

A New Approach to the Zodiac by Dane Rudhyar

Part One *The Process of Human Existence and the Four Elements*

One of the main factors which makes it difficult for a modern mind, having developed under the influence of contemporary philosophies and psychologies, to accept astrology is the astrologer's reliance upon archaic traditions and his use of a technical language equally based on an archaic approach to the world and its problems.

Archaeologists pursue a very valuable activity in reconstituting from the few remaining records of the past the general outlines of the culture, the institutions and the science of ancient China, India, Egypt or Chaldea, provided that their conclusions are not based on the study of only a limited section of the culture being studied — which does often happen! However, we are living today. The fundamental concern of astrologers should be with the existing problems and personal attitudes of men and women who are now asking questions and seeking solutions in terms of the concepts and emotional drives which modern society has produced.

Each civilization has its basic way of meeting the various problems it faces. In the ancient past, astrology was an essential component in man's attempts to solve his physical uncertainties and his psychological anxieties concerning the future. It was a fundamental technique for the discovery of the order and periodicity which we realize to be inherent in the sequence of our experiences when we take a really objective attitude toward them. The manifestation in the future of what is periodic can be predicted, and what can be classified can be given a well-defined place in our environment and a precise name. Knowing where anything "belongs" and what it is called produces a sense of security and the feeling that somehow we can **control** events.

However, it is becoming increasingly clear in some modern sciences — particularly the ones which deal with human beings, their welfare and their ills (physical or psychological) — that by stressing the exact place of and giving precise names to what happens, we may also lose contact with the deepest realities of existence.

Existence is seen more and more as **a process** — thus, as a series of more or less exactly "cyclic" transformations. We realize that what is most important is the process-as-a-whole, not the separate events to which we gave set characteristics. To consider what happens at a particular time as an "entity" with a name inevitably emphasizes its separation

from other entities; whereas if we think of any event and phenomenon — or even of any person, race or society — as a **phase** of some vast process, we gain a new perspective on life — a truly "modern" outlook.

The type of astrology almost everywhere in use today is based on set classifications and on traditional technical names. Each sign or house is given a variety of more or less precise features or characteristics. It stands as an entity to which, in most cases, a moral signification (good or bad, fortunate or unfortunate) is attributed. Likewise, an "aspect" — such as a square — has a definite character simply because it reveals that two astrological factors (celestial bodies or symbolic points) make a 90° angle to each other. According to this purely abstract concept of "aspect," a square of the Moon and the Sun has a meaning which applies equally well to two different "existential situations" (i.e., to two actual human experiences) called First Quarter and Last Quarter of the Moon.

A square aspect between the Sun and Moon is, however (from the modern point of view), only a phase in the cyclic process defined by the related cyclic movements of the (apparent) Sun and Moon — a process which begins at the conjunction (New Moon) and reaches an apex in the opposition (Full Moon). The square aspect following the New Moon (First Quarter) cannot logically have the same meaning — in terms of the cycle as a whole — as the square which belongs to the waning hemicycle of the lunation cycle (Last Quarter). This applies as well to any aspect between two moving celestial bodies.

From this same "modern" point of view, the zodiac represents also a process. It should be referred to the basic human experience of the seasons and applied to all that is affected by the seasonal rhythm of the year. Indeed, it seems very likely that the zodiac was **originally** a seasonal cycle, a time factor. Only later in the **classical** cultures of India, Egypt, Babylon (three or four millennia ago) did it become a **spatial** pattern, a geometric and figurative method of dividing the sky for the purpose of mapping more exactly the movements of the planets. Such a transformation would parallel quite exactly that of music, for music originally was based on series of **tones** and rhythms; only in "classical" periods, and particularly in Greece, did **intervals** (and "notes," as abstract components of the scales or series of intervals) become fundamental elements of a music in which, after a while, notation and the score which could be read emphasized further the "spatial" or geometric factor.

Music is emerging today — thanks to tape recorders and electronic devices — into a new world of unbound possibilities, by stressing the primary factor of sound, the direct experience of tone and rhythm — by replacing spatial patterns on printed scores by durational processes of tone transformation. This is a key to the modern world we are entering into; and it can — indeed, I believe it should be — applied to astrology, by reasserting the sense of process and flow of experience and by transforming not only our approach to the zodiac, but our entire picture of the solar system and the universe as well.

We are not living in ancient India or Babylon. We are living today — and the rigid doctrines and rationalisms of the past have been discredited and proven unable to solve the

problems of our present-day existence. Yes, in a sense, ours is a "primitive" age. It is so in the sense that we must reassert the primacy of human existence and the immediacy of our experience of life — life, with its many phases and its various levels of activity.

The Experience of Seasonal Change

Aries, Cancer, Libra, Capricorn considered as signs of the zodiac are names given by our civilization to certain basic turning points or phases in the cycle of seasonal changes which affects the rhythm of all that lives on the earth surface. These changes are factual, existential, emotional — thus, real. They do not depend on celestial maps drawn by priests or intellectuals, stargazers or astronomers. You and I live them. Modern civilization tends to blur the sharpness of the seasonal changes, making available heat and tropical fruits in winter, and so on. Yet under the varnish of a possibly dying civilization, the "fundamental nature" of man cannot be suppressed. Denying it, men turn neurotic, insane, criminals — or are "safely" depersonalized into robots.

The value of the experience of seasonal change is basic for man. Greatly creative cultures seem to have developed mostly where this change was deeply marked, yet not so severe as to produce the extreme phase called hibernation. In some cases, the change was most marked as an alternation of wet and dry weather; but in any case, the great symbol of the yearly process has been the change made visible by vegetation with its two fundamental modes of existence — the **plant state** (characterized especially by the leaf, modified into flower for fecundative purposes) and the **seed state**.

The zodiac as a seasonal process is symbolized by these two conditions of existence in yearly alternation. The plant state reveals its fullness when the days are longest (Cancer); the seed state experiences its mysterious moment of inner transformation, represented in our culture by Christ-birth, when the nights are longest (Capricorn).

This yearly rhythm of alternation became obviously connected with the changes in the Sun's elevation in the sky, particularly with the changing places, through the year, of the Sun's setting. Stone pillars were erected in the most ancient past to mark the places at which the Sun sets at regular intervals during the year, and this seems to have been the first zodiac — a fact of human experience relating the Sun to the earth horizon. What we call Aries is the phase of the yearly cycle of this Sun-earth relationship at which the Sun sets exactly at the west before the setting point begins to creep slowly northward — Libra, the phase at which the Sun also sets exactly west — but thereafter sets more and more southward. These are the equinoctial moments of the yearly process. The extreme places of setting north and south are, respectively, Cancer and Capricorn — the two solstitial cultures which actually are rooted in the soil of the southern hemisphere.

According to our astrological traditions which differ in other civilizations, like the ancient Chinese, these four fundamental phases of the seasonal process — and, thus, of the earth-to-Sun relationship — are symbolized by the four "elements": fire, water, air and earth. Fire and air are equinoctial; they mark situations of day-night equilibrium and of

intense momentum of change in the seasonal cycle. Fire starts the seed germinating and ends, thus, the seed state; air releases the seed from the seasonal plant which, as this happens, begins to die.

These astrological, as well as chemical elements are often only superficially understood. The names they carry are obvious "blinds," as we can well see from alchemical traditions; and the connection between alchemy and astrology (and also religious rites and musical modes) has been shown clearly at various times, particularly in the Syria of the days of the Crusades. These four elements constitute the basic quaternary which is the structural factor in all cyclic manifestations: and it can be related to the Hebrew **Tetragrammaton**, the sacred four-letter names of God, J H V H (**Jod, He, Van, He**). The first letter refers to the animating principle, fire. Fire consumes or tears open all that is the seed results of the past; it is the divine will to renewal which makes whatever had until then manifested past and obsolete **as a concrete form**.

The third letter of the sacred name (the **Vau**) represents the element air. Air is the unifying factor in life; it balances the differentiating power, fire. Water (the first **He** letter) and earth (the second **He** letter) refer to the types of pressures that change intensely dynamic urges into static accomplishments. In a sense, these two elements have the same character; but they operate upon two forces of opposite polarities, fire and air. Fire plus water produces **individual living organisms** which cry out their individuality in midsummer; air plus earth produces **collective social organizations** which propagate their achievements (while glorying in them) in midwinter.

The spring phases of the seasonal cycle (Aries, Taurus, Gemini) particularize the universal; the autumn phases generalize the particular. Water triumphs in the particular organism that has isolated itself from other organisms (Cancer, the home, the individual ego-centered person). Earth triumphs in generally accepted, held valid and obeyed "institutions" — at the limit, the State (Capricorn) — within which individuals find themselves integrated.

In the second part of this brief study, the character of each of the four elements will be analyzed in greater detail; but it must be said at once that each element has its primary manifestation in three zodiacs. There are three zodiacs because **while the process of human existence is one, it operates at three levels**. Each level has its reflections or anticipations upon the other; thus, the fourfold character of each zodiac expands into a twelvefold (three times four) pattern.

These three levels refer to **(1) Life**, as a cosmic power generating periodically new forms; **(2) Personality** and the development of the ego or "I am" feeling; **(3) Mentality**, this word being understood as the correlated activity of a group of individuals who together are building complex patterns of thought (for instance, a culture as a whole, "science" as an integrated system of classification and interpretation of natural phenomena and human experiences).

The first zodiac begins with Aries; the second, with Leo; the third, with Sagittarius. Each, I repeat, represents a process which can be defined by a periodical sequence of four basic phases which are given the symbolical names of fire, water, air and earth. It is the constant interaction of these three processes at three levels which constitutes what we call "human existence." "Man" is that complex being in whom these three processes are integrated. The integration may be consonant or dissonant. It may emphasize one process and one level at the expense of the others.

The possibilities of combinations are almost infinite when one considers how each phase of each process and its subdivisions can be **activated** in one way or another by the cyclic interactions of the planetary movements. Each combination establishes the "seed pattern" of a particular form of individuality, and it indicates (through its extension as "progressions" and "transits") the natural unfoldment of its innate potential (**1**) as a living organism, (**2**) as a personality and (**3**) as a participant in the mental activity of a community or of mankind as a whole.

Part Two

The Three Zodiacs and Their Interactions

The main ideas formulated in the first part of this study are as follows:

(1) The primordial and basic character of the zodiac is that of **the seasonal cycle of the year**, a cycle which refers to facts deeply affecting all existence and the actual experiences of all people. It was originally measured by the periodic changes in the settings of the Sun. The idea of using "constellations" as a means to map out more precisely and geometrically the movement of the Sun in the sky came, most likely, only as the great cultures of the past reached their intellectualistic and "classical" stage under the leadership of colleges of priests, mathematicians or astrologers working for the State.

(2) The zodiac refers to a **fourfold process or rhythm of existence**. Its four basic phases are symbolized by the four elements: fire, water, air and earth. Seen from the point of view of man's biological and natural existence, these phases correspond to the spring, summer, autumn and winter seasons, the beginnings of which we identify in the northern hemisphere as Aries, Cancer, Libra and Capricorn (the names having to be reversed in the southern hemisphere if there is any logic in astrology).

(3) However, a human being is a complex being able to **function at three levels of activity** by focusing its attention and consciousness upon each of them, in turn or simultaneously. One can, therefore, speak of three zodiacs, each starting at the time of the year most conducive to the type of activity with which it correlates.

The element fire represents always the start of the fourfold process at each of the three levels. These refer to **life, personality and mentality**.

(4) These three processes constantly interact, and each of the phases of one process is **anticipated or reflected** by intermediary phases in the other processes. Existence is indeed one vast, complex process. Every human being participates in it according to the **particular possibilities** represented by his or her birth-chart and according to the timing and place of his or her activities at this or that level of existence.

Four Elements – Three Levels

"Life" is the root foundation of all existence; without a physical biological organism — a body — a human being cannot exist as an entity able to experience and, **through experience**, to raise his powers of attention and his desire to act to "higher" (i.e., more conscious) levels. We can analyze a body, dissect it and give names to all its parts; but this anatomical knowledge is quite meaningless unless we make it subservient to a

comprehension of the immensely complex processes which go on, in total interdependence, within this physical organism.

It is quite erroneous, I believe, to think that astrology deals with anatomical structures. It deals primarily with processes, secondarily with zones of the body in which these processes operate. When astrologers say that certain parts of the body are "ruled" by certain zodiacal signs, they should have clearly in mind that these parts are selected mainly because of the fact that certain life processes either originate in or are more specifically focused in those parts. But the processes are not limited to these parts or organs; they affect as well, directly or indirectly, all other parts — and related functions at the two other levels of human activity.

What we call the element fire can perhaps best be represented in terms of normal human experiences as **rhythm**. We have spoken of it as the "animating principle"; but this is just what rhythm actually means. "In the beginning" is rhythm. The medieval alchemists who (following a very old tradition) spoke of God as "Fire" saw in fire a symbol of this great rhythm of destruction and rebirth, also dramatized in the story of the phoenix — the story of cyclic activity.

Aries is the symbol of "life" in its condition of fire; it is ever-renascent life, at the rhythm of which the materials left over at the destruction of the old cycle **reorganize themselves**. This rhythm is the "will of God," the creative power which ever makes things new. At the level of "personality," the element fire, as the sign Leo, is likewise the starting point of the psychic process which introduces a new kind of rhythm, the rhythm of "individuality," the "I am-this particular person, with exclusive use of this name and these prerogatives." At the level of the collective "mentality" of a group, culture or nation, Sagittarius, as fire, introduces the rhythm of great ideas which can move men and transform the course of history.

The element water is perhaps most simply represented by the process of **assimilation**. It reduces everything to a single — therefore, limited and concentrated — purpose, within a well-defined field of existence. In the "life" process, Cancer, water, relates to digestive activities and metabolism in general. The assimilation of available materials generates energy ready for use. At the level of "personality," water operates as Scorpio; at its most fundamental sense, the Scorpio activity seeks the assimilation of varied personality experiences through an intense feeling of "at-one-ment" with other persons — a feeling which not only sexual union, but as well various kinds of ritualistic group activities can best produce. At the level of the collective "mentality" of a society, the element water operates as Pisces, which represents at that level the memory and tradition of a group of people, the **collectively conscious** — and the building and defense of group values which result from the assimilation of group experiences.

The element air operates at the level of "life" at and after the fall equinox. What was rhythm, tone, driving energy at the spring equinox is now oriented toward the preservation of the typical character of the life organism in specific forms — indeed, in "seed forms." The

keynote here is **essentialization**. What is essential is preserved in a condensed form, as a seed — or, in general, as whatever will insure one type or another of "immortality." At the level of "personality," the element air manifests as Aquarius. This refers to the effort in every individualized person to give a form to what is most essential in his or her experience. That becomes his or her great hope — i.e., the image of his existence as an individual which seeks to affect the consciousness of other individuals.

At the level of "mentality," the element air manifests as Gemini, for it is through the codification and precise intellectual formulation of its collective values and its tradition that a culture can both spread and preserve for future ages the quintessence of its experiences as a people.

With the element earth, we come to the principle of **consolidation**. "Earth," in this symbolical sense, is not an expression of materiality and heaviness; it is rather the manifestation of solidity and solidarity — thus, cohesiveness or even coherency. It produces the sense of belonging together and naturally also the kind of character which has the ability to make use of the power generated by this state of cohesion — thus, the executive, the politician, the statesman.

At the level of "life," the earth factor refers to that stage in the seasonal cycle when all that has proven essential reaches a wintry stage of final condensation and also clarification (Capricorn). Basic issues appear clearly when all non-essentials have been absorbed in autumnal decay or frozen by winter's cold. Then also is revealed what is the fundamental **need** of the new cycle. The answer to that need manifests through a cosmic type of polarization. A "mutation" may appear within the seed; God may incarnate to alter man's response to the energies of life.

At the level of "personality," the earth element is expressed in Taurus. In that sign, we may see the consolidation of personality in a spiritual brotherhood or in a creative group effort through which human evolution is accelerated. Taurus is consecrated in Asia to the Buddha, founder of the first **universal** brotherhood of individuals of all races, creeds and castes. Taurus, the month of May, shows the sap raised from the roots into the flower, a consecrated place for the symbolical "marriage of heaven and earth"; and a consecrated brotherhood is the "flower" of a race.

At the level of the collective "mentality," earth is Virgo; and Virgo is symbolically the pathway from the Sphinx (half lion and half Virgin) to the Pyramid as a place of initiation (Libra). Along this path of trials and tests, the Gemini formulations and the intellect's processes are assayed; and what emerges victorious is utterly solid, logical, impervious to criticism.

The Secondary Interactions (the Modes)

According to the traditional practice of astrology in the West, the twelve zodiacal signs are divided not only in terms of the four elements which we have reinterpreted above, but also in terms of three categories: cardinal, fixed and mutable signs. These categories refer to the

fourfold sequence of the basic phases of the three zodiacs just discussed. That is to say, the life zodiac is basically structured by **cardinal** signs (Aries, Cancer, Libra, Capricorn); the personality zodiac, by **fixed** signs (Leo, Scorpio, Aquarius, Taurus); the mentality zodiac, by **mutable** signs (Sagittarius, Pisces, Gemini, Virgo).

What we call "life" is primarily activity; it is a constant **straightforward** release of energy scattering itself with immense prodigality — and this is usually the character attributed to cardinal signs. On the other hand, "personality" is based on what we might call a circular motion. To say "I" is figuratively to surround the field of one's psychosomatic existence with a circle. "I" exists only within such a circle which fixes the identity of the contents inside of the circumference. As to what we called "collective mentality," this has the essential characteristic of expanding through lives and changes — i.e., through successive fashions or styles of thinking-feeling, a **spiral** motion. The mutable signs of the zodiac structure such a zodiac.

A zodiac, however, is not reduced to its four fundamental phases. These represent the dynamic framework, not the total process. Each of the three zodiacs contributes to the other two (theoretically) in a infinitely complex series of interactions. We usually speak only of twelve signs; but each sign contains three decanates, and many other modes of subdivisions are possible. If the twelvefold division is basic, it is because it integrates the fourfold structures of the three zodiacs and, thus, establishes the foundation of man's total existential situation in its simplest form.

One may state this differently by saying that each sign is **potentially** a field of human activity at three levels. Take, for instance, the sign Gemini. It represents most significantly the third primary phase of the "mentality zodiac" which begins with Sagittarius — that is to say, it represents in this zodiac what Libra signifies in the seasonal cycle of the year (i.e., the life zodiac). In Gemini, thus, the **human mind** essentializes its experiences and its discoveries, releasing these little seeds of mentality which we call intellectual concepts.

If we place ourselves in the life zodiac at the end of spring (what we call May-June in the northern hemisphere), the Sun is then passing through the sign Gemini, which every student of astrology knows to be related to the development of the intellectual faculties, the linking of sensations and memory pictures into concrete ideas. But this process of intellectual development in the human organism (via the brain and the nervous system's myriads of connecting links) is based upon the collective mentality of the society in which this human organism is born and educated. Indeed, one may well think that there is in fact only **one** human mind to which individual persons **resonate** according to their personal means of communication (one might say, their organic "radio"). Individuals not only resonate to this evolving all-human mentality; they also contribute to its evolution **to the degree in which** they are able to operate in terms of the "mentality-zodiac" field of activity.

The sign Gemini has its place also in the personality zodiac. There it follows Taurus, which is the fourth primary phase of that zodiac. In Taurus, personality reaches its

culmination — that is, it reaches it at the level of the "I-am" consciousness. This culmination is also its transfiguration. Man, the individual person, becomes fully awake — thus, literally, a "buddha" (which means, the Awake, the Illumined). As it becomes fully **awake**, the limitations and the ignorance of the ego are cast aside and the reality of the true self is revealed — the one self of humanity.

This great experience of transfiguration and illumination seeks expression and communication. This supreme flowering of an individual (and we know what the symbol of the flower means to Buddhism, particularly in Zen) includes the potentiality of spiritual seeds which are protected and integrated by the hard shell of a "doctrine." The sign Gemini, thus, represents the doctrine in which is prolonged and through which is communicated the great experience. This doctrine leads to the establishment, in Cancer, of its "home" in the hearts of living human beings to whom it brings stability and security — to the extent to which they have "assimilated" it.

Seen from the point of view of the mentality zodiac, the sign Cancer waters, as it were, the Gemini seed of mind and the sign Leo warms their growth, before the fourth primary phase of this mentality zodiac begins with Virgo, in which every mental growth is tested and from which it emerges as an irreducible factor in the evolution of the one mind of humanity.

Space does not permit a fuller development of the ideas presented in this far-too-condensed study; but what has been said may suffice to stimulate the reader and make him seek to gain the experience (or the "feel") of the zodiac as a complex process operating at three levels and of every sign of the zodiac as a vast vortex of forces and potentialities. The most important thing for the modern astrologer is not to predict events — predictions which at best can be only part of the time accurate and which can do serious psychological harm. It is to understand what is "behind" events, the character of the forces at play at any time and the meaning of the results of their cyclic interactions.

Basic Structure of the Zodiac			
3 Levels of human existence	LIFE "cardinal" straightforward	PERSONALITY "fixed" circular	MENTALITY "mutable" spiral
Phase 1. Rhythm (Fire)	Aries	Leo	Sagittarius
Phase 2. Assimilation (Water)	Cancer	Scorpio	Pisces
Phase 3. Essentialization (Air)	Libra	Aquarius	Gemini
Phase 4. Consolidation (Earth)	Capricorn	Taurus	Virgo

(example of secondary analysis in the 12-fold pattern)

GEMINI is basically: phase 3 of MENTALITY zodiac
but also: 3rd subsection of phase 1 of LIFE zodiac
2nd subsection of phase 4 of PERSONALITY zodiac