mars on the ascendant gives us plenty of energy in our responses to life, and for such people the creation of a more peaceful, contemplative attitude is very difficult. Nevertheless we are not automatons of astrological influences, as some mechanistic astrologers might propose. Astrology is a psychic, mental, occult science. It does not belong to the many concrete sciences, although we try to be as concrete as possible in our interpretations for obvious reasons.

At this point it would be useful to discuss whether karma can be seen in a horoscope and in what way. I would say that precise formulations of karmic factors in a chart are very difficult to define. The Tibetan did not give precise formulations of these factors, although he gave some hints as to the right direction in this respect. I think we are not yet ready to handle this kind of precise information in a constructive way. Humanity's love nature and the overall discipline of human nature are not developed enough. We can certainly imagine what harmful outcome might result if a selfish, self-important or hateful person used this kind of information against another person. Yet it might be useful to learn more about how it might appear in a horoscope.

Saturn is the planet of karma, but other planets also have a karmic influence. Both Mars and Jupiter, especially if they are in difficult positions, can work in that way, and karmic factors often come through a combination of many astrological positions. The Moon, as the ruler of the body built in the past, and the Moon's north and south nodes (which are in opposite signs) are also influential. But interpretation is often difficult. Besides Saturn, the Tibetan mentioned three other karmic planets, but he did not name them.

The karmic influence of Saturn, also named the planet of opportunity, could be seen as a journey down a road, where scenery can be seen ahead in the distance as well as on either side of the road; this image symbolizes our psychic and mental scenery. Something comes up that demands our attention on this side of the road, but we also have to consider those values we have in place on the other side. We come under some collective pressure at another point, but then we see this opportunity looming nearby. Or we meet someone along the way, and then we remember some experiences we had with similar people in the past. We may see some attractive scenery up ahead, but we can't get there; instead an obstacle appears in front of us. But always it is an experience like a road: we are coming from somewhere, a place left behind us, to the place where we are at present with our surrounding conditions, and we are heading forward to some place that is still ahead of us, which we try to visualize, which we work toward, and which also often *demand a choice*.

Karma works in this way. I have myself so many times repeatedly chosen a certain action in a certain situation, and other possibilities are always presented to me at various crossroads. I have my karma, but Saturn will continue to offer me choices and opportunities.

The circumstances encountered on this road and the attitudes taken in response to them also differ widely from person to person. If we are always looking backwards, progress becomes slow and it's possible to stumble. If we advance forcefully, while neglecting what was learned in the past,

mistakes may be made. Mistakes can also be made in the present if we lack perspective and are not sure where we stand. It is also important to have a keen understanding and awareness of our environment and maintain our discipline along the way, because the saturnine way is built by these qualities.

Sometimes we want to postpone a decision, or we do not want to push forward, because we think circumstances are not favorable, or we are fearful, or our pride prevents us. Then the opportunity might be lost to discharge some karma that might have led us to further understanding and development. It is also true that we cannot see the whole way at once, and if we choose to change direction at a crossroads, new “scenery” will come up that demands new ways of handling and seeing things. This is very typical of the Saturn influence and its energies. Saturn influence provides opportunities for growth, and overall development during many incarnations is made under the Saturn influence.

The “scenery” we encounter on the way and how we react to it under Saturn is one aspect of karmic influence. Jupiter is another karmic influence that can evoke opportunities to develop togetherness, right attitudes and right relationships. The karmic influence of Mars affects our energy, courage, devotion and goals. Venus develops our mentality, sound reason and loving understanding. Mercury gives intuition, vision and insight into the many facets of a given situation in order to make them whole. Neptune might also be a karmic influence, arousing mystical aspirations, visions of the higher worlds and a spirit of inclusivity in the person it touches. Uranus helps us make connections, to express and teach rhythms and rituals, and to shed light on occult ideas. Pluto helps us redeem our shadow aspects, to destroy forms for the sake of liberation and also to give the stamina to persist – even through maya, glamor and illusion. Pluto is the forerunner of Vulcan, the blacksmith, who builds with precision and speed and gives endurance. This influence is also there, and many people are becoming conscious of this energy. There are so many different influences that it is no surprise for me that human beings have so many differences of opinion. But we don’t have to deal with these influences all at one time. We are only given the portion that we can handle and learn from.

The Tibetan tells us that the revelation of karmic laws concerning groups, and the individuals in those groups, will come through the sign of Cancer when the mental and psychic state of humanity is sufficiently developed, and that the interpreter of these laws might be born under the sign of Cancer. Clearly that time has not yet arrived, and I think a lot of time must still pass before that can be possible. Why are these laws not given out through Capricorn or Libra, which are the signs for Saturn and Saturn’s exaltation? Cancer is the portal for a new incarnation, but it is also a sign of togetherness. It is the great sign of manifestation, and under its influences people and groups manifest a new start and new growth on the physical plane. This sign also strengthens psychic links between people in groups, and it rules traditions, public opinion, and mass psychology.

In today’s world the materialism and separative attitudes that this sign fosters prevent higher mental development in the direction of karmic thinking, but the possibility for that is always there. We continually create karma in our relationships with others and, therefore, it is to a great extent a group phenomenon. Nowadays karmic thinking is all too personal and individualistic, and this often prevents understanding karmic laws more clearly so that we can act and relate to others more wisely. Now that the Aquarian Age is coming upon us collectively, developments in group relationships and group thinking, in small groups as well as large groups such as nations, become more possible. The sign of Aquarius nurtures the characteristics of Cancer, because Aquarius is the mental sign of group consciousness when it is developed, and it is also the eighth sign from Cancer, or the sign of transformation for Cancer.

When physical plane life ends at death, we return to the Soul, which initiated the process of incarnation in the first place. We inevitably learn something during each life on Earth, especially if the Soul has managed to catch the attention of the wanderer, and Soul understanding can increasingly lead us to greater light and a greater demonstration of the love nature. In the next incarnation the astrological conditions will produce a being with a different nature, because free will has influenced a whole lifetime. The Soul also has new plans for the new human being on the physical plane, because it is also the intermediary between Heaven and Earth, besides being our wise teacher and master in the heart.