

# The Astrological Alphabet

Astrological interpretation is all about reading and interpreting combinations of symbols. The Planets, Aspects, Signs and Houses constitute the basic alphabet with which one ultimately constructs the words and sentences that unveil the message of the stars. There are certainly other factors, such as the effects of specific Fixed Stars, Lunar Mansions (which are lunar based zodiacs of 27 or 28 signs, which are typically encountered in traditional Arabic and Vedic astrology), and various peculiar mathematical formulas, such as the so called Arabic Parts, that could enter into your astrological equations- but Planets, Aspects, Signs and Houses are the most essential components of the system, and the appropriate place to begin.

What follows is a basic description of these elementary symbols and their astrological significance. Although most of what will be presented here is conventional western astrology, I have here and there infused the content with bits of Vedic astrology where it seemed appropriate. There are many principles in Vedic astrology that complement and are essentially totally consistent with otherwise western ideas and principles.

## The Planets

The planets are the vital organs of chart interpretation. Each planet represents certain faculties and functions of body, mind and soul. The position or condition of a planet in the birth chart will reveal how fully, in which way, and in which arenas of life, we express and make use of the corresponding faculties or functions. In an ideal world we are all perfectly in touch with every planet, and therefore able to use and express the corresponding faculties and functions in a balanced and healthy way. It is interesting in this regard to note that certain ancient horoscopes, said to belong to avatars and perfected beings, place every planet in the sign of it's exaltation (which is a planet's strongest sign position, and these special positions are listed later on). It is very likely that these charts are more symbolically than historically accurate, and seem rather to represent this idea that the perfect person has each planet honed to it's ideal "pitch", and therefore can express all possible attributes and faculties in their ideal fullness, and for the proper purposes. Perhaps in this astrology provides us with a symbolic pathway or map to the perfection we should strive (or are all working) towards.

Perhaps the most basic traditional classification of the planets is their designation as either "benefics" or "malefics". The idea here is pretty simple and clear; benefics are pleasant or beneficial, whereas malefics are "bad", troublesome and difficult. Venus and Jupiter are the most clearly definable as benefics, and Mars and Saturn are the classic malefics. Venus is sometimes described as the "lesser benefic", and Jupiter as the "greater benefic"; whereas Mars is known as the "lesser malefic", and Saturn is the "greater malefic". Mercury is normally considered mildly benefic, though it is repeatedly stated in the astrological literature that Mercury takes on the energies of the planets it is most intimately associated with, and so can become malefic through association with malefics. Although the Sun and Moon are more or less neutral as far as this classification goes, Vedic astrology will normally consider the Sun a mild malefic, being very hot and dry, and thus potentially scorching (even though in certain contexts the Sun can represent pure and positive qualities), and the Moon benefic (though, according to Vedic astrology, the Moon should ideally be waxing and otherwise well placed for this benefic status to be assured). Vedic astrology considers both the Moon's Nodes as malefic (under most circumstances), though in western astrology the North Node is perhaps, if anything, benefic, and the South Node malefic. Uranus, Neptune and Pluto don't fall into any traditional classification as either benefic or malefic, but all three of these planets are capable of producing crisis and problematic circumstances in peoples lives. Certainly none of them are nearly as clearly and consistently beneficial as Jupiter. However, it is well known that trials in life can bear sweet fruit, and under ideal conditions the

benefits and blessings people gain through Uranus, Neptune and Pluto seem greater, or at least more profound and spiritually meaningful, than the benefits people typically manage to derive from the more traditional malefics (Mars and Saturn).

Modern western astrologers tend to be critical of this traditional classification of planets as either benefics or malefics, and not without reason, since there are ways in which we can benefit from and grow through the so called malefics (as alluded to above), and be harmed by benefics. Even Vedic astrology, which may on the surface seem more comfortable with this crude classification, contains rules and principles whereby malefics can bring beneficial results, and vice versa. Few traditional astrological rules lack some amount of truth and value, and this classification of planets as benefics and malefics is no exception. The malefic planets represent attitudes and energies that are under normal circumstances likely to result in discomfort, and in the context of human nature they are associated with various vices, such as excessive selfishness, anger and malice, which cannot produce true and lasting happiness or pleasure. Likewise the benefics represent the generous, gentle, kind and refined potentials in human nature that produce or attract comfort, happiness, interpersonal cooperation and support.

In the planetary family the Sun and Moon are the father and mother figures respectively, Mercury is a lively and curious child, Venus and Mars are young adults in the prime of life, brimming with vitality and libido, while Jupiter and Saturn would represent the elders, ripe with the material and moral fruits of age and experience.

The outer planets, Uranus, Neptune and Pluto, represent entities that are somewhat alien to, and, in a sense, function outside of the conventional "family structure". In this analogy the outer planets are agents for larger social (and cosmic?) processes that are normally beyond the grasp of self-absorbed individuals concerned with common things. Uranus is personified as the innovator, transforming society and the world with new knowledge and technology, but Uranus can also be a rebel without a cause that becomes an agent for anarchy. Neptune is the illusive mystic who's role, function and work in the world may have little to do with, and little evidence in, physical reality; and yet Neptune can also represent the desperate and vulnerable elements of society, the drug addicts and other victims that often drain the resources and erode the collective health of society. Pluto can manifest through the social underworld as the shadowy and brutal criminal groups, as well as the sometimes equally shadowy, criminal and secretive C.I.A. type agents of social justice; however, Pluto can also represent forces of social regeneration in the form of healers and truly altruistic politicians or committed "messiahs" who access primal power for the purpose of rebuilding and necessary transformation.

Although the Sun and Moon are in themselves a pair (arguably the primary archetypal pair of complementary opposites), as a unit ("The Luminaries") they are the polar opposites of Saturn, whom we may here style a "dark cold shadow". Note that the Luminaries both rule signs opposite Saturn ruled signs; Moon ruled Cancer is opposite Saturn ruled Capricorn, and Sun ruled Leo is opposite Saturn ruled Aquarius.

The Sun and Mars are clearly definable as masculine and can and will represent men and masculine energies in a chart. The Sun is normally going to be more of a fatherly and authoritative man, whereas Mars is likely to represent a more forceful, youthful and competitive face of masculinity. Regardless of your own sex, the Sun and Mars will represent essentially masculine facets of the psyche that get projected onto external males or masculine persons. The Sun and Mars are related to "ego" or one's sense of identity, the drive to assert oneself and to project one's will outwardly into the world. Planets like Saturn and Neptune can inhibit, frustrate, diffuse and deplete this drive, whereas expansive Jupiter or energetic Uranus would be more likely to encourage and fuel it.

Conversely, the Moon and Venus represent women and the feminine facets of one's psyche. The Moon and Venus are both nurturing planets and associated with one's emotional life. The maternal type of nurturing function is usually more specifically associated with the Moon. Venus is more specifically associated with romantic love, beauty (fashion, art, decoration) and sexuality. It is interesting to note here that, according to Vedic astrology, both the Moon and Venus are significators for the 4th House, which is associated with the mother, amongst other things (Venus is not typically viewed as a signifier for the mother in western astrology). The Moon is certainly likely to represent a more maternal type of women who is more mature and domesticated than the beautiful, sensuous and "sexy" type associated with Venus.

Although Venus is said to represent a person's approach to love and romance in both sexes, the Sun and Mars may be of special importance in defining a woman's image of the "animus" she seeks in, or projects onto, the males in her life. Likewise the Moon and Venus in a male's chart will reflect his inner image of the feminine "anima" he seeks in women in order to complete himself.

Venus and Mars are, in a sense, another octave of the basic Sun-Moon polarity. Venus and Mars combined seem to have a special bearing on sexuality, and in this context represent opposite but complementary facets of sexual expression. Venus relates to the "togetherness" and would be concerned about emotional bonding and accommodating the needs and wants of the other. Mars represents a more assertive and selfish drive to gratify personal desire, and yet also provides a necessary element of vigor and motivation to complement the essentially passive Venusian approach to sexuality. Any Venus/Mars combination tends to have a bearing on sexual drive and desire, and perhaps more primarily our ability to effectively assert ourselves and achieve personal gratification in all our relationships with others. When the combination is "balanced" it manifests as the ability to achieve personal gratification while contributing positively to the gratification of the other person's needs, and thus the health of the relationship. The danger lies in a poor balance between "love and lust", or between self-will or personal desire on the one hand, and the needs of the other person and the relationship on the other. Note that Venus and Mars always rules signs located opposite each other on the zodiac wheel; Mars ruled Aries is opposite Venus ruled Libra, Venus ruled Taurus is opposite Mars ruled Scorpio.

Mercury is a bi-sexual or asexual androgyne, and represents a completely balanced merging or integration of Solar and Lunar energies. Mercury is in this regard quite unique and not as obviously part of a pair; especially not a pair that can be associated with gender. However, although Jupiter is rightly seen as being the polar opposite of Saturn in many respects, Mercury and Jupiter share certain attributes, such as an association with knowledge and education (in Vedic astrology Mercury and Jupiter are both significators of the 2<sup>nd</sup> House, which is associated with both wealth and education). Mercury represents basic literacy, analytical knowledge and the ability to intelligently engage with bits of information, whereas Jupiter represents the faculty of intuitive synthesis of fragmented facts into a meaningful and comprehensive whole. One might add that Mercury rules short journeys and little ideas, whereas Jupiter represents long distance voyages and "big ideas" or broad general concepts. The fact that Mercury and Jupiter rule signs opposite each other on the zodiac wheel affirms the notion that they represent a pair of complementary opposites; Mercury rules Gemini which is opposite Jupiter ruled Sagittarius, and Mercury also rules Virgo, which is located opposite Jupiter ruled Pisces.

The Sun, Moon, Mercury, Venus and Mars are sometimes collectively referred to as "personal planets"; they relate to our personal psychology, personal drives, and our personal needs and idiosyncrasies. Jupiter and Saturn occupy a type of midway position between the personal planets and the outer planet trio; Uranus, Neptune and Pluto.

Jupiter and Saturn are associated with our integration into the larger social order. Jupiter relates to

the culture and education that contribute towards our social respectability, and our capacity to function within, or harmonize with, the moral and religious value systems of society. Saturn is associated with the more material aspects of our social reality; our professional responsibilities and social duties that enable us to maintain our security in the struggle for survival. It is true that Jupiter and Saturn can and do represent more personal components of your psyches: for instance, Jupiter relates to a basic capacity for faith and optimism in an individual, whereas Saturn is associated with personal fears or insecurities, and these states can manifest in circumstances that have little to do with our social roles and status. The (20 year) Jupiter-Saturn cycle is of key significance in the astrological assessments of longer term social/political trends.

Jupiter and Saturn are not easily definable as belonging to this or that gender, though Jupiter is probably more likely to be masculine, in that it tends to be a more expansive energy, as opposed to a distinctly withdrawn and introverted tendency of Saturn. However, Jupiter is definitely more nurturing than Saturn, and Saturn is traditionally a "father figure" planet. The gender roles or correspondences are blurred and mixed here, but then these planets belong to a phase of life and an orientation towards the world that is quite a lot less personal and emotional than the Sun, Moon, Venus or Mars.

The so called "outer planets", Uranus, Neptune and Pluto, represent the most impersonal energies or principles represented by planets, and yet even here they can have purely personal significance. Uranus, for example, is typically experienced at a personal level as a desire for freedom and new experiences, but this is not necessarily the only, or the essential, attribute of Uranus. It has been observed (and touched on earlier) that all three outer planets have the potential to bring relatively drastic upheaval into our lives, though one can certainly not say that they are essentially "malefic". It is perhaps worth noting, though, that when the positive potentials of these planets are manifested it takes the form of, for want of a better word here, "spiritual" experiences, and profound or extraordinary personal growth and transformation. When these planets bring about crisis it is possible due to a resistance to their essentially "spiritual", transpersonal qualities or purposes. It is possible that people will only be able to handle and usefully express the energies of the outer planets when they have achieved a fairly advanced stage of evolution.

According to one scheme Uranus is considered the higher octave of Mercury, Neptune the higher octave of Venus, and Pluto the higher octave of Mars. This is all very neat and tidy, though not without some apparent validity. Uranus can be somewhat "nervous" and "clever" like Mercury. Neptune can be "loving" and devoted in a possibly more extreme or ultimate way than Venus; and both Neptune and Venus seem to have artistic inclinations, but Neptune is more imaginative and emotionally indiscriminate than Venus. Pluto can be "aggressive" like Mars, and even more brutal, but is certainly somewhat more impersonal and is often focused through collective group intentions and agendas rather than the individual ego drives, as is the case with Mars.

There is a concept or principle implied here and there in what has been stated above on the various classifications or groupings within the planetary family, which is made more explicit in Vedic astrology; and that is the idea that there is sympathy and antipathy between the individual planets which will affect the way they function when combined. Vedic astrology has an elaborate scheme of friendship, neutrality and enmity between the planets which will not be explored here in further detail, and is only mentioned because it is an example of this idea, one which is non-the-less relevant to and implied in a more purely western approach. According to a western take on this principle planets that are inherently similar (such as the Moon and Venus, or the Sun and Mars) will tend to combine easily and will powerfully strengthen a particular type of energy or inclination, whereas, on the contrary, a tension can result from a combination of fundamentally different energies (such as the Moon and Saturn, for example) that will to a greater or lesser extent obstruct the expression of both or either of the planets. However, in principle at least, every conceivable

planetary combination has some other legitimate and useful way of expressing and manifesting itself, just as somewhat unpleasant or harsh processes in nature (such as death and decay) have an ultimately benign, and certainly legitimate, function.

## Sun

**The Sun** is quite obviously the vital core of the Solar System- the very fact that it is called a “Solar System” underlines this point. Your astrological inner Sun may similarly be seen as the vital core of your being, maybe we could even call it your Soul. In Vedic astrology it is literally referred to as the signifier of the self or soul (“Atma Karaka”). In a very general sense the Sun might represent your identity, and it is often seen as a barometer of one's vitality, confidence and capacity for positions of authority and leadership. The Sun may be associated with the government and government officials, as well as all regal and dignified persons.

The Sun, as a symbol of dignity and regal power, rules the majestic sign Leo. As with the sign Leo, the Sun is associated with the heart. Sometimes an afflicted or weak Sun will literally manifest as physical heart problems, along with poor self esteem.

The Sun fulfills a masculine kingly and fatherly role in the planetary family, complemented by the Moon in a feminine, maternal or queenly role. The Sun and Moon represent the basic polarity of masculine and feminine energies within ourselves, at biological, psychological, social and spiritual levels.

A well placed Sun improves and strengthens self esteem and enables us to assert ourselves in the world. It will assist us in establishing positive and helpful relationships with authority figures, and we will be capable of exercising authority over others. In fact, when the Sun is very prominent and powerful in the chart as a whole, it can manifest as a bossy and domineering tendency that is not inevitably a virtue, or happily endured by others. A strong and prominent Sun that is not well integrated could take the form of arrogance and egocentricity, and even a hint of cruelty.

When the Sun is weak in a chart, through occupying Libra or the Saturn ruled signs (Capricorn or Aquarius) there could be a sense of being dominated or obstructed by others, particularly authority figures, and yet the person with a debilitated Sun may assert themselves fitfully and abruptly in a defensive, cowardly and insecure fashion. There is typically a need to develop a more steady, open and consistent approach to self assertion. A weak Sun may manifest as a remote or fragile father figure, and/or there may be some problematic episodes with the father, the government, or other authority figures.

The Sun completes one round through all twelve signs of the zodiac in one year; spending roughly a month in each sign. It is very likely that the 360 degree circle is a convenient approximation of the number of days in a year. For this reason it so happens that the Sun moves almost exactly one degree along the zodiac (or ecliptic) per day.

## Moon

**The Moon** is the archetypal Mother, and represents women in general. The Moon is ruler of the mothering water sign Cancer, and is associated with feelings, instincts, emotional sensitivity, nurturing, nourishing, the home, and family life. The Moon represents familiar environments, our past (often as memories and emotional attachments), and the most basic and instinctive levels of our awareness. The habits and automatic responses that largely shape our personalities are essentially lunar.

The changing appearance of the Moon has led to the theme of “fluctuation” being associated with

the Moon, so an area of life directly influenced by the Moon may be inclined to undergo regular changes; it becomes “fluid”. We are also likely to deal with any area of life influenced by the Moon in our charts in a very instinctual, subjective, and emotional manner. At best this could give us an ability to deal with that area in a comfortably familiar way, though at worst our strong emotional identification or associations with that area can cloud our perception of it, making compulsive reactions more likely, and objectivity more difficult.

The Moon is watery and “juicy” and might represent water in the body, or in the world. The Moon would also rule over the breasts and stomach as organs relating to nurturing and nourishing functions.

A strong and prominent Moon indicates that we are able to nurture others as well as ourselves, both physically and emotionally. We will have an ability to respond to others and they will easily feel at home with and accepted by us. We are likely to have positive relationships with women, our mothers, and our family life should be rich and rewarding. From a Vedic astrology perspective a strong Moon will improve the clarity and lucidity of the mind- "the mind" here meaning the basic faculty of awareness and perception.

A dysfunctional Moon (more likely with Moon in Scorpio, or in the 6th, 8th or 12th House, and/or when aspected by malefic planets) may cause us to be edgy, irritable, aloof and generally moody and emotionally unhappy or unsettled, and these qualities could result in alienation from family and loved ones and difficulty establishing intimate bonds and a stable sense of belonging. Even when there is sharp intelligence as a result of these tense placements (which is often the case with Moon in the 6<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> or the sign Scorpio), the mind may be stormy and restless, and thinking may be erratic and scattered, or just plain negative. Moods and feelings are prone to be inharmonious, and there is some liability to physiological problems affecting the stomach, digestive system. Some people will struggle with infertility, and women may have menstrual problems.

The Moon moves through the zodiac faster than any of the other heavenly bodies (another reason for its association with rapid fluctuation), taking about 28 days to travel through all twelve signs of the zodiac; that's about two-and-a-half days per sign. The Moon passes through one degree of the zodiac in about two hours.

## Mercury ♀

**Mercury** is a clever little youth, known mythologically as the winged messenger of the gods. He bears the Caduceus, a winged serpent-entwined staff. Immediately after his birth, according to the mythology, he was expressing wit and dexterity; stealing cattle (Mercury is the patron god of thieves), and inventing musical instruments.

The planet Mercury is associated with intelligence, learning, communication, the mind and mobility (short journeys). Mercury is eloquent and articulate and associated with all little, detailed things. Letters, paperwork, news and information, as well as negotiations, are all associated with Mercury. There is often a "mercantile" orientation to Mercury's smooth talking that makes this planet useful in the world of business and sales. However, Mercury can be superficial and flighty and is not by nature very serious, steady or reliable, unless associated with other planets that contribute these qualities.

Mercury can represent a young or youthful person, a student, or a meticulous, highly-strung, nervous, fine-featured person. A teacher, author or speaker, a secretary or assistant. Anything tiny, diminutive, speckled, variegated and rapid.

Mercury rules the signs Gemini and Virgo. These are both intellectual and analytical signs, though Airy Gemini is the more communicative and socially orientated sign, whereas Earthy Virgo is

relatively more practically minded.

The nervous system, hands and fingers (and more generally the limbs and extremities) are under Mercury's dominion. Of all the fingers on the hand the little finger is most specifically Mercurial. Some consider the lungs as being under Mercury, especially since Mercury has such distinctly airy attributes and is ruler of the sign Gemini, which is often associated with the lungs.

A strong, prominent and well handled Mercury will tend to manifest as ease and charm in communicating with others. Comedians will invariably have interesting Mercury placements; a Mercurial person is never at a loss for words and will typically be a very entertaining speaker. A strong Mercury will stimulate intellectual curiosity and enable one to study practically any subject. Eloquence is an almost indispensable attribute for a leader...

A weak and debilitated Mercury will tend to show as a lack of clarity in thinking and communication, and in extreme cases even a lack of honesty or integrity in the use of intelligence and communication faculties. There may be problems and obstacles in education, and/or the person may be thoughtless and tactless in their speech; they may gossip or slander others and generally occupy their minds and tongues with inharmonious, illegitimate or useless thoughts and words.

Since Mercury is so close to the Sun, its zodiacal position is never more than about 28 degrees from the Sun. So, Mercury can at any given time only occupy either the same sign as that occupied by the Sun, or one of the signs on either side of the Sun sign. Mercury's proximity to the Sun means that it also completes a round through all twelve signs of the zodiac in about a year. However, Mercury often turns retrograde, speeding up and slowing down in the process, and will at times, at its most rapid rate of movement through the zodiac, move nearly two degrees per day.

## Venus ♀

**Venus** is well known mythologically as the goddess of love and beauty, and this is also largely the astrological connotation. Venus is by nature sweet, gentle, comfortable, harmonious and peaceful. She is associated with romance, as well as more platonic affection and friendship between people. Venus is attractive, friendly, sociable and charming and likes fashion, art and decoration.

Physiologically Venus is associated primarily with the sexual organs (the word "venereal" is literally derived from "Venus"), as well as the bladder and kidneys.

Venus rules the sensuous and materialistic Earth sign Taurus, as well as the relationship orientated Air sign Libra.

When Venus is strong and prominent in a chart the person will tend to be physically beautiful, and will tend to have a very pleasant, easy-going and likable personality. The person will dress tastefully and will find it difficult to bear ugly and untidy surroundings. A strong and prominent Venus should make it relatively easy to find a mate, since the person is bound to be attractive and popular with the opposite sex. The person has many opportunities to enjoy sensuous pleasures and material comforts. In fact, a strong and prominent, but otherwise undisciplined and imbalanced Venus, may make one somewhat too preoccupied with pleasure, romance, sexuality and superficial physical beauty.

When Venus is very weak and poorly integrated in a chart the person might lack beauty and physical attractiveness and may find it difficult to give and receive affection. Marriage may be denied, delayed, or frustrating, and the person may seek pleasure in unwholesome and extreme ways. There may be a negative attitude towards love, romance and relationships, and this may show as a tendency to get involved in relationships and friendships in which there is discord and a lack of

mutual respect.

The usual focus on Venus as a planet associated with love, romance and beauty tends to obscure the fact that this planet has a deeper and more profound potential significance. A “Venusian state of consciousness” can enable one to perceive harmony and connectedness between things in a way that is not at all frivolous, and can, in fact, lead to profound philosophical or even scientific realizations. In this regard it is interesting to note that in Vedic astro-mythology Venus (or Sukracharya, as depicted in the Mahabharata epic) was, like Jupiter, a guru possessed of deep wisdom and insight. Therefore in Vedic astrology's caste classification Venus and Jupiter are both brahminical (priestly) planets.

Venus is closer to the Sun than the Earth, and is never found more than about 48 degrees from the Sun's position along the zodiac, therefore Venus is never more than two signs removed from the Sun. When Venus is located behind the Sun in the zodiac she will be seen as the “morning star” in the east before sunrise. When Venus is ahead of the Sun in the usual sequence of the zodiac signs, she will be the “evening star”, visible in the west around the time of sunset. You will never see Venus or Mercury at midnight due to the fact that they are so close to the Sun. Like Mercury, Venus' proximity to the Sun means that she takes a similar amount of time as the Sun to complete one round through all twelve signs of the zodiac.

## Mars

**Mars** is the mythological god of war, and the physical planet itself has a reddish hue to it. This quite aptly expresses the aggressiveness and vigor of the planet Mars, which inflames passion and urges one to act and pursue objectives through daring and self-assertion. The energy of Mars is hot, sharp and piercing. Ideally Mars, the archetypal warrior, is a dynamic energizer; at worst he causes violence and reckless actions, and therefore accidents and disruption are associated with Mars.

Mars is the traditional ruler of the signs Aries and Scorpio. These are therefore both rather aggressive and energetic signs. However, the aggressive and dynamic attributes of Mars are expressed more overtly through the extroverted masculine Fire sign Aries, whereas Scorpio represents a more subtle, covert and secretive expression of Mars energy.

Mars and the Sun are both masculine planets that can represent (experiences with) men, in contrast to the Moon and Venus, which represent women. Although both the Sun and Mars are associated with will and self-assertion, these attributes are far more vigorously and fiercely expressed by Mars.

Physiologically Mars is associated with the muscular system as the organs of action. Sometimes a weak Mars will manifest as blood related disorders, such as iron deficiency. Heat, inflammation, injury and surgery (cuts and piercing) are associated with Mars.

A strong and prominent Mars imbues one's personality with courage and forcefulness, and this will enable one to win many battles in the fight for survival. However, this can cause one to become feared as somewhat dangerous and formidable. Independence and dynamism are the chief virtues of a strong Mars, and with a worthy goal, a legitimate task, and noble aspirations, these qualities can be very constructively employed. Mars is the courage and sharply focused intention of a “spiritual warrior”.

A weak or poorly integrated Mars might cause one to be timid and/or aggressive in a petty and cowardly (compensatory) way. The person may lack initiative and vitality, will give up easily, and tends to avoid any challenge that would require drive and clarity of intention. These qualities may ultimately lead to a lack of achievement and weakened self-esteem.

Mars takes about 2 years to complete one round through all twelve signs of the zodiac.

## Jupiter ♃

**Jupiter** is a big and beneficent personage in the planetary family; wise, wealthy and “jovial”. Mythologically Jupiter (Zeus) was the king of the gods who had overthrown his father, Saturn (Kronos). If any planet competes with the Sun for grandeur and dignity, then it's Jupiter, the largest planet proper in the solar system.

Jupiter brings good fortune, expansion, growth and faith wherever he is located or influences. Jupiter is associated with long-distance journeys and faraway people and places. Jupiter presides over religious beliefs, and moral or ethical values, as well as those social institutions that provide care and protection, or preserve and disseminate knowledge- particularly philosophical knowledge or high-level education. Jupiter is associated with optimistic, opulent and/or wise people. In Vedic astrology Jupiter is literally called “Guru”, pointing clearly to Jupiter's association with knowledge, learning and teaching.

Physiologically Jupiter is consistently associated with the liver, as well as body fat. A typical Jupiter type has a large and strong body! Generally Jupiter would promote good health and even healing and restoration, though doing things to excess is one weakness to which Jupiter is prone, so that Jupiter induced health problems (from hangovers to weight gain) may be directly related to jovial overindulgence.

Jupiter traditionally rules the signs Sagittarius and Pisces. We could say that the open, extroverted, masculine Fire sign Sagittarius represents exoteric religion, whereas Pisces represents a more feminine, mystical and esoteric manifestation of the search for Truth.

Although Mercury also relates to learning and education, Mercury's approach has a very narrow range and focuses on fine detail. Jupiter represents the big picture and one's overall comprehension of a subject or issue.

A strong and prominent Jupiter will manifest as dignity, morality and integrity. The person may be wealthy and well traveled, and therefore easily takes a broad, optimistic and tolerant view of things. The person has a buoyant and idealistic personality, and yet this idealism and optimism is normally quite balanced, practical and realistic. Expecting the best tends to promote success, and yet the ideal Jupiter type is unlikely to be exceedingly enamored by material things, and will on the contrary have a strong intuitive sense of spiritual truth and will consciously cultivate spiritual, or at least socially acceptable, moral values. The person is generous and may well have the capacity and inclination to bring about improvements (material, moral or educational) in the lives of others, and society at large.

A weak or poorly integrated Jupiter will typically manifest as pessimism and a lack of faith and joy. The person may be cynical about religion and may experience conflict with religious people, teachers or institutions. In some cases a poorly placed Jupiter could manifest as poverty, a poor sense of social belonging or community, and/or a thin and undernourished body. At worst the person will lack wisdom and moral integrity, and might have a weak or distorted sense of justice and honor.

Jupiter takes about 12 years to pass through all 12 signs of the zodiac, therefore about one year per sign.

## Saturn ♄

**Saturn** is the old grandfather, the stern geriatric of the planetary family, out there alone in the

distant reaches of the solar system, hobbling along in the cold darkness. In traditional astrology (before the discovery of Uranus, Neptune and Pluto), Saturn was the most distant visible planet, and also the slowest moving. Saturn's slow movement is one reason why its influence is associated with inertia.

The influence of Saturn is considered inimical to prosperity, and Saturn tends to point to areas of insecurity and debility that demand work and careful attention. We experience delays and deprivations, limitations and grave responsibilities through this planet. The symbol for Saturn is sometimes described as a sickle that cuts back and prunes our lives.

In all fairness and honesty it should be said that despite his bad reputation, Saturn has a more than legitimate purpose and function, and when you fulfill the Saturnine demand for discipline and structure, you will experience the tangible value of his carefulness and seriousness.

Saturn is often associated with the role of father, or more generally, the idea of an elder or authority figure. Saturn furthermore has a bearing on our own social status and standing, our work and our professional goals, our worldly duties, and generally the structure of our lives. We often look to the parent of the same sex to help us define our social roles and responsibilities.

Saturn is literally associated with hard things like rocks, as well as high places, like mountains, roof-tops or, more figuratively, elevated social positions. When people fall, literally or figuratively, it tends to be under the auspices of old Saturn.

Mythologically Saturn (Kronos, the god of time) ate his own children to evade a prophecy that he would be overthrown by one of them. This reflects the hard, cold and unsympathetic temperament of Saturn who is anything but nurturing.

Physiologically Saturn is associated with the skin, bones and teeth; organs that define and structure us, our hardened parts. It's dry cold and windy on mountain peaks; conditions that can wither and dry a body out. Saturn is also sometimes associated with the legs, as the organs that keep us upright and standing, and without which we fall.

Dark old Saturn traditionally rules the signs Capricorn and Aquarius, and we might note that these two signs are opposite the two signs ruled by the Luminaries (the Sun and Moon), Cancer and Leo.

A strong and positively integrated Saturn will show as steadiness, endurance, patience and practicality. There will be an ability to accept responsibility and to use limitations and duties as a means to achieve personal fulfillment, stability and material/social security. A good wholesome Saturn helps one to be realistic and to work effectively with one personal or circumstantial limitations. Sometimes a strong Saturn will take the form of impressive worldly success, but at the expense of human values, like kindness, empathy and generosity.

A weak or poorly integrated Saturn may take the form of fearfulness, anxiety and insecurity, and these tendencies may lead the person to become devious or cunning in worldly affairs. At worst there is a complete lack of practicality and discipline which ultimately leads to material/financial problems. The person's sense of reality is weak and they will be easily overwhelmed and disheartened by obstacles and delays.

Saturn takes about 29 years to complete his journey through all twelve signs of the zodiac; about two-and-a-half years per sign.

## The Outer Planets

The planets Uranus, Neptune and Pluto are often referred to as the "outer planets". Their orbits lie

beyond that of the traditional boundary defined by Saturn, and they are generally seen as having rather metaphysical and transpersonal attributes. All of the outer planets spend several years in each sign of the zodiac, so someone born within the same year as yourself would have the outer planets in their birth-chart located not very far from yours (probably within the same sign). The outer planets need to be connected with more personal factors in a chart to have a personally meaningful influence. Where outer planets are powerfully aligned with the Sun, Moon or Ascendant (ideally by Conjunction or Opposition aspect) an individual may be a personal embodiment of these archetypes.

## Uranus

**Uranus** has been called an “awakener”, and sometimes also a “rebel”, and the effect of Uranus tends to be sudden, startling and dazzling. Uranus is brilliant and innovative, and it is a peculiar astronomical fact that the axial tilt of Uranus is extremely irregular, compared to the other planets.

Uranus “electrifies”, inducing an accelerated tempo of events and experiences, and tends to create a restless craving for excitement and change in people. A “Uranian” type person may be a scientist, astrologer, technological wizard, or someone who lives a free, radical or very experimental life. At best Uranus is progressive and triggers liberating realizations. At worst the influence of Uranus causes chaotic, wayward unpredictability and volatility.

Many modern astrologers take Uranus to be the ruler of the sign Aquarius, though all are not in agreement that outer planets should necessarily rule over signs. I do not take this as a particularly important connection.

It is not clear what the physiological correspondence of Uranus would be, though there is a tendency to associate Uranus with the nervous system and electricity in the body. Uranus does certainly seem to manifest as excitement and can be somewhat like Mars in its potential for explosiveness; perhaps the effects of Uranus (and Mars) somehow relate to adrenaline in the body, but this is mere speculation on my part. Robert Hand has suggested that Uranus has Fiery qualities, which I consider a viable description of Uranus' energy.

When Uranus is prominent in a chart, and positively expressed in a person's life, there is a progressive and free thinking inclination. The person will be open to trying out new ideas, experiences and lifestyles, regardless of whether or not these are sanctioned by popular opinion. In this sense a Uranian type person can be a dazzling pioneer or “free spirit”.

When Uranus is prominent but not well integrated there will be instability and shocking events. There may be a tendency to be very extreme and radical, but not very practical or constructive in the implementation of ideas that are considered progressive by the person. A strong but negative manifestation of Uranus is perversely defiant and disruptive. In some cases the person may bottle up their frustrations and true desires until there is an eruption of this energy in the form of a sudden drastic action or some or other cataclysmic external event.

A decidedly weak and unintegrated Uranus could perhaps take the form of dullness and inertia inasmuch as there will be little inclination or ability to explore new possibilities or make liberating changes in life. However, it is possible that someone who fails to express or get adequately in touch with the energy of Uranus in their charts will be periodically overwhelmed with sudden changes being forced upon them. It is doubtful whether we can ever indefinitely avoid dealing with the “lessons” that a planet has to teach.

It has been suggested that when a planet's energy is resisted or blocked, it simply becomes more

insistent and apparently fated in its manifestation in our lives, when the appropriate cycles activate it. This principle is often quite dramatically demonstrated with Uranus, perhaps because the potentially "wild" impulses of Uranus are so unorthodox or antisocial that we will tend to suppress them more often and more determinedly than other energies.

Uranus takes about 84 years to complete a round through the zodiac; that's roughly 7 years per sign.

## Neptune ♆

**Neptune** is associated with the illusive world of imagination, fantasy, dreams, drugs, hallucination, psychic experiences, and mystical or otherworldly phenomena. Spirituality, compassion and empathy are also regularly associated with this planet. People with a strong urge to help the suffering and downtrodden tend to be under the influence of Neptune; yet it is also apparently Neptune that leads to degrading situations, moral weakness, addiction, disillusionment, deception and confusion to begin with. Neptune is as apt to be the victim as the savior.

The mythological Neptune was the god of the ocean, and the watery association with emotional impressionability seems appropriate and consistent with its effects. Sometimes Neptune seems to literally draw people to the ocean, or other bodies of water, apparently to somehow get in touch with their inner feelings or "soul". Artists and inspired, devotional-type mystics are frequently strongly influenced by Neptune; but the world of Neptune can be beguiling and disappointing. Glamorous illusions can be convincingly real under Neptune's spell, but reality can't be evaded indefinitely, and Neptunian delusions and denial will eventually be forced into a confrontation with hard reality. Neptunian euphoria is fragile.

Neptune produces sensitivity and vulnerability on various levels, and physiologically this can manifest as allergies, or hypersensitive reactions to foods and medicines. Neptune is vague, unfocused and indiscriminate, and this can cause energy to leak or be dissipated in a careless manner, eventually leading to a sense of loss, fatigue, exhaustion, disorientation and victimization.

Modern western astrologers consider Neptune to be the ruler of the sign Pisces (with Jupiter, the traditional ruler), and there are certainly some similarities between Neptune, the sign Pisces and the 12<sup>th</sup> House.

A strong and positively expressed Neptune will contribute to sensitivity and compassion for others, making some Neptunian types caregivers, like nurses. The person will have a rich and vivid imagination and may be an artist or photographer. There may be psychic experiences, or prophetic dreams, and the person will have easy access to mystical perceptions and spiritual dimensions of reality. Having such a full and direct experience of spiritual worlds tends to make a person less worldly and materialistic, less self-assertive, and more willing to make sacrifices for others.

When Neptune is prominent but poorly handled there may be weakness in the body and/or character. The person may be vague about their objectives and true feelings and intentions, and may either unintentionally confuse others, or in extreme cases will be deliberately and intentionally deceptive and cunning. This deceptive streak is often due to a sense of impotence that makes the person feel incapable of asserting themselves in a direct and open manner. Addictions, distorted perceptions, and overwhelming emotional sensitivity are common negative manifestations of a strong but misdirected Neptune influence. There may also be an indiscriminate, if well intentioned, tendency to try to save others in a way that leads to a mere squandering of energy and resources, and/or a tendency to rely on others too dependently. Rational discernment is not (by any stretch of the imagination) a Neptunian attribute.

Neptune takes about 150 years to pass through all twelve signs of the zodiac.

## Pluto ♃ or ♇

**Pluto** (Hades) was the mythological god of the underworld, who abducted Persephone, the goddess of Spring. This story of abduction aptly reflects the brutal power and coercion that can be expressed through this planet.

The astrological Pluto is associated with "transformation", or what could be described as a "death-rebirth" processes. Pluto energy is deep, powerful, volcanic, and it often seems to produce a purging effect. In society Pluto can represent people who wield power, whether constructively and legitimately or not. The criminal underworld is Plutonian in character, as well as those organizations that bring healing, upliftment and regeneration to society. Pluto can powerfully build, strengthen and restore things, or ruthlessly destroy and eliminate them. "Pluto types" are purposeful and focused, and in extreme cases this can be expressed as a fanatical, obsessive zeal.

Pluto is considered the ruler of the sign Scorpio by many modern astrologers, and there are certainly some similarities between the two symbols (but note that Mars is the traditional ruler of Scorpio).

When Pluto is strong and prominently placed in a chart, and where this prominent and emphasized Pluto influence is well managed and constructively directed, it will tend to give a person a strong commitment to some or other personal mission of significance to the larger social order. The person may align themselves with ideological groups that seek to bring about progressive change and regeneration in the world. On a more personal level the Plutonian individual will have a definite sense of undergoing periodic catharsis and self-renewal, and this process will probably be relatively traumatic at times, leading, however, to a profound sense of resurrection, personal power and personal purpose.

When Pluto is prominent and strong but not well handled there may be a ruthless type of power-mania in the person's personality, which may express itself as possessiveness or manipulative patterns in the person's personal or professional relationships. The person may be a dictator or "control-freak" who always has to be in charge, though this control might in some cases be exercised in a rather subtle or covert fashion. When Pluto is very weak and poorly integrated in a chart the person may well be somewhat apathetic about larger social issues (though of course the rest of the chart has to be considered), and may lack the strength and focus that comes from having a definite sense of purpose. However, it is doubtful whether nature will allow one to long remain disconnected from any archetypal energy. Sooner or later (the timing can be ascertained through Transits and Progressions) it will be the right time to encounter a strong dose of Pluto, and this may be more difficult for a timid and superficial character that hasn't integrated Pluto's attributes or energies before. When we are failing to integrate Pluto's energies effectively we may find ourselves the victim of other people's Plutonian power trips, which could take the form of an unpleasant encounter with the criminal underworld. In such a case it may well be significant that we are encountering and personally becoming a victim of an essentially impersonal social problem. Pluto seems to be largely concerned with "the masses", and impersonal social issues and processes. Pluto's position in the natal chart, as well as Pluto's cyclic effect in our lives, can reveal how we are personally relating to these larger transpersonal social processes.

A strong Pluto will always add depth and forcefulness to a person's character, as well as a measure of the type of charisma that hard-core characters (like mafia bosses, tough cops or superheroes) possess.

Pluto takes about 250 years to complete one round through all twelve signs of the zodiac.

## The Moon's Nodes ( North Node ♁ , South Node ♁ )

There are two points where the orbital path of the Moon intersects or crosses the ecliptic, and these are known as the Nodes of the Moon. That point where the Moon crosses the ecliptic heading in a northerly direction is known as the North Node of the Moon, and that point where the Moon's path crosses the ecliptic heading south is known as the South Node of the Moon. These two points are invariably directly opposite each other in the zodiac.

Eclipses occur when New Moons or Full Moons occur close to these intersection points, and for this reason ancient astrology referred to the North Node as the Dragon's Head, and the South Node as the Dragon's Tail; this dragon being said to devour the Sun or Moon at the time of an eclipse.

There are various schools of thought regarding the degree of importance and the actual significance of the Nodes, making this a rather shadowy zone of astrological lore.

In Vedic astrology the Nodes are considered more important than they usually are in western forms of astrology. In fact, in Vedic astrology they have status more or less equivalent to the planets proper, even though they are insubstantial sensitive points. Vedic astrology considers their influence to be malefic and rather stormy. In that system the North Node (known as Rahu) is seen as insatiably driven and materialistic, whereas the South Node (known as Ketu in Vedic astrology) is volatile, but quite spiritual and mystical. Vedic astrology states that Rahu is like Saturn and Ketu like Mars, though, it may be more useful to liken Ketu to a mixture of Mars and Neptune qualities.

Many modern western astrology books describe the North Node as somewhat more positive than the South Node, and it is typically suggested that one should endeavor to move towards and integrate the qualities of the North Node, while moving away from the South Node, which in this context is described as a type of anti-evolutionary comfort zone in which one has lingered too long. If there is truth in this it never managed to impress me greatly in practice, and I have been more convinced by other formulations of the meanings of the Moon's Nodes.

Another stream of western thought on the subject views the Nodes as representing connections with other people, in a way that is quite similar to the lunar sense of belonging and community. From this perspective the Moon's Nodes are “sociable” points, and I have seen some convincing manifestations of this idea.

## The Zodiac

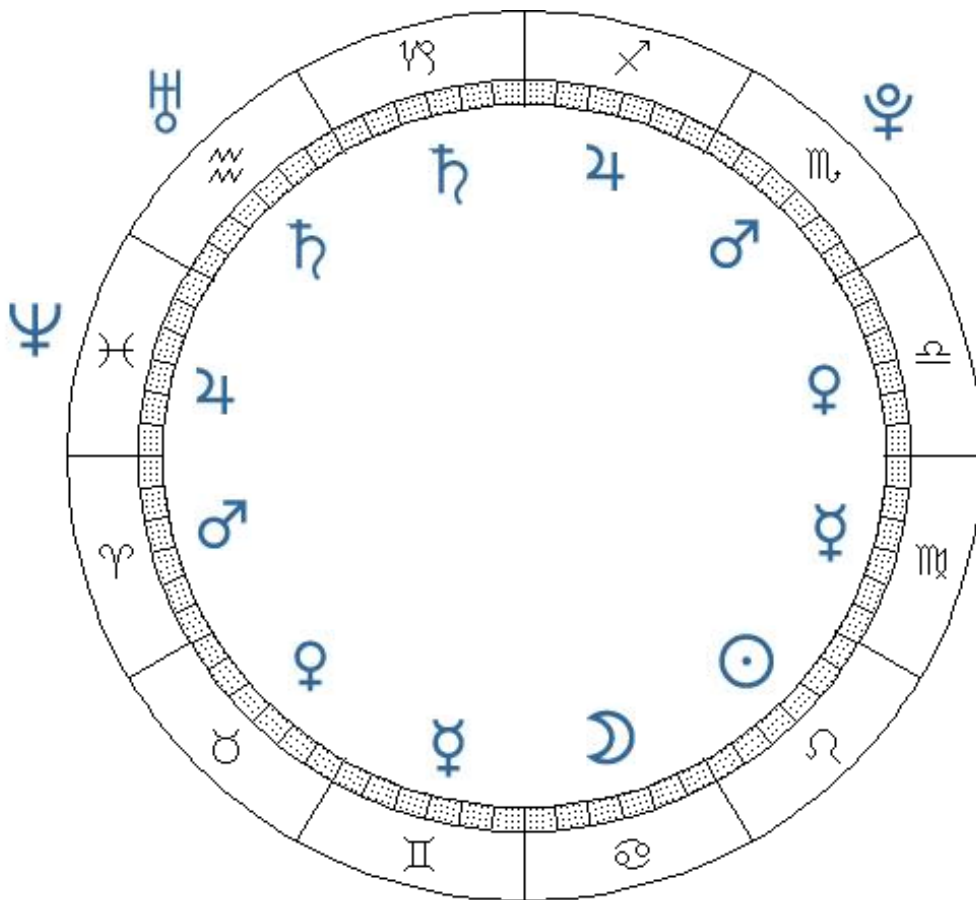
The signs of the zodiac are among traditional astrology's most essential components. At the most basic and practical level the zodiac serves as a means of defining the positions (along the ecliptic) of the Sun, Moon and planets, as well as the Ascendant, Midheaven and House Cusps.

Even though there are challenging technical questions regarding the criteria for locating or positioning the zodiac signs along the ecliptic, and therefore exactly how to apply the zodiac in practice (see the article on *The Tropical and Sidereal Zodiacs*), as a mandala through which one might gain insight into psychological types and evolutionary processes, the rich symbolism of the zodiac is indispensable to a full appreciation of astrology's deep fount of wisdom.

### The Relationship between Planets and Signs

Each sign is said to be ruled by a planet. Before the discovery of Uranus, Neptune and Pluto there

were seven planets; the Sun, Moon, Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn, and rulership of the twelve zodiac signs was distributed among the seven planets in the following manner. The Sun and Moon each “rule” one sign (Leo and Cancer respectively), whereas each of the other traditional planets rule over two signs, one of which will be masculine and the other feminine. So, Mercury rules over masculine Gemini and feminine Virgo, Venus rules over feminine Taurus and masculine Libra, Mars rules over masculine Aries and Feminine Scorpio, Jupiter rules feminine Pisces and masculine Sagittarius, and finally, Saturn rules masculine Aquarius and feminine Capricorn. In modern western astrology Uranus is associated with Aquarius, Neptune with Pisces and Pluto with Scorpio. The modern associations have been placed on the outside of the zodiac circle in the diagram below in order to preserve the symmetry of the traditional scheme. Note that the planets follow the same sequence on either side of the Sun and Moon: Mercury, then Venus, then Mars, then Jupiter, and finally Saturn. This is the order in which they are found in the solar system.



Tradition declares that the energies and attributes of a given planet would be modified by the sign in which it is located. When there is compatibility between a planet and the sign in which it is located it enables that planet to function more naturally, freely and effectively. The reverse is naturally also true; planets will be stifled and “debilitated” in certain signs with which they are inherently incompatible. Planets function very well, or at least powerfully, in the signs they naturally rule, and are weakened when in the signs opposite their own. So, for example, Venus would prosper in Taurus or Libra, but will be weak in Aries or Scorpio.

Apart from being happily placed in it's own sign/s, each planet has a single sign in which it is said to be "Exalted", and in which it functions with exceptional grace and effectiveness. A planet is said to "Fall" in the sign opposite it's exaltation sign.

*The Sun is Exalted in Aries, and Falls in Libra  
 The Moon is Exalted in Taurus, and Falls in Scorpio  
 Mercury is Exalted in Virgo, and Falls in Pisces*

*Venus is Exalted in Pisces, and Falls in Virgo*  
*Mars is Exalted in Capricorn, and Falls in Cancer*  
*Jupiter is Exalted in Cancer, and Falls in Capricorn*  
*Saturn is Exalted in Libra, and Falls in Aries*

The Exaltation and Fall positions of the modern outer planets are less established and agreed upon, though there seems to be a general consensus that Uranus is Exalted in Scorpio (and therefore obviously Falls in Taurus).

## The Structure of the Zodiac

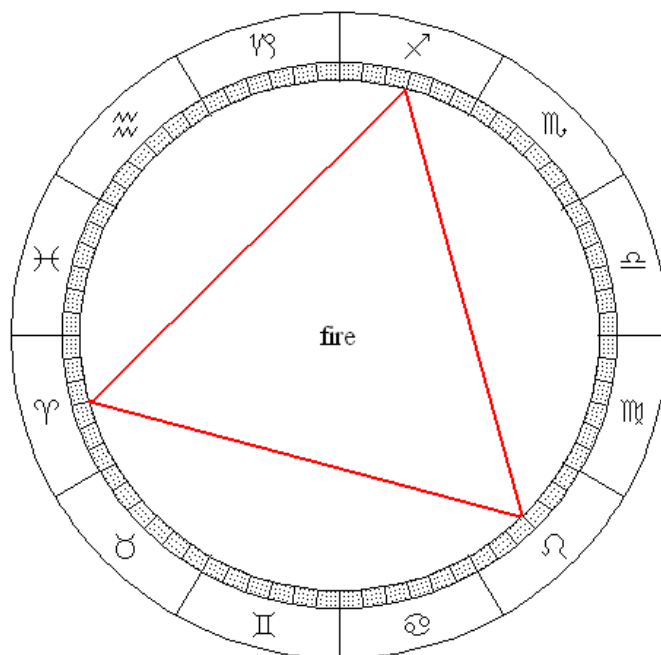
The zodiac is an intricate tapestry of multi-layered and multi-faceted symbolism. Each sign is related to every other in a very specific way, and, in fact, every sign derives its meanings and qualities largely from the nature of its relationships to the other signs. No sign stands alone.

Each sign of the zodiac occupies 30 degrees of the ecliptic circle ( $30 \times 12 = 360$ ), and each degree (of the 360 in the ecliptic circle) is composed of 60 minutes (measurements of arc, not time). Each of these "minutes" is further subdivided into 60 "seconds". The zodiac position of a planet is expressed as so many degrees (out of the 30) into the given sign. So, for example, a planet at 10 degrees of Libra is one-third of the way through that sign, bearing in mind that most astrological diagrams represent the sequence of the signs of the zodiac proceeding in an anti-clockwise direction.

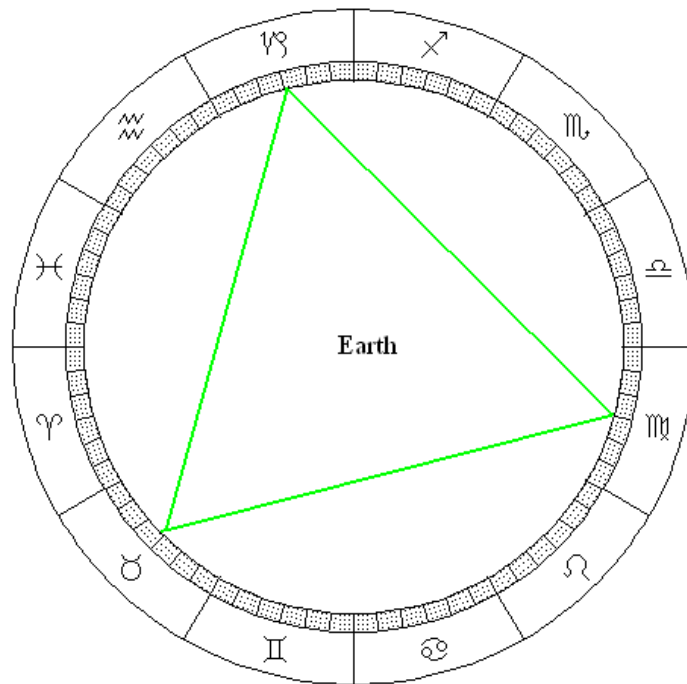
### Four Triangles

The so called Elements, or Triplicities (Fire, Earth, Air and Water) are perhaps the most well known of the zodiac's groupings. Three signs belong to each one of the four Elements, forming four equilateral triangles in the zodiac wheel.

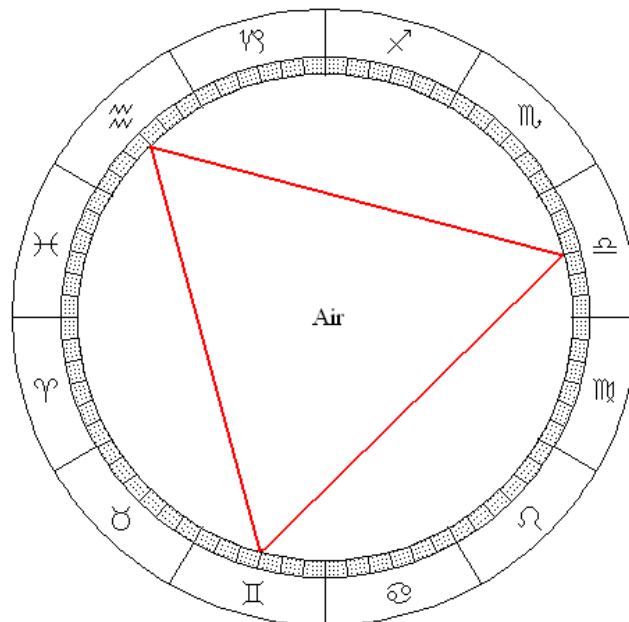
The **Fire Signs** (Aries, Leo, Sagittarius) are vibrant, energetic, spontaneous, expressive, volatile and "warm". They may be impulsive, excitable, willful and courageous, but definitely not secretive or timid.



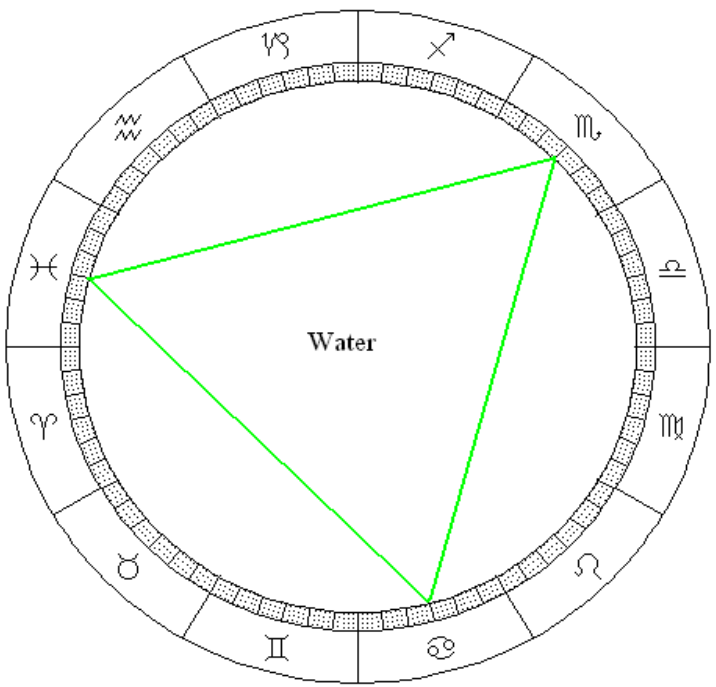
The **Earth Signs** (Taurus, Virgo, Capricorn) are practical, methodical, careful, stable, and are associated with concrete, tangible, material or substantial things.



The **Air Signs** (Gemini, Libra, Aquarius) are communicative, socially orientated, rational, intellectual, emotionally detached, "breezy", and concerned with ideas more than feelings or things.

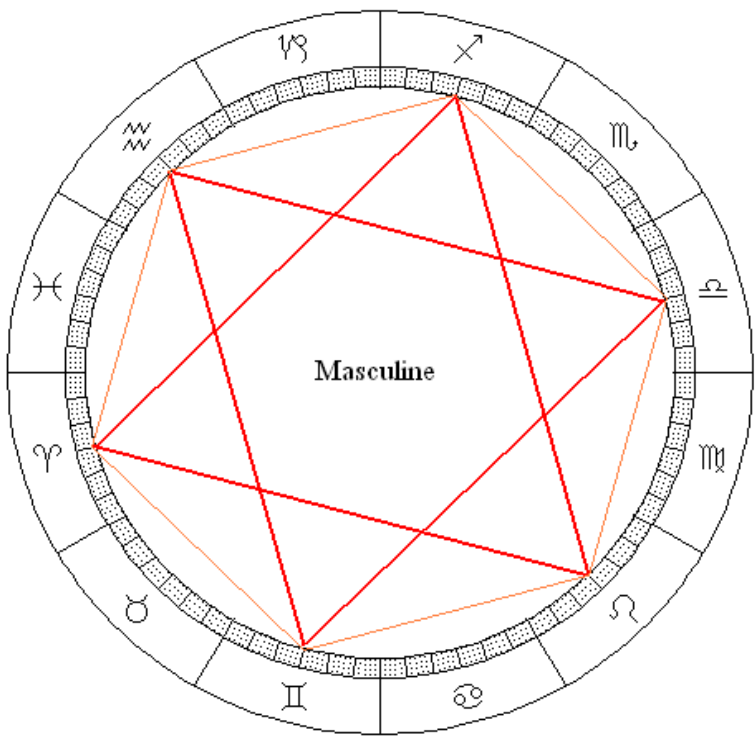


The **Water Signs** (Cancer, Scorpio, Pisces) are sensitive, receptive, and inclined to live in a world of feelings and emotional impressions. Water is imaginative, shy, and may be secretive or reserved.

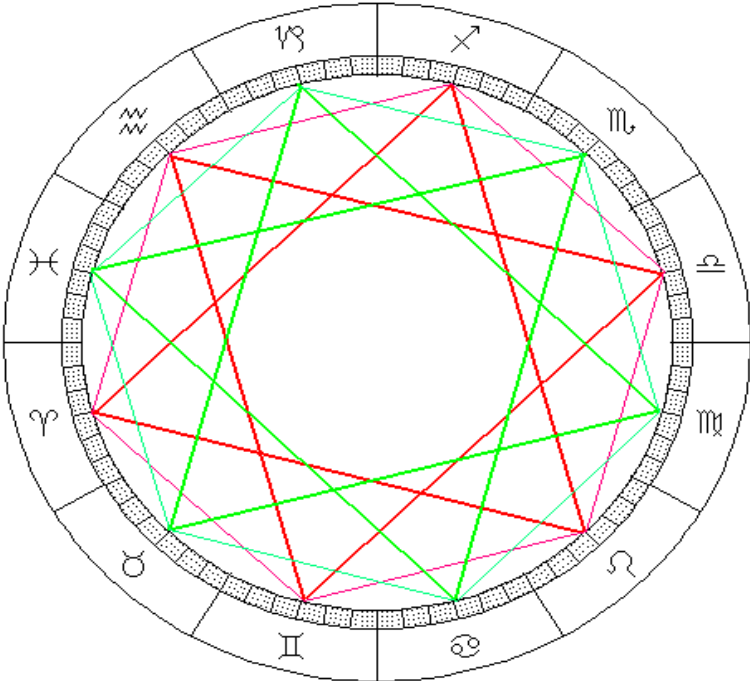
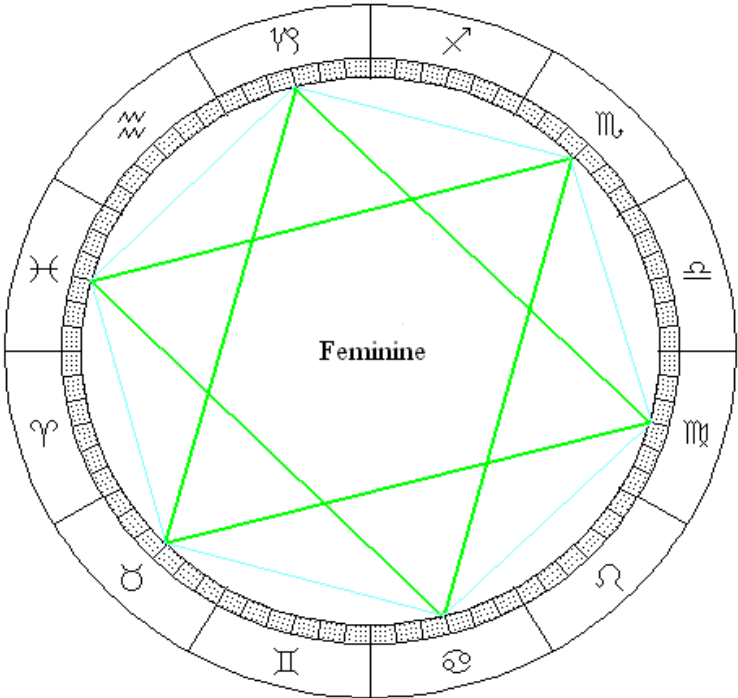


### Two Hexagons

The **Masculine/Day Signs** are the Fire and Air Signs; these are generally extroverted and outgoing, and more open, energetic and active than the feminine signs.



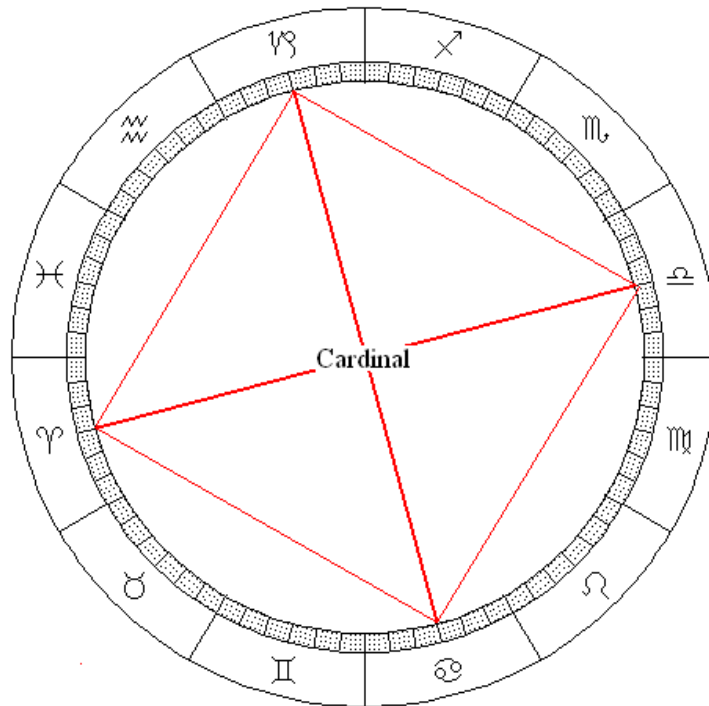
The **Feminine/Night Signs** are the Earth and Water Signs; they are introverted, passive and receptive.



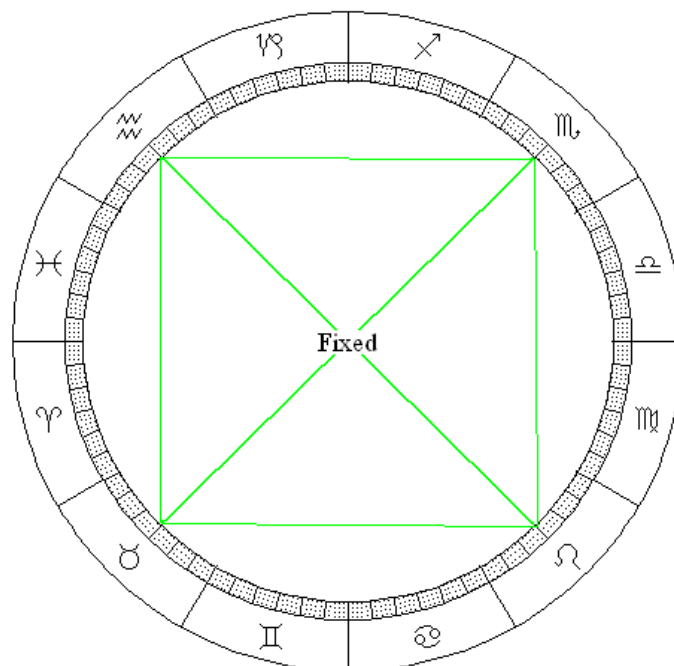
## Three Crosses

The three Crosses or Quadruplicities are known as the Cardinal, Fixed and Mutable divisions of the zodiac. Four signs belong to each of the three Crosses.

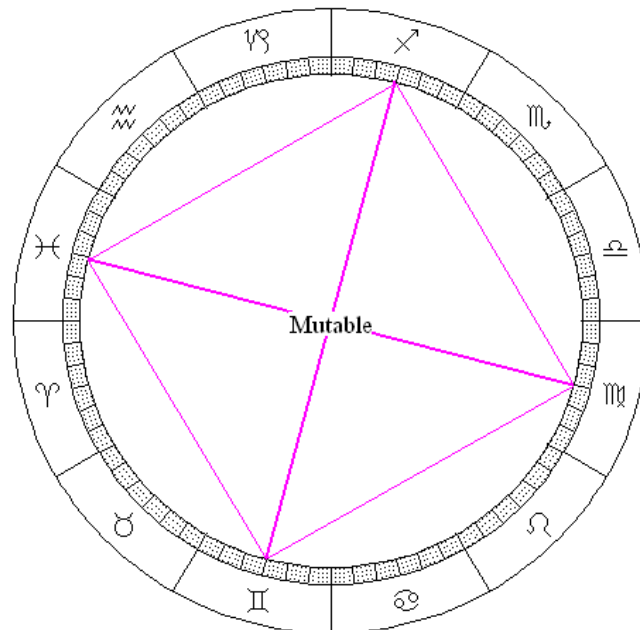
The **Cardinal Signs** (Aries- Libra, Cancer-Capricorn) are dynamic and action-orientated. Cardinal signs begin or initiate things, though they aren't inclined to maintain and sustain them, which is the task of the Fixed Signs.



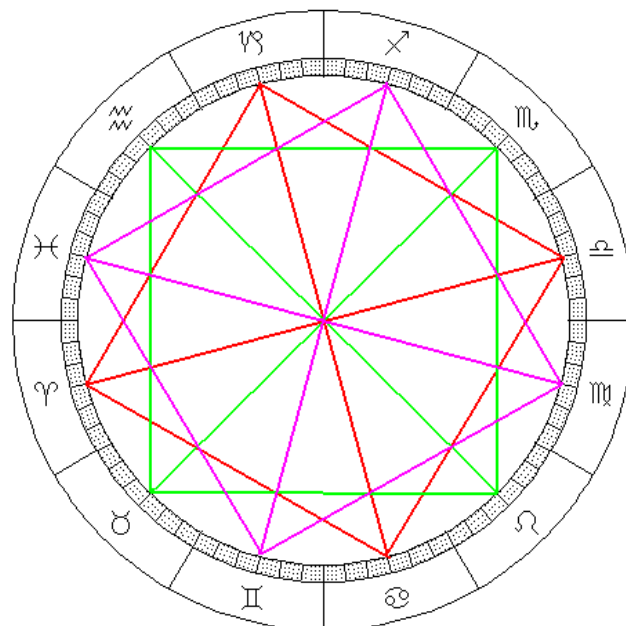
The **Fixed Signs** (Taurus-Scorpio, Leo-Aquarius) tend to be unchanging; maintaining and staying with something, as the word "fixed" implies. They hold onto the momentum of the Cardinal impulse and represent relative stability.



The **Mutable Signs** (Gemini-Sagittarius, Virgo-Pisces) are changeable, fluctuating, adaptable, dual or multiple. They represent the unraveling, dispersal or final execution of the intention or impulse initiated by the Cardinal signs, and sustained by the Fixed Signs.



Physiologically the Cardinal Signs might be seen as corresponding to the head of the physical body. the Fixed Signs would represent the abdomen and torso; the Mutable Signs the limbs and extremities.



Note that there is an intricate relationship between the Elements and Crosses in that each of the three signs belonging to a given Element belongs to one of the three Crosses (for example, Aries is Cardinal-Fire, Leo is Fixed-Fire, and Sagittarius is Mutable-Fire), and each one of the four signs belonging to a given Cross belongs a different Element (Aries is Cardinal-Fire, Cancer is Cardinal-Water, Libra is Cardinal-Air, and Capricorn is Cardinal-Earth). So, each sign is a unique combination of Triplicity and Quadruplicity: Aries is the only Cardinal-Fire sign, Taurus the only possible Fixed-Earth sign, Gemini the only possible Mutable-Air sign, Cancer the only Cardinal-Water sign, and so on.

# Attributes of Individual Signs

## ♈ Aries, the Ram

Aries is the first sign of the zodiac, representing the pure impulse to be, to begin, to be born, and to do. Aries is the "big bang", the vigorous first impulse that gets all things started. This sign is associated with qualities of impatience and assertiveness. Aries represents identity and one's sense of Self, and how one expresses that to, and impresses that upon, the environment.

Aries is dynamic and pioneering, impulsive and impetuous. In a sense Aries is the infant of the zodiac, bursting in upon the world in direct, open and unambiguous self-affirmation; but having eleven further stages of relationship and "self-unfolding" yet to be assimilated and integrated.

Physiologically Aries rules the head, and by extension may be associated with the brain. Rams are known for butting heads with other Rams, and this aptly depicts the competitive spirit of the sign Aries (and it's ruler, Mars). Rams (and typical Arians) rush headlong into things, without much planning and forethought.

Libra, the sign opposite Aries, symbolizes the meeting or joining of individuals in marriage, partnership, consultation, or a direct and open confrontation. In such a partnership, encounter or confrontation the individuality of each participant is brought into sharp objective focus or contrast. If Aries is action, then Libra is the inevitable balancing reaction.

Aries belongs to the dynamic Cardinal Cross and the feisty Fire Triplicity.

The sign Aries, as the first sign of the zodiac, corresponds to the 1st House, and shares a number of themes and attributes with the 1st House; primarily the concept of "self" or "identity".

## ♉ Taurus, the Bull

A Bull is a solid and voluptuous bulk of creature; determined, slow, sure and steady in movement. Bulls tend to mellowly go about the pleasurable tasks of fulfilling their basic needs, like self-nourishment and procreation. The Bull is a symbol of material abundance and earthy fertility.

Taurus is associated with property and financial matters, and tends to be possessive and materialistic.

If Aries is the newborn infant, Taurus is a baby settling into the physical world, drawing in nourishment from it's mother, stabilizing and anchoring itself in the material world, and growing in strength and stability.

Taurus governs the neck, throat and ears (hearing), and, if we take a hint from Vedic astrology, Taurus would also be associated with the face, mouth and oral activities, such as eating and speaking.

Taurus and Scorpio are opposite each other on the zodiac wheel, and represent polar opposite but complementary themes and principles. The comfortable stability of Taurus contrasts with the crisis and catharsis associated with Scorpio. Taurus represents the accumulation of substance or resources, but Scorpio represents it's creative release or "ejaculation". If Taurus (or the 2<sup>nd</sup> House)

represents “my resources”, then Scorpio (or the 8<sup>th</sup> House) represents “our resources”.

Taurus belongs to the Fixed Cross and Earth Triplicity, and is ruled by the beautiful, sensuous and amorous planet Venus.

Taurus, as the second sign of the zodiac, corresponds to the 2<sup>nd</sup> House, and shares many of the themes and attributes of the 2<sup>nd</sup> House, primarily the 2<sup>nd</sup> House association with money and property.

## ♊ Gemini, the Twins

The image of the young Twins represents the youthful curiosity and communicativeness of the sign Gemini. Gemini represents the process of learning to interact with the people and things in one's immediate environment, thereby becoming a more skillful participant in the physical and social worlds in which one lives.

Gemini is associated with the desire to learn, to mimic, and to pick up the lingo used in the environment, like a young child. Gemini represents multiplicity and diversity, physical and mental dexterity and mobility.

Gemini and Sagittarius are located opposite each other on the zodiac wheel and represent polar opposite but complementary principles. Gemini represents the basic literacy, for example, that is indispensable to the “higher learning” associated with Sagittarius, whether this higher learning takes the form of a university education, or grand philosophical theories and speculations about the ultimate meaning of it all. Gemini furthermore represents our ability to physically travel over relatively short distances, or to grapple with the people and things we encounter in our immediate environment, whereas, by contrast, Sagittarius represents long voyages covering relatively great distances, as well as the philosophy, vision or ideal that guides and illumines our direction in life.

Gemini belongs to the Mutable Cross, and the Air Triplicity, and is ruled by the clever and versatile planet Mercury.

Gemini rules the arms, hands and fingers, which are used for communication, as well as effective manipulation of physical things, enabling us to fulfill our immediate needs and desires. In western astrology Gemini is regularly associated with the lungs.

As the third sign of the zodiac Gemini corresponds to the 3<sup>rd</sup> House, and shares many themes with the 3<sup>rd</sup> House; most specifically day-to-day communications, siblings, neighbors, as well as short journeys, busy-ness and mobility.

## ♋ Cancer, the Crab

A Crab is a ravenous but careful creature, retreating into its shell at the slightest sign of danger. This sign is extremely sensitive and has a great need for safety, and yet the prominent claws might represent acquisitiveness and tenacity. The crab is wary of intrusions from the outside, but is protective and caring towards those that are familiar and part of its private, intimate sphere.

Cancer is the Cardinal-Water sign of the zodiac, and is ruled by the archetypal mother of the planetary family; the Moon.

This private and domestic inner life, associated with Cancer, needs to be healthy and secure for public and professional potentials, associated with Capricorn, the opposite sign, to thrive. A wholesome meal, the family's love, and a good night's rest at home (Cancer/4<sup>th</sup> House) enables us to face the merciless and competitive public world of our daytime duties (associated with Capricorn and the 10<sup>th</sup> House). Family units or households constitute the building blocks, and are in a sense the foundation of the larger social order; a town, nation or civilization.

If Gemini represents a toddler or very young child in the formative stages of learning to engage with the physical and social world, then Cancer would represent the following stage in which there is a recognition of the family or household as a whole unit within a larger socioeconomic matrix, with the parents as the indispensable “pillars” holding it all together. In a sense Cancer represents a stage in which the foundation of the personality is established and there is the first glimpse of the future roles and responsibilities that come with full adult participation in the larger socioeconomic order, and here the actions and “ceremonies” of parent figures provide the blueprint that enable a future assumption of these adult roles and responsibilities.

As the Cardinal-Water sign of the zodiac, Cancer is perhaps more dynamic and assertive than the other water signs, but certainly the most reclusive and sensitive of the Cardinal signs.

The chest area in general is under the dominion of this sign; specifically the breasts (you can see them in Cancer's glyph), consistent with the nourishing and mothering themes of this sign.

## ♌ Leo, the Lion

The Lion is the "King of the Jungle", a symbol of authority, majesty and power, representing the blossoming of the individual's creative vitality. If Cancer can be associated with the stage of a child becoming aware of the family unit as a little whole, then Leo is the warm-hearted, fun loving teenager who has awakened to a full sense of his/her individual creative potential, and in doing so is emerging in embryonic autonomy from the protective shell of the Cancer stage.

Leo is ruled by the Sun, the most radiant of the “planets” (it is fully understood that the Sun is not technically a planet), and this again describes and represents the power, vitality and individual grandeur associated with this sign. Ideally Leo expresses integrity, honor and a regal dignity; whereas the less ideal manifestation takes the form of arrogance and self-righteousness. Even so, Leo is perhaps the most truly generous sign, since it is the natural instinct of a “king” to patronize his subjects. Leo needs to be acknowledged, and cannot bear to go unnoticed and unadmired.

Leo is physiologically associated with the chest area in general and with the heart in particular. The heart acts as a central distributor of life-force through the various blood vessels, which are associated with Aquarius, the sign opposite Leo. Leo is also regularly associated with the back.

As much as Leo is associated with Individuality, Aquarius, the sign opposite Leo, is related to friendships and collective group values, which potentially complements Leo, and provides for Leo it's natural field of expression. If Leo represents the creative intelligence of an individual, Aquarius would represent the collective store of humanity's intelligent creativity in the form of sciences, groups and associations, and various social/cultural activities and ceremonies through which knowledge and group values are preserved and disseminated.

Leo belongs to the Fixed Cross and Fire Triplicity and could thus be considered the most stable and steadily focused of the Fire signs, while perhaps being the most lively, energetic and volatile of the Fixed signs.

As the 5<sup>th</sup> sign of the zodiac Leo corresponds to the 5<sup>th</sup> House, and shares a number of themes with the 5<sup>th</sup> House, most notably the idea of individual authority, integrity, and creative intelligence.

## ♍ Virgo, the Virgin

The symbol of a virgin represents the idea of pristine purity and perfection. Virgo is often depicted as a woman holding ears of wheat, which hints at a knowledge of sowing, harvesting, food processing and agriculture, and more generally, practical techniques and efficiency in all its forms. Practicality, efficiency, service, precision and the proper functioning of the body; these are among the outstanding themes of the sign Virgo.

Virgo is ruled by the intellectual planet Mercury, giving this sign mental or intellectual attributes, but as Virgo is the Mutable-Earth sign of the zodiac, the mind tends to focus on practical techniques that accomplish concrete work, rather than vague and remote abstractions, or communication for its own sake (as one may encounter in Gemini, the other sign ruled by Mercury).

Virgo is located opposite the sign Pisces on the zodiac wheel, and therefore these two signs represent and embody opposite but complimentary principles. The precision and practicality of Virgo contrasts with the vagueness and essentially emotional orientation of Pisces. The efficiency of Virgo can compliment the desire to save and sacrifice for others that Pisces represents; conversely the empathy and intuition of Pisces can "balance" the Virgoan preoccupation with cold and clinical facts, purely physical conditions and results.

Physiologically Virgo rules the intestines (which can be seen in its glyph), and Virgo's usual preoccupation with health issues connects Virgo to diet, medical treatments, etc. The discriminating selection of that which is useful, and its separation from that which is useless, which the body demonstrates in the digestion of food, reflects the meticulously discerning analytical attributes Virgo.

As the 6<sup>th</sup> sign of the zodiac Virgo corresponds to the 6<sup>th</sup> House and shares with the 6<sup>th</sup> House an association with health issues (possible illness), work, jobs, and possibly also servants and co-workers.

## ♎ Libra, the Balance

Things are weighed and compared in the Scales of the Balance, and this weighing of things with or against each other reflects the Libran themes of relationship, partnership or confrontation.

Libra is the middle-point of the zodiac (dividing it into two equal halves, like the even symmetry of the balance), and is thus opposite the first sign, Aries, on the zodiac wheel. If the key phrase for Aries is "I Am", then Libra's would be "We Are"; Libra is the union of two "I Ams"; a union of two equal, opposite and (ideally or potentially) mutually complementary entities.

Libra (or "marriage") is a type of initiation into the collective, socially-orientated half of the zodiac that follows. The signs preceding Libra symbolize the development of the individual's identity and (conspicuously in Virgo- "the apprentice") prepare him/her for fruitful participation in the larger social arena depicted in the second half of the zodiac wheel.

Libra is ruled by the planet Venus, and this suggests qualities of grace and gentleness, a love of

beauty and harmony, and therefore potentially artistic inclinations. Despite the friendly, courteous and amicable attributes associated with this sign, it does belong to the dynamic Cardinal Cross, and the Masculine Airy Triplicity; Libra is the match for Aries in terms of enthusiastic and direct competitiveness.

Libra (and by extension the 7<sup>th</sup> House) represents the idea that one's sense of Self or Identity (Aries/1<sup>st</sup> House) is largely defined by and evoked through “face-to-face” encounters; whether they be consultations, competitive confrontations, or partnerships.

## ♏ Scorpio, the Scorpion

A Scorpion, it can't be denied, is a rather ominous symbol, with its pincers and fearsome sting. Scorpions have a reputation for being dangerous, and are also rather elusive creatures; hiding under rocks or in other dark crevices. Some of the deeper, darker, mysterious and secret facets of life (such as death, sex and the occult) are associated with the 8<sup>th</sup> sign of the zodiac.

Scorpio belongs to the Fixed Cross and the Feminine Water Triplicity, and is traditionally ruled by Mars, though modern western astrologers tend to consider Pluto to be the ruler of Scorpio.

Physiologically Scorpio is associated with the sexual organs and excretory system, and also sometimes the nose.

This sign is sometimes associated with the symbol of an eagle, which is regarded as representing the higher, nobler expression of Scorpio in which the person has risen above the more basic carnal desires and instincts which can be so powerfully evoked in this sign, and has thereby achieved power and dominion.

Scorpio represents emotional intensity, which might be expressed as great concentration and focus. Obviously these attributes can be useful, and Scorpio can achieve great things through this capacity for intense commitment and determination. This same quality, however, can make for a type of obsessive or fanatical preoccupation with an idea or feeling, so that it warps and distorts reality (especially where fear or paranoia are driving this obsessive focus).

This sign (like the 8<sup>th</sup> House) is associated with “shared resources”, as opposed to the idea of “personal resources” embodied in the opposite sign Taurus (and the 2<sup>nd</sup> House). As the sign following Libra (relationship), Scorpio represents the tangible fruits and results of a union or partnership, which can range from jealousy and psychological vulnerability (in the form of fear of betrayal), to the increased wealth and security that comes with the support of a successful partnership.

## ♐ Sagittarius, the Centaur

The Sagittarian Centaur is usually depicted as aiming his arrow high at a distant goal. The sign Sagittarius is indeed associated with idealism and aspiration; a lifting of one's gaze towards higher things and a wider horizon.

Sagittarius is associated with mental and physical exploration, and this can manifest as the quest for philosophical truth, or, on a more physical level, journeys to foreign lands. Sometimes sport is associated with Sagittarius, and in this context sport would represent the aspiration to achieve ever greater skill, grace and perfection in physical action.

Scorpio represents a phase of development in which there is fascination with mysteries and secrets, and this awareness of the fact that there are many unknowns gives birth to the Sagittarian seeker. A more esoteric interpretation associates the sign Scorpio with a type of “developmental crisis” in which the beastly and divine attributes in man are forced into a confrontation from which, ideally, Sagittarius emerges as “the one-pointed disciple”.

Sagittarius is ruled by the expansive planet Jupiter, the largest and luckiest planet in the solar system. This sign frequently demonstrates an intuitive and even visionary streak, often expressing itself through art, science or other culturally vital knowledge.

Sagittarius belongs to the Mutable Cross, and the Fiery Triplicity. Similarly to the other Fire signs, Sagittarius is optimistic, enthusiastic and forthright, but is probably the most mobile, and certainly the most moral, of them all.

Physiologically Sagittarius rules the thighs, and its planetary ruler, Jupiter, is frequently associated with the liver.

The 9<sup>th</sup> House, which corresponds to Sagittarius, is associated with many Sagittarian themes, such as beliefs, morals, philosophy, higher education and travel to distant places.

## Capricorn, the Goat

The Goat is an adept mountain climber, toughened and hardy, and able to withstand the cold winds and rocky terrain of worldly ambition. Calculated steps get you to the top, and relentless determination combined with careful initiative ensures eventual success. Capricorn is associated with career goals, social status, financial security, and dynamic practicality in general. The practicality of Capricorn (following on from and guided by the ethics and ideals of Sagittarius) is far more visionary than the technical efficiency of the sign Virgo.

Capricorn represents a relatively mature stage of development in which responsibility can be shouldered for projects that will affect large numbers of people, such as in the realms of politics and big business. This requires worldly experience and a combination of both discipline and dynamism.

Capricorn is depicted as a goat having a fish’s tail, giving this sign an amphibious quality; a feature it holds in common with its opposite sign, Cancer, the Crab.

Capricorn is the Cardinal sign of the Earthy Triplicity, and as such capable of greater initiative and confidence than the other Earth signs.

Stern old Saturn is the planetary ruler of the sign Capricorn. This sign is indeed associated with father or authority figures whom we look up to and respect for their achievements and proven ability.

Physiologically, Capricorn is said to rule the knees, and one might consider that Saturn, the planetary ruler of Capricorn, is associated with the skin, bones and teeth.

Capricorn, as the 10<sup>th</sup> sign of the zodiac, corresponds to the 10<sup>th</sup> House, which is associated with one's career, public persona and social status.

## ♒ Aquarius, the Water Bearer

The sign Aquarius is depicted as the Water Bearer; a man pouring forth water from a jar or urn. This sign represents a socially idealistic phase that follows and develops from the socially conscious ambitious practicality of Capricorn, the preceding sign. Aquarius represents a more ideological and communication orientated phase of social awareness and social structure than we find in the preceding sign Capricorn. It is significant, though, that Saturn, the planet of structure, rules both Capricorn and Aquarius. Capricorn is the earthy (materialistic) and Aquarius the airy (communicative) expression of Saturn's energy.

Modern western astrologers associate the planet Uranus with Aquarius, and it has been found in practice that the planet Uranus is very eccentric, and even quite volatile. This has led to a tendency to associate the sign Aquarius with these Uranian attributes of unpredictability and unorthodoxy. Even if there is some truth in this idea it seems to have become a little exaggerated. People with prominent Aquarian influences in their charts are often notably Saturnine in their cool and aloof emotional detachment, and many of them are fairly restrained and controlled in the self-expression, and not nearly as wildly eccentric as some of the modern depictions of Aquarius would have us believe. In fact, Aquarius in many respects represents conformism to a set of group ideas or dogmas, though Leo, the sign opposite Aquarius represents the complementary balancing principle of Individuality, which is thus “an issue” for Aquarians.

Aquarius is very much associated with knowledge and those arts and sciences that express social ideals and humanity's collective pool of knowledge and culture, as well as those social communication channels, such as radio stations, or the Internet, for example, that keep people informed and connected.

Physiologically Aquarius is associated with the shins and ankles, as well as the veins, arteries and circulatory system in general. The association of Aquarius with the blood vessels is complimentary to the association of Leo (the sign opposite Aquarius) with the heart.

Aquarius is the Fixed Air sign of the zodiac, and “fixed-air” combines the ideas of holding (fixed) with communication (air); hence the association with collective social values and communication systems and channels that maintain the collective unity of a group.

Aquarius is associated with friendship and groups of individuals that share some or other interest, ideology or value system. The 11<sup>th</sup> House, which corresponds to the sign Aquarius is similarly associated with group activities and friends.

## ♓ Pisces, the Fishes

Pisces is the final sign of the zodiac, representing the closure and ending of the process begun in Aries; it represents a return and surrendering to the "cosmic ocean" or “primordial soup”. In Aquarius humanity's collective unity is realized, but here in Pisces there is a realization of unity that encompasses all that is.

The dissolution of concrete boundaries, distinctions and categories that occurs here can make for empathy, or simply confusion. Sensitivity, vulnerability, aloneness and self-sacrifice are common Pisces themes, yet this is also a sign of mystical realization and one's inner, spiritual life, which can lead to the most universal and ultimate type of connectedness and communion.

Fishes are slippery creatures, and it's not easy to pin Pisces down. There's nothing very specific about the sign Pisces, other than it's association with the vague all-embracing unity underlying all things. Pisces is therefore associated with a distinctly indiscriminate tendency, though this nebulous

and indiscriminate way of being makes for an ability to deal with abstract and paradoxical ideas and gives the potential to *feel* the relatedness of all things and beings on a level that transcends thought and concepts as we normally experience them.

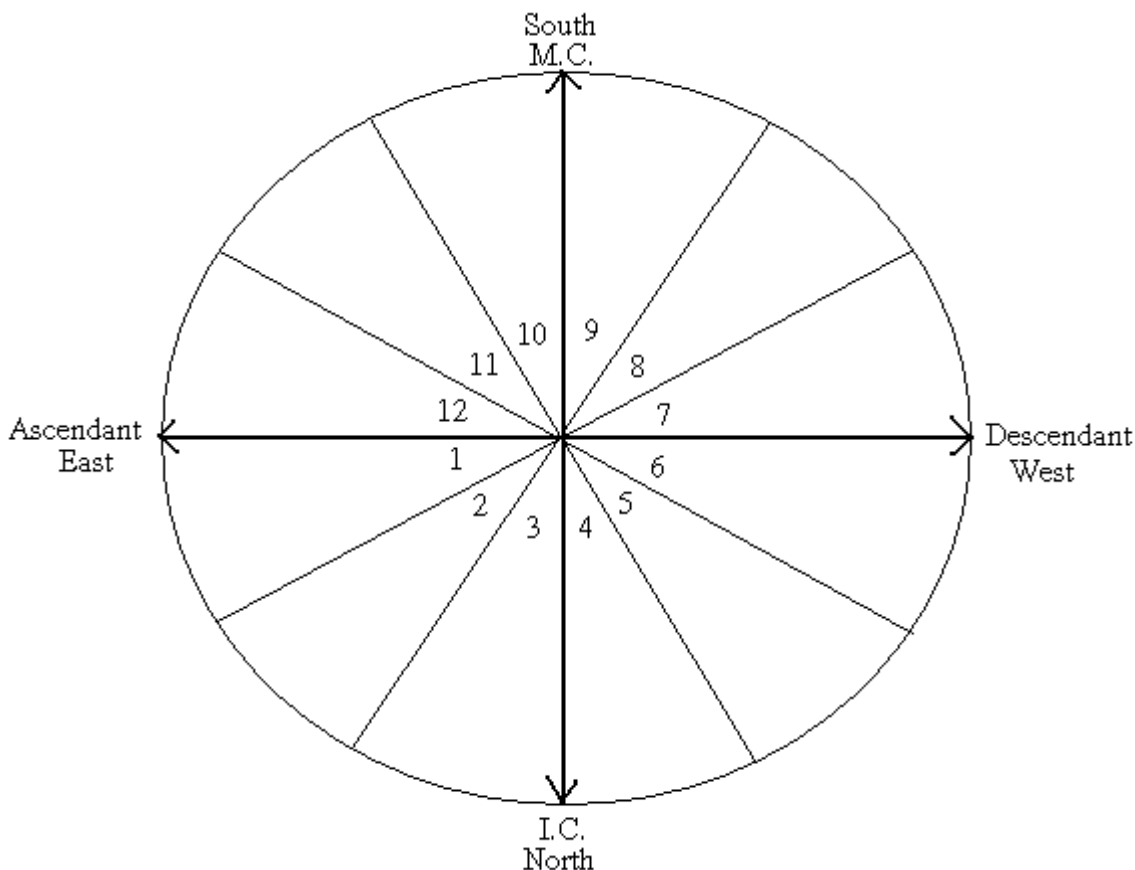
Jupiter is the traditional planetary ruler of Pisces, though Neptune has become associated with it in modern times. This sign belongs to the Mutable Cross and Water Triplicity. Physiologically Pisces rules the feet.

The 12<sup>th</sup> House, which corresponds to the sign Pisces, is associated with Pisces themes such as self-sacrifice and spirituality.

## The Houses

As the Earth spins on its axis it would appear to us, wherever we happen to be on the Earth, that the sky and any heavenly bodies in our field of vision are *rising* in the east, *culminating* overhead, and then *setting* in the west. From our vantage point it *seems* as if we are stationary and that the stars and planets are moving from east to west, but in fact it is our *diurnal* or daily motion, our 24 hourly revolution on our own axis, that creates this illusory appearance. The Houses divide this space around the Earth, along which the Sun, Moon and planets repeat their daily journey, into twelve sections, each associated with specific areas of life.

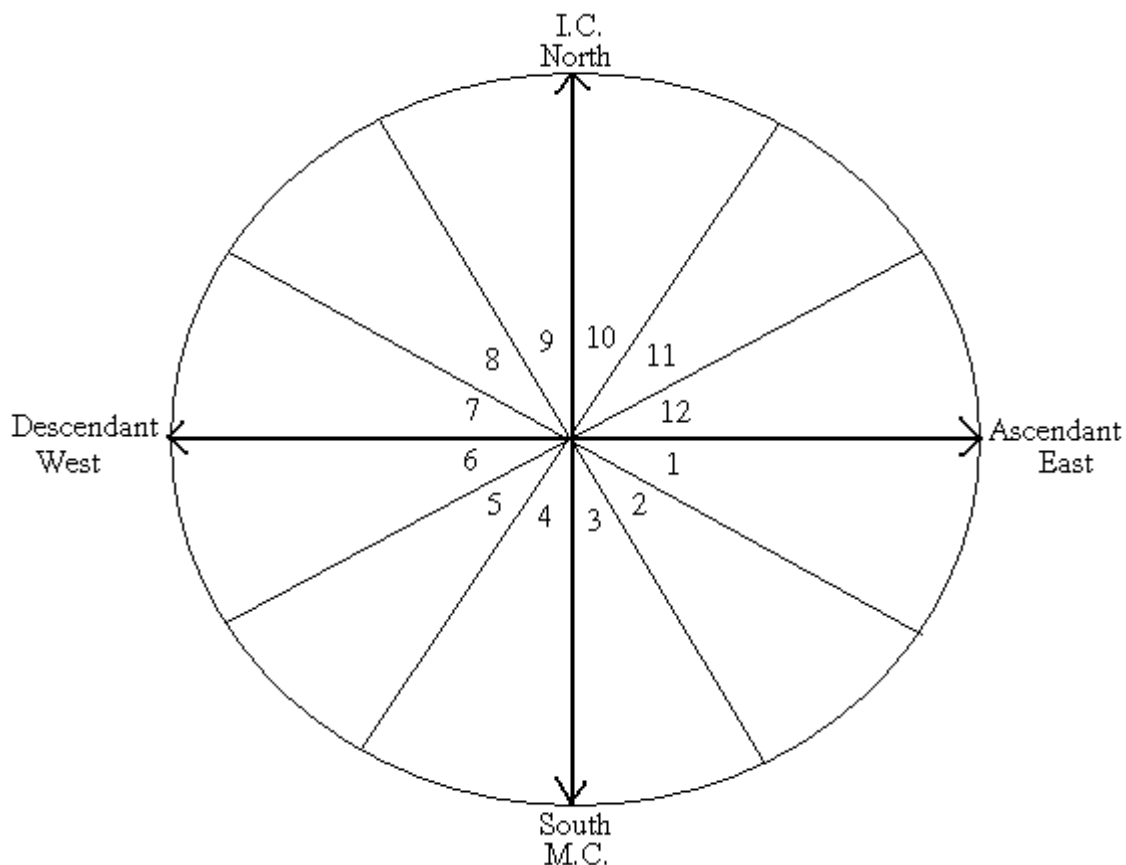
The eastern horizon, or Ascendant, normally marks the cusp of the 1<sup>st</sup> House (corresponding to Aries), and the sequence is started from there. The 1<sup>st</sup> House normally occupies the first 30 degrees or so below the eastern horizon, followed by the 2<sup>nd</sup> House, and so on. The diagram below should convey the idea clearly.



The western horizon is the cusp of the 7<sup>th</sup> House, corresponding to Libra; the cusp of the 10<sup>th</sup> House (corresponding to Capricorn) is usually defined by the Midheaven, or *medium coeli* (usually abbreviated as "M.C."), which is directly overhead- the place in the sky where the Sun would be at noon, where planets reach their highest elevation above the horizon.

The top half of the circle in the above diagram represents what is above the horizon and therefore visible, whereas the lower half of the circle is below the horizon, and therefore anything located there is not visible. Opposite the Midheaven you find the Nadir, or *immium coeli* (I.C.); where the Sun would be at midnight, directly "underfoot", marking the 4<sup>th</sup> House Cusp.

I think it a worthy digression to discuss the question of why South is located at the top of the circle, since North is usually granted that position in maps? In the northern hemisphere one needs to look south, toward the Equator, to see the arc of the ecliptic along which the Sun and planets travel. If you face north in the northern hemisphere the ecliptic will be behind you. So, the above format is perfectly valid in the northern hemisphere, but it would be correct to draw the map differently for the southern hemisphere, where you would have to look north to see the ecliptic (and therefore the Sun, Moon and planets), as shown in the diagram below.



I have never encountered such a "southern hemisphere chart", and the reason the format is not adapted for southern hemisphere charts is because the planets do end up in the same houses (and signs) regardless of where you put north, south, east and west. If, however, you hold a chart in your hands in the southern hemisphere with the Ascendant on the left as it usually is, and if you align the Ascendant with the east and the Descendant with the west, you will be facing south, and the ecliptic (and therefore the Sun, Moon and planets) will be behind you, especially if you are further south than the Tropic of Capricorn.

There are various different *House Systems* endorsed by different astrologers, all employing somewhat different technical criteria for determining the location of the house cusps. The simplest method is the Equal House system in which each house spans 30 degrees exactly, starting at the

Ascendant. Here the 2<sup>nd</sup> House would begin exactly 30 degrees ahead of the Ascending degree of the zodiac, the 3<sup>rd</sup> House another 30 degrees further ahead, and so on. With this method the M.C. is often inserted as a sensitive point but does not mark the 10<sup>th</sup> House cusp as it does in most other western methods of House Division.

The fact that there is no final agreement among astrologers as to the best or correct method to determine the *House Cusps* makes this a potentially awkward and ambiguous facet of astrology; but non-the-less, the houses constitute an important and indispensable component of astrological analysis, and each student has to grapple with this problem as best they can. I personally (at least for now) use mainly the Vedic astrology chart to analyze Houses.

The twelve houses of an astrological birth chart are in a sense another way of using the symbolic concepts you encounter in the zodiac, except that the physical or astronomical factors under consideration are very different. The Houses are more "mundane" in that they divide the immediate physical or earthly environment into different zones of influence. It is also probably correct to say that the houses represent a more material manifestation of the archetypal energies represented by the zodiac signs, as if the houses are the same thing as the signs on a more concrete and mundane octave of manifestation.

Aries and the 1<sup>st</sup> House, for example, are essentially the same idea, so much so, in fact, that some astrology books give exactly the same interpretation for, say, Moon in Aries and Moon in the 1<sup>st</sup> House, or Mars in Gemini and Mars in the 3<sup>rd</sup> House. Although there are certainly parallels between a planet's expression in a given sign and it's expression in the corresponding house, I don't personally take the effects as quite so identical.

Like the signs of the zodiac, the houses can be divided into a number of special groups that share certain common themes or attributes. Some of the more important groupings are listed below:

### The Angular Houses

The "Angles" of the horoscope, the Ascendant, Descendant, M.C. and I.C. are often emphasized in astrological diagrams; they are powerful points in the chart where the energies of planets are potently and very concretely expressed. By extension this increased prominence and potency of expression is also somewhat true for planets occupying any part of Houses corresponding to the Cardinal Signs. These "Angular Houses" (the 1<sup>st</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> & 10<sup>th</sup>) are sometimes described as the *foreground* of the chart (and your life).

### The Four Triplicities

Vedic astrology's approach to dividing the Houses into special groups helps to make explicit some valuable ideas that are certainly valid in western astrology, even if they're not explicitly expressed in the average western astrology textbook. In this regard it is especially fruitful to compare the western and Vedic approaches to what could be termed the division of the Houses into the four elements or Triplicities (fire, earth, air and water).

The "fire houses", the 1<sup>st</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Houses, are sometimes called "life houses" in western astrology, presumably since the fire element is "lively" and energetic, and the 1<sup>st</sup> House in particular can relate to the most basic type of physical vitality and "life-force".

The "earth houses", the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> Houses, are described by western astrologers as "practical" or "substance" Houses; which is perfectly consistent with their correspondence to the Earth signs of the zodiac.

The “air houses”, the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Houses, are referred to as “social” or “communication” Houses by some western sources, which is easy to understand, and valid, since these Houses do relate to these themes.

The “water houses”, the 4<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> Houses are described by Robert Hand (in his book *Horoscope Symbols*) as “unconscious houses”, which is an interesting take on this group, since these Houses do represent energies that are often rather hidden, subliminal and unconscious in us. Many western astrologers would see these “water houses” as related to *feeling* and emotional sensitivity.

None of these western ideas are misleading in my view. I simply find that they are complimented by the Vedic approach in which these four groups are said to relate to “*the four aims of human life*”; Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha.

The Dharma Houses are the 1<sup>st</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup>. Dharma is a word that is defined in various subtly different ways, but in all its shades of meaning it illumines different facets of the “fire houses”, many of which are only hinted at in western astrology. Dharma is often associated with what might be roughly translated as “righteousness”, though in some respects it is closer to the notion of “the natural way of things”, which I find consistent with the spontaneity, integrity and honesty of the 1<sup>st</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Houses. The 9<sup>th</sup> House is perhaps the most closely aligned with the notion of Dharma as righteousness or religion, but the 1<sup>st</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Houses represent Dharma as “the truth of one's being”, as expressed in and through one's essential identity and creativity respectively. Sometimes the Dharma Houses are said to represent your mission or purpose in life, which may or not be something you express or find in and through your career. The Dharma Houses are considered lucky in Vedic astrology, since flowing with the truth of one's being implies flowing with grace and fortune. The 5<sup>th</sup> House in particular is associated with “good karma”.

The Artha Houses are the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> Houses. “Artha” is more or less “wealth” and very similar to the western designation of the “earth houses” as Houses of *Substance*. Through the Artha Houses we gain the material resources we need to sustain ourselves in the physical world.

The Kama Houses are the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup>. “Kama” translates as “desire”, and here we have a relatively different take on the “air houses”. The 3<sup>rd</sup> House relates to our *immediate* or short term desires, and the skill with which we can fulfill them. These are the types of desires which our arms and hands can often help us to grab hold of. Flexibility, mobility and communication skills are obviously also useful in this regard. The 7<sup>th</sup> House relates to the “kama” we have for the spouse. The 11<sup>th</sup> House is associated with longer time desires, or major life goals; our “hopes and wishes”.

The Moksha Houses are the 4<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> Houses. “Moksha” is often translated as “final liberation” and relates to the ultimate destination of the soul after death (which may more often than not be a phase of preparation for reincarnation). Western astrologers would agree that these “water houses” are in a sense the gateways into and out of incarnation, and as such they relate to, and connect us with, dimensions of reality and existence that we are normally rather unconscious and even afraid of.

## Difficult Houses

Both western and Vedic astrology would agree that certain houses represent areas of life that we usually (though perhaps not invariably) experience as difficult and undesirable. These “grief producing houses” (as they are described in Vedic astrology) are the 6<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>, with the 3<sup>rd</sup> House included as a moderately problematic house. Although modern western astrologers would agree that the 6<sup>th</sup> (illness), 8<sup>th</sup> (death) and 12<sup>th</sup> (loss) can indeed represent grievous circumstances, the

3<sup>rd</sup> House is not likely to be seen as difficult by them. It seems, however, that the 3<sup>rd</sup> House was also viewed as moderately difficult in ancient forms of western astrology. All of these grief producing houses have certain positive connotations, and in actual practice it will be found that where these houses are emphasized in a chart people will often experience both the difficulties and the benefits that come with having these zones of the chart enlivened. Of course, depending on the specific factors involved, particular individuals may be more or less able to tune into the positive aspects and minimize the negative effects of these houses. The 8<sup>th</sup> and the 12<sup>th</sup> Houses in particular may well bring various worldly and psychological calamities that ultimately lead directly to the development of extraordinary insight, sensitivity and spiritual depth.

## 1st House

The 1<sup>st</sup> House corresponds to Aries and is more or less synonymous with the Ascendant; it is associated with your self, your identity, and your outstanding personal characteristics. It is often associated with the physical appearance and body (health) in general. Any planet in the 1<sup>st</sup> House is greatly enhanced in strength and importance in the chart as a whole, it represents qualities and attributes we embody or radiate to the world. This may prove exceptionally true of a planet close to the Ascendant. The 1<sup>st</sup> House is the pinnacle of the chart, the ultimate synthesis of the whole being and all the other houses; therefore a strong 1<sup>st</sup> House (and 1<sup>st</sup> House ruler) improves the entire chart, and of course the reverse also holds true.

## 2nd House

The 2<sup>nd</sup> House corresponds to Taurus; it is associated with money, property and material assets. Western astrology doesn't usually offer much more than this on the 2<sup>nd</sup> House, but Vedic astrology further associates the 2<sup>nd</sup> House with speech (Taurus rules the throat and neck and ears), and by extension, orally transmitted knowledge (early education), what you eat, as well as the "luster of the face".

## 3rd House

The 3<sup>rd</sup> House corresponds to Gemini, and is associated with siblings, relatives and neighbors, short journeys, routine day to day encounters and communications, the mind and basic education; our dexterity and ability to interact effectively with people and our environment in general.

## 4th House

The 4<sup>th</sup> House corresponds to the sign Cancer, and shares with Cancer an association with the home and family life. Generally this house is related to the mother (the opposite 10<sup>th</sup> House is usually associated with the father), but some say that the 4<sup>th</sup> House represents the parent of the opposite sex, and the 10<sup>th</sup> House the parent of the same sex. So, both the 4<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> Houses can represent the parents, as well as representing, in a sense, our internal and external life respectively. The 4<sup>th</sup> House is our inner foundation, our psychological, emotional basis. The Sun is in the region of the 4<sup>th</sup> House around midnight; it is (ideally) a place of rest, peace and recuperation.

## 5th House

The 5<sup>th</sup> House corresponds to Leo, and shares with that sign qualities like self-confidence and a gregarious type of self expression. This house is associated with children, creativity, playful games, fun and recreation, romance, devotion, spontaneous enjoyment, and things we do with/for heartfelt pleasure. "Self realization" rhymes with "5<sup>th</sup> House"...

## 6th House

The 6<sup>th</sup> House corresponds to Virgo and is associated with service, efficiency, effort, employment and health issues. Planets and signs that occupy the 6<sup>th</sup> House may represent areas of the body liable to experience problems. The 6<sup>th</sup> House can indicate our approach to work, as well as the types of co-workers we may be drawn to, and our experiences with/through them. However, the 10<sup>th</sup> House, 1<sup>st</sup> House, and the condition of the planet Saturn, as well as other factors dependent on the individual's unique planetary positions, may come to bear on our "work and career" issues. Employees and servants, as well as household pets, are represented by the 6<sup>th</sup> House.

## 7th House

The 7<sup>th</sup> House corresponds to Libra. Usually the Western Horizon (or Descendant) marks the cusp of the 7<sup>th</sup> House. This area of the chart is primarily associated with relationships, marriage and partnerships; all "face-to-face" encounters, including consultations or confrontations with others. Planets and signs in the 7<sup>th</sup> House describe our approach to, and experience of relationships, as well as indicating the type of person to whom we are attracted in partnership, consultation or competition. These significant others will tend to literally have the planets/sign in your 7<sup>th</sup> prominent in their charts. However, there are various other factors that contribute to the astrological view of relationships; most notably the role of Venus (specifically in the context of romantic relationships).

## 8th House

The 8<sup>th</sup> House corresponds to Scorpio, and shares with that sign an association with certain deep and dark facets of life; such as death, sex, crime and the occult. Planets in the 8<sup>th</sup> House are relatively obscure and hidden in the chart, and generally an 8<sup>th</sup> House planet may undergo some trouble or difficulty. Since the 8<sup>th</sup> House is the 2<sup>nd</sup> House from the 7<sup>th</sup> House, it is associated with the money and income of the partner, and generally shared or inherited resources. At best the 8<sup>th</sup> House can give us penetrating insight into mysteries, or, at worst, the 8<sup>th</sup> House awakens fears, phobias, dark suspicions, and creates crises and tragedies.

## 9th House

The 9<sup>th</sup> House corresponds to Sagittarius, and shares with Sagittarius qualities like noble aspiration, and an interest in religion and philosophy. The 9<sup>th</sup> House describes our moral, ethical and religious beliefs, as well as higher education in general. The 9<sup>th</sup> House is concerned with exploration, mental or physical, and so is also associated with long journeys and experiences in foreign lands. Since the

9<sup>th</sup> House is the 3<sup>rd</sup> House from the 7<sup>th</sup>, it relates to the relatives and siblings of the partner, and is therefore generally designated as a house of "in-laws".

## 10th House

The 10<sup>th</sup> House corresponds to Capricorn; it represents our social status, reputation and career. Planets are powerfully and prominently positioned here, and tend to mold our ambitions and describe the type of profession we are suited for or likely to pursue. The 10<sup>th</sup> House is commonly associated with the father, and authority figures and bosses are seen in the 10<sup>th</sup> House. Only the 1<sup>st</sup> House makes a planet's influence more prominent and imposing in the chart as a whole. Planets in the 1<sup>st</sup> House are often associated with one's career, probably inasmuch as we are to a great extent identified by our social standing, and in a sense planets in the 10<sup>th</sup> also have a more general tendency to define or identify; more specifically what we could term our "public persona".

## 11th House

The 11<sup>th</sup> House corresponds to Aquarius, and shows our friendships and group activities. Planets and signs in the 11<sup>th</sup> House will describe our friends, and our typical patterns in group activities, including the types of groups or clubs we might belong to. Your friends will often literally have the signs and/or planets located in your 11<sup>th</sup> House. The 11<sup>th</sup> House is often referred to as the house of "hopes and wishes", and in this regard may describe major or long-term life goals. The 11<sup>th</sup> House can represent "gains", and in Vedic astrology in particular it has an important bearing in the ability to earn wealth, and is used (along with the 2<sup>nd</sup> House) to assess financial prospects.

## 12th House

The 12<sup>th</sup> House corresponds to Pisces, and shares with Pisces an association with spirituality, seclusion and sacrifice. As the last of the twelve houses it represents endings, renunciation, surrender, withdrawal and rest. The 12<sup>th</sup> House is often regarded as a place of misfortune, difficulty, secret enemies, losses, confinement and obscurity. Prisons, hospitals and charitable institutions are associated with this house. The 12<sup>th</sup> House carries an important spiritual connotation, and relates to one's inner life and also that which is hidden and unconscious. The 12<sup>th</sup> House can greatly enhance sensitivity and empathy, but also sometimes indicates confusion and a sense of futility and hopelessness. Secret, subtle and subliminal things are ruled by the 12<sup>th</sup> House.

## Aspects

Aspects are special geometric angles formed by the planets (or other vital points, such as the Ascendant and Midheaven) according to their relative positions in the zodiac. In most astrological birth-charts aspects are indicated by lines connecting the planets, and these lines are often of different colors, to indicate the different types of aspects.

When in aspect, planets interact and combine their energies, and the results of the planetary relationship that is established depends on the qualities of the planets involved, as well as the inherent attributes of the specific type of aspect which connects them.

The most important and commonly used aspects are all multiples of 30 degrees (one zodiac sign), and, in fact, every 30 degree multiple angle is a significant aspect, and this is a very important and useful fact to remember. For this reason two planets located at (or very near) *the same numbered degree of any two signs* will always be in aspect. For example, if a planet is located at, say, 6 degrees Gemini, it will be forming some or other aspect to any other planet or vital point located at 6 degrees of *any other sign* (or the same sign, which would constitute a Conjunction). If one is thoroughly familiar with the different groupings of the zodiac signs (Elements, Crosses, Masculine/Feminine Signs, etc.) it will be much easier to identify and relate to the most important and commonly used aspects.

### Conjunction

A Conjunction is formed by planets located close together. Planets occupying the same degree of the same sign will be in exact Conjunction. The Conjunction could be termed a “1<sup>st</sup> House aspect” since planets in Conjunction are in the 1<sup>st</sup> House from each other, so to speak. It represents beginnings, and generally planets in Conjunction are powerfully united, and their energies merge.

### Semi-Sextile

A Semi-Sextile aspect is formed by planets 30 degrees (or one full sign) apart. It is the weakest and subtlest of the 30 degree multiple aspects. The Semi-Sextile aspect could be termed a “2/12” relationship. If, for example, the Sun is located at 5 degrees Cancer and the Moon is located at 5 degrees Leo, then we could say that the Sun is in the 12<sup>th</sup> House from the Moon and the Moon is the 2<sup>nd</sup> House from the Sun. Apart from the general fact that the Semi-Sextile is relatively weak and subtle in its effects, it may well manifest in 2<sup>nd</sup> House and 12<sup>th</sup> Houses ways. The 12<sup>th</sup> House association gives it a subliminal or hidden quality, whereas the 2<sup>nd</sup> House connotation hints at financial, property or ownership related themes.

### Sextile

A Sextile aspect is formed by planets located 60 degrees (of two full signs) apart. Fire and Air signs nearest each other, and Earth and Water signs nearest each other are in Sextile relationship. The Sextile aspect could be termed a “3/11” type relationship. For example, if Mercury were located at 15 degrees Taurus and Mars were located at 15 degrees Cancer they would be in Sextile aspect, and we could further say that Mars is here in the 3<sup>rd</sup> House from Mercury, and that Mercury is in the 11<sup>th</sup> House from Mars. The Sextile aspect may well manifest with, in or through such 3<sup>rd</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> House themes as friendship, group activity, day-to-day communications and neighborly relationships.

### Square

The Square aspect is formed by planets located 90 degrees apart. Signs that belong to the same Cross (Cardinal, Fixed or Mutable) will be in a Square relationship (except, of course, signs opposite each other, which also belong to the same Cross). The Square could be termed a “4/10” relationship; planets in Square aspect are either in the 4<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> Houses from each other. If, for example, Venus is located at 12 degrees Leo and Saturn at 12 degrees Scorpio they are in an exact Square aspect, and we could say that Venus is in the 10<sup>th</sup> House from Saturn and Saturn in the 4<sup>th</sup> House from Venus. Square aspects will tend to manifest in and through 4<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> House arenas, such as a person's domestic or professional life (which are perhaps the most basic or foundational aspects of a person's psychological and worldly security).

## Trine

The Trine aspect is formed by planets located 120 degrees apart, normally in signs belonging to the same Element (Fire, Earth, Air, Water). The Trine aspect could be described as a “5/9” relationship, since planets in Trine aspect are either 5 or 9 Houses apart. The 5<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Houses represent creativity, spontaneity, aspiration and realization, and these attributes or themes also characterize the qualities of the Trine aspect. It is apparently this fact that makes the Trine so “benefic” and benign.

## Quincunx

The Quincunx aspect (also known as an “Inconjunct”) is formed by planets located 150 degrees apart. For example, Gemini is Opposite Sagittarius, and will be in Quincunx type relation to Scorpio and Capricorn, the signs on either side of Sagittarius. The Quincunx is a “6/8” aspect, and often manifests with/through 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> House themes such as work, service, health issues, obligations and liabilities to others (or theirs to you), shared resources, debts etc.

## Opposition

The Opposition aspect is formed by planets located 180 degrees apart, directly opposite each other in the zodiac. The Opposition aspect could be described as a “7/7” type relationship, since two planets in Opposition to each other or both in the 7<sup>th</sup> House from each other. This 7<sup>th</sup> House connotation results in Opposition aspects manifesting in and through partnerships, confrontations and meaningful one-to-one encounters with others. The Opposition also generally brings things into full objective manifestation and awareness.

The Conjunction, Sextile, Square, Trine and Opposition are known as the "Major Aspects", and many astrology books only provide interpretations for these aspects. Traditionally the Sextile and Trine are considered harmonious and beneficial, whereas the Square and Opposition aspects were described as “adverse” and discordant. The Conjunction, in this context, is viewed as variable, the result depending largely on the nature of the planets involved. There is certainly some merit in this classification, but it is often taken too literally, even by modern western astrologers who pride themselves in being non-fatalistic. It seems that the Conjunction, Square and Opposition are so potent or vigorous in the way they combine energies that an imbalanced or excessive expression of the energies they combine is more probable than with the Sextile or Trine. Conversely, the Trine and Sextile seem to be simply too gentle to make for dramatically negative consequences, though there are instances where even these “benefic aspects” can create tensions and uncomfortable experiences (and I'll add that I think I've seen this more often with the Sextile than the Trine).

It would furthermore be appropriate to emphasize that the *Conjunction* and *Opposition* aspects are the most important and powerful of all the aspects. In Vedic astrology, which employs aspects quite differently to western astrology, planets in the same or opposite signs are automatically in aspect. Whenever two planets are in Conjunction or Opposition from our perspective you actually have a straight line between three heavenly bodies in the Solar System; the two planets involved, and the Earth.

When two planets combine in aspect, the *primary* factor is the range of possible results or consequences of those two planets connecting, *regardless of the specific type of aspect*. While the different aspects certainly connect planets in *varying degrees of intensity* (Oppositions are stronger than Sextiles, etc.), and although each aspect has certain *themes and qualities of its own*, there is a misguided tendency to assume that, say, a Mercury/Mars Square is very different from a

Mercury/Mars Trine. The more fundamental truth here is that both are Mercury/Mars aspects, both are combinations of Mercurial intellect and Martian self-assertion. The lesser factor is the fact that a Square is more abrupt in its manifestation than the inherent graciousness of the Trine aspect. ALL Mercury/Mars aspects, for example, relate to intellectual dynamism, and/or verbal self-assertiveness, etc. etc.

## Aspect ORBS

The specific geometric angles that constitute the various aspects have been given above, but one might ask how much error or deviation from the precise angle (30, 60, 90, etc.) is tolerable? This range of allowable deviation is known as the "orb" of an aspect. This word is used to refer to both the maximum error allowable, as well as to the actual amount of error in any given instance. For example, we may say that we will allow for a 5 degree orb for Sextile aspects, but in a given instance a Sextile aspect may be within an orb of 3 degrees.

The allowable orbs vary in different contexts, and among different practitioners. It is, however, generally agreed that the smaller the error the stronger or more focused the aspect will be. To begin with we need to distinguish between "Natal to Natal" orbs, and orbs in other contexts. By "Natal to Natal" we mean aspects between one planet (or other sensitive point) in a birth chart and another planet *in the same birth chart*. As soon as we start comparing planets in one birth chart to planets in another birth chart, or Transiting (the currently moving) planets' positions to the planets in a given birth chart, we need to adapt the orbs.

The following orbs are suggested for "Natal to Natal" aspects; aspects between planets within the same birth chart. The stronger types of aspects are naturally effective within wider orbs.-

**Conjunction and Opposition:** 8 – 9 degrees

**Square and Trine:** 7 degrees

**Sextile:** 5 degrees

**Quincunx:** 3 degrees

**Semi-Sextile** 1.5 or 2 degrees

There are one or two further considerations that could influence the amount of orb allowed and/or the amount of priority or emphasis given to a particular aspect in a specific case. Firstly, the Sun and Moon are generally more important or powerful in their effects than the other planets, so aspects involving them might justify a slight stretching of orbs. Even when they are well within the orbs used, aspects involving the Sun and Moon should be given greater priority. Under certain circumstances other planets may gain special status, by being the Ascendant Ruler, for example, and some may view this as justification for stretching orbs for aspects involving that planet.

Then there's the consideration of whether an aspect is "*attaching*" or "*separating*". When the fast moving Moon, for instance, is located at 7 degrees Aquarius, and slow moving Saturn is placed at 11 degrees Libra, then apart from the fact that there is Trine aspect between them within an orb of about 4 degrees, we should note that the aspect is *attaching* or *applying*, since the faster moving Moon is moving ever closer to the exact Trine to slower moving Saturn. If, however, the Moon were located at 11 degrees Aquarius and Saturn at 7 degrees Libra the Trine aspect between them would be *separating*, and therefore waning or weakening. Generally attaching aspects are stronger than separating aspects, and sometimes one might stretch the orbs just a little for an attaching aspect that is just out of orb.

## Transits and Progressions

Transits and Progressions are the primary methods used for calculating life cycles in basic modern western astrology, and in this context aspects play a very prominent role. Aspect orbs are here

normally kept down to 1 or 2 degrees.

The moving positions of the planets, or their actual positions at any given time, are known as the *Transiting* positions. Calculating astrological *Transits* involves comparing the positions of the planets for any given time under consideration to the (Natal) positions at birth. Aspects between the Transiting and Natal (birth) positions are noted, as well as the Houses of the birth chart in which a Transiting planet would be passing through. If, as a simple example, Leo occupies the 2<sup>nd</sup> House of your birth chart, a Transiting planet will occupy and influence (according to it's nature) your 2<sup>nd</sup> House (and therefor financial affairs) while it is traveling through the sign Leo. If, for example, it is the Moon, this influence will last just over two days, whereas if it is Saturn it will last over two years.

There are various types of *Progressions*. The most traditional approach is known as *Secondary Progressions*, or the “day-to-a-year” method. The axiom states: *a day corresponds to a year*. So, for example, the positions of the planets 30 *days* after your birth will represent developments in your life 30 *years* after your birth. In other words, the *Transits* 30 days after your birth correspond the *Progressions* 30 years after your birth. Here aspects between the Progressed and Natal positions are the main consideration, though attention is given to the Houses of the Natal chart the Progressed Moon is passing through (all other planets will take decades to move through one House).

There is a variation of the above method of calculating Progressions known as *Solar Arc Progressions*. As the name implies, it involves progressing all the planets ahead the same number of degrees as the Progressed Sun would travel according to the day-to-a-year method by the age under consideration. Since the Sun moves about 1 degree a day a rough-and-ready way of calculating Solar Arc Progressions would be to add 1 degree to every natal planet for every year lived, and then calculate the aspects from the Progressed to the Natal (birth) positions.

There are other types of Progressions and life cycles, but the above are the most common and should suffice for most purposes.