

Beyond the Zodiacal Debate

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Vedic astrology is enjoying a renaissance in the most unlikely of times. Yet, what is more surprising is the degree of controversy and disagreements that exist among astrologers. As a result, Vedic astrology can no longer be viewed as universally as it once was. A reading with a Vedic astrologer now begs two essential questions: What zodiac are you using, tropical or sidereal? And what ayanamsha do you use? Depending on the answers to these two questions, the reading given by one astrologer can differ in varying degrees to that from another astrologer--both of whom consider themselves to be practicing "Vedic" astrology. How is one to make sense of this?

Currently, the Vedic astrology community is suffering divisive (and even disparaging) debates around which zodiac is "correct": tropical or sidereal? Unfortunately, this is becoming the perennial question in astrology. In contrast to determining which of the two zodiacs is correct, I would like to suggest (as other astrologers have) that it is not a question of choosing one over the other. Rather, we must instead shift our perspective to understand that there are two zodiacs and each zodiac has its relevance.

The majority of Vedic astrologers choose to use the sidereal zodiac for determining the signs and nakshatras. My teacher, Ernst Wilhelm, was the first to explore the validity of using the tropical zodiac for determining the signs and the sidereal for determining nakshatras. This is now catching on among astrologers and many are using this system successfully, myself included. Regardless of which zodiac an astrologer uses to determine the signs, everyone is using the sidereal zodiac to determine the nakshatras--at least on this much, we can all agree.

The longitudinal difference between the tropical and sidereal zodiac is known as "ayanamsha" in Sanskrit ("ayana" means "movement" and "amsha" means "component"). Although 5,000 years ago the two zodiacs lined up quite nicely, currently the difference between the tropical and sidereal zodiac is nearly one sign. Depending on the zodiac being used, the Ascendant can differ by an entire sign, which then changes the houses and signs for all the other planets. A person who has a reading with a sidereal astrologer and later with a tropical astrologer may begin to feel schizophrenic! In this case, one has to

choose with what resonates the most. This is more difficult than it seems, as it is human nature to choose what sounds the best, even if the other is more accurate. Ultimately, this only complicates the matter further.

The truth is that there is no answer or solution to the zodiacal debate. There are only choices. Astrology concerns itself with the mysteries of life, and despite its mathematical precision, will always remain mysterious. If destiny could be reduced to mathematical calculations, then anyone with astrology software could be an astrologer. The calculations (and their accuracy) are very important, but what defines an astrologer is the ability to perceive the underlying (and obvious) patterns of life as seen in the birth chart. This is why Vedic astrology is considered to be the "eye" of the Vedas. We must not forget that a good astrologer can always give a good reading, despite the zodiac and ayanamsha used. A true astrologer must look not only to the obvious realities (Ascendant and placement of planets) but to what the chart as a dynamic and interrelated whole is indicating in relationship to the person. We must not forget while we strive for accuracy that astrology also requires intuition, and that there is a psychic dimension to any reading.

The question of zodiacs is an important one that should be intelligently and openly considered. But, if the sacred practice of astrology is to continue to be both sacred and helpful to others, then astrologers must move beyond the mood of zodiacal debate. Intelligent and open-minded inquiry is the means for reaching conclusions. Divisive debates, where one attempts to successfully prove the other to be wrong, is neither comprised of intelligent conversation nor intelligent conclusions. It is a self-inflated drama of emotions, devoid of real and fruitful consideration.

Astrology is based on an understanding of the intrinsic unity of existence. As such, astrologers must champion the deepest truths of life, rather than creating divisions among themselves. Vedic astrology is known as "Jyotish" in Sanskrit, often translated as "the science of light". Astrologers should therefore be a light in a darkened world, radiant with truth, and shining with the profundity that is itself at the root of this sacred science.

For further reading on the topic of zodiacs, I recommend Ernst Wilhem's article "The Mysteries of the Zodiac", which in my view is the most balanced and erudite presentation of this issue to date: <http://www.vedic-astrology.net/Articles/Mystery-of-the-Zodiac.pdf>