

***Circumstances
and Opportunities
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Words often take on quite a remarkable meaning if we probe into their etymological formation. The two words of the title of this article are particularly significant when we relate them to the basic significance of two of the most essential factors in interpreting a birth-chart: the **houses** and the **planets**.

According to Marc Edmund Jones, the houses refer to the circumstances of our lives; but what does the term circumstance actually and precisely indicate? The Latin adverb *circum* means "around," and "stance" comes from the verb "to stand." The word circumstance refers, therefore, literally to the way an event, or events in general, stand around you. When you say: "He is in difficult circumstances," you mean that this person is surrounded by events or by the likelihood of events which confront him with difficulties.

The twelve houses of a birth-chart refer to circumstances in that they represent twelve basic types or categories of events (or pressures from the environment) which every individual person, at one time or another, has to face. The individual stands, as it were, at the center of the chart; and he is surrounded by the twelve houses, each of which is challenging him in a characteristic manner and in a particular area of his personality to **prove himself an "individual."**

Each house represents a basic "test" of individual existence — because every category of events a person meets in life demands of him a specific and an adequate "stance" — i.e., a way of standing up to the challenge they pose. In every house, a person is tested as to his ability to meet a more or less definite type of experience — experiences which, however, can occur at several levels of activity and consciousness.

The Search for Identity

The first house may be the most difficult area of experience to understand, for it refers essentially to the self and to the manner in which each of us can best acquire a deep and vivid sense of individuality and come to know our individual destiny. We hear today in psychology a great deal about a person's search for "identity." This simply means that every man and woman is in some way trying to discover a convincing answer to the questions: "Who am I? What am I born for?" etc. The answers should be found by considering the first house of the person's natal chart — and (theoretically, at least) even more precisely in the ascending degree and its Sabian Symbol, provided one does know the precise moment of the first breath.

"But how can this answer be found?" the reader may ask. First of all, it is by considering, studying objectively, and trying to understand the **circumstances** in which one is born, one grows to maturity, and one now finds oneself. Every person is born and develops in some kind of circumstances which, if he or she were only able to grasp fully their meaning, would reveal the character of that person's "identity." But the trouble with most of us is that we become moulded as egos by these circumstances, whereas we should realize that, as a self, each of us stands in the midst of these circumstances, affected but

not controlled or structured by them — indeed, able to answer their challenges and in these answers to discover what we really are as individuals.

It is as we take our stand in the midst of circumstances — it is, indeed, in the taking of a stand — that we realize our own identity. Too easy a set of circumstances may make such a realization actually more difficult than if we are surrounded with a good deal of antagonisms or persistent environmental pressures, for in a very easy life situation, we have very little to fight against. It is in this process of fighting against that we develop strength. It is by being more or less compelled — inwardly or outwardly — to see ourselves "separate" that we come to realize our identity, provided the struggle is not so hard that we develop a **false** type of identity — i.e., the embittered, ambitious, and ruthless ego which is a distortion of the true self.

Jesus asked of his disciples: "Be ye separate!" But this "separation" from the world of biological drives and social-personal attachments — or the "isolation" which was advocated by the great Yogis of ancient India — are **not** ends in themselves. They constitute a transitory phase of development — i.e., a "path" that leads to the fullest realization of the self within and of the destiny for the accomplishment of which we were born as human organisms. What the first house of our birth-chart indicates are the conditions in which we can best discover and follow that path; and our ascendant is (theoretically, at least) the beacon light that should show us **why** we are born in such circumstances and **how** we ought to be able to use them instead of being used by them. Technically speaking, the character of a natal house is indicated by the zodiacal sign at its cusp — and by whether it contains only a few degrees or many (including a whole "intercepted" sign).

Also, a great deal can be learned from whether or not the house contains one or more planets, for the presence in a house of a planet (and also of other factors like Nodes and Parts) reveals the nature of special opportunities being offered to us in the types of circumstances represented by this house.

The Meaning of "Opportunity"

This word opportunity is a fascinating one, for it means etymologically: "reaching a harbor" (*port* means also harbor). Life is often a tempestuous sea of events; and the harassed sailor longs for the calm waters and the rest or the enjoyments provided by a harbor. You sail along; perhaps on the horizon, you can distinguish a shoreline or a light tower. But perhaps also you are asleep or too frightened or too preoccupied with maneuvering your boat. The currents or the winds lead you away from the harbor; you have lost your opportunity.

Any planet in a house represents a type of opportunity which you are most likely to encounter in the category of circumstances represented by that harbor, for there are essentially, I believe, no "good" or "bad" planets. Yet there are harbors the entrance to which may greatly test your navigating skill — because of dangerous rocks, banks, treacherous currents, etc. All opportunities are not easy to take; and, of course, what you do after you are in these "harbors" is another matter!

Considered as opportunities, the meaning of each of the ten astrological planets can be briefly stated as follows:

THE SUN is the opportunity to be alive and vibrant with power. Of course, we are all more or less alive; but the point here is: Do we, as individuals, consciously use and rely upon the life energy or do we let it use us and sway our consciousness and will according to its instinctual bio-psychic tides? If the Sun is in our natal first house, this tells us that we can best use our innate vitality in facing and meeting the circumstances which will allow us most effectively to discover and project our individual identity. If the Sun is in our second house, we should use this vital energy in the actualization and the management of all our possessions — and, first of all, of our "birth potential," of the faculties and capacities we were born with (our birth capital, as it were). The Sun in the seventh house indicates that it is in the realm of human relationships (and, more generally, in all our contacts with the outer world) that the opportunity to display and to build on our basic life energy will be most significant; and so with the other houses.

THE MOON refers to the opportunity of developing in everyday life a keen sensitivity to all that surrounds us. The Moon is essentially the capacity to adjust to the demands of both our total organism (body and psyche) and of our environment so that the claims of both may become harmonized. Thus, the Moon deals with the "feelings"; but this does not mean that we should be the creature of our "moods" — for a mood is usually a negative kind of adjustment, a spilling of subjective bio-psychic reactions over the people with whom we are related.

The house in which the Moon is in our birth-chart will indicate the circumstances in which we will learn and grow most readily through our feelings and our sensitivity to other people. If, for instance, the Moon is in the fifth house, this would show that we will gain greatly by being keenly sensitive to the needs and reactions of our children — or, if we are creative artists, that our work should succeed through the exteriorization of our sensitivity to situation, natural forms, colors.

MERCURY in our birth-chart points to the field in which opportunities to develop our mental faculties should be sought most consistently. The world of mind is often indeed, especially today, like a stormy or choppy sea. The house in which Mercury is placed at birth indicates the direction in which lies the most satisfactory — for us, as individuals — harbor. This may be the direction of the concrete intellect (third house) or that of philosophical, religious studies (ninth house). An optimum of mental growth may come through creative activity (fifth house) or through service (sixth house), etc.

VENUS points to the opportunity which full use of the sense of value brings to us. Venus brings to us the realization of what is to be loved and what is to be avoided. It is also "magnetic power" — the power to draw to us what we need for our growth and happiness.

In any typical set of circumstances (i.e., in any of our natal houses), Venus means that there we will find great opportunities for us to make the most of these circumstances by meeting them with a keen sense of value and by pervading and (as it were) magnetizing them with the vibration of our innermost personality, our heart's desire.

MARS in a natal house reveals the best field in which opportunities to go forth into the outer world will be found — and, by going forth, to release our excess energy and capture the "food" (spiritual as well as material) we need for our growth. If in the first house, Mars tells us that we will best discover our identity by taking a positive and active stand. Mars says there: "Act yourself out spontaneously; and, in acting, you will find who you are." But if Mars is in the seventh house, the indication is that it is through a total going out into relationship — a merging with the "other" — that you will realize best your identity; this unreserved outgoing may hurt, but then the hurt itself will be the experience.

JUPITER refers to the fellowship linking human beings within some kind of community. Where Jupiter is located, there are the circumstances most favorable for socializing and for reaping a bounteous harvest through cooperation — in some cases, through efficient management. If Jupiter is in the first house, the best opportunities to discover who you really are and what your function in life is will most likely come as you identify yourself with the interests of your community and learn how to manage the circumstances resulting from such an identification.

SATURN's place in a house indicates the type of circumstances which will be most conducive to finding a solid and secure base of action in society. But Saturn is the kind of "harbor" which exacts a price for entry and which may keep you virtually a prisoner. The tenth house is the field of achievement; there your efforts come to a head. With Saturn in the tenth house, you will probably realize your great ambition — but it may enslave and finally kill you.

URANUS is the "Great Transformer." In the sixth house, Uranus will give you the opportunity to transform the character of your service, to discover new techniques by means of which work can be lightened — or to learn from an unusual "master" secrets of personal regeneration. In the first house, Uranus will give you opportunities to discover your true self and destiny through the ability to meet crises and revolutionary challenges.

NEPTUNE is the universal solvent and the visionary. The natal house in which it is found tells us the type of circumstances in which you can best use idealism and a sense of transcendence of normal problems. If Neptune is located in your natal seventh house, you will find the most valid opportunities for close human relationship" (marriage among them) by being drawn to unusual, imaginative, and perhaps mystical partners. But the Neptunian "harbor" tends to be full of mist and deceptive mirages. If you can pierce through them, new horizons, new forms of relationship will be revealed.

PLUTO represents the opportunity to reach a state in which all that is superficial, unnecessary, and not really belonging to your essential self tends to be ruthlessly pruned away or ascetically relinquished. Its natal house position points to circumstances most conducive to this process of total denudation and to your being able to make a mark on your society, provided you become totally identified with your fundamental destiny. However, in the great majority of human lives, these Plutonian opportunities are not directly operative. Then Pluto tends to represent the feeling of inner emptiness or futility seizing the individual for whom the usual pleasures, values, or hopes have lost their meaning, yet whose ego does not dare to (or cannot) let go and allow the root self to become the dominant power in a thoroughly "committed" life.

The Great Test of Individual Existence

No one is born an "individual." Individuality at birth is potential; it is not an actual fact of existence. It becomes more or less of a fact when we reach maturity and we find our essential place and function in society. This does not mean that we have to conform to what society expects or demands of us; we can operate effectively in society without being inwardly subservient to it. Indeed, we can only operate truly as individuals when we cease to take for granted the values and models of the family, the society, and the culture in which we were born. Thereafter, we can, of course, consciously accept whatever in this way of life harmonizes with the rhythm of our "fundamental nature" and reject the rest.

This is inevitably a long process; and at every step, we are challenged and tested by circumstances. Every step can lead to a positive or to a negative result. What the outcome will be, no one can definitely foresee, for this is the area of our individual freedom. We are not free to **choose** basically our circumstances, for this is where "Karma" operates in the form of environmental conditions and also of unconscious inner pressures. But we are, at least in most cases, free to give either a positive or a negative meaning to our experiences; and even this "freedom" can become easily blurred, confused, and ineffectual.

The First House

The test to which the first house refers is, as I already mentioned, the test of isolation. Birth is a process of relative isolation, an emergence from an unfolding biological matrix — the mother's womb. There are also psychic and cultural matrices out of which the would-be individual has to be born; and every "birth" leads to a condition in which the positive factor, isolation, blends with the negative reaction, loneliness. The man who has become positively and spiritually "isolated" appears distinct. He stands relatively alone in clear distinctness because he is no longer a member of the crowd or the herd. He has a character that is truly his own.

There are many persons who, though they would like to achieve this "distinction," cannot do so actually because they are still inwardly unborn. They then try by one means or another to make themselves appear **different**; but this deliberate stressing of more or less

artificial differences is actually a form of separativeness rooted in insecurity and in a sense of relative failure. It is a negative approach to the search for identity — a search which we can most effectively pursue if we follow the indications offered to us by the first house in our birth-chart exactly calculated for the time of our first breath.

The Second House

The test related to the second house is the test of ownership. We are placed at birth in a set of circumstances which allows us to possess at the very least some innate faculties and, indeed, our body and its various capacities — also, possibly a degree of family wealth. The question life poses to us is: "What are you going to do with what you own by birth right?"

Our attitude to our possessions is a determining factor in our existence as an individual. Most people take for granted their wealth, at any level. The positive approach to anything we own (including our body) is that of effective and purposeful use; the negative approach is that in which the ego seeks to enjoy, according to ancestral and traditional patterns, what he owns and the privileges that go with possessions and inherited social status.

The Third House

The test related to the third house is the test of thought. Man as a center of power and consciousness operating in and through a physical organism finds himself in an environment which provides him with a complex set of materials and information which he must absorb and assimilate for his growth. He can do this positively or negatively, according to the character of his thinking. Positive thought processes produce "intelligence"; constricted and negative thinking becomes caught into the rigid structures of dogmas or "intellectualisms." Constructive thinking is based on related-ness and the eagerness to face ever new conditions.

The Fourth House

The fourth house refers to circumstances in which your feeling of stability is being tested. These are at first circumstances related to your home life; then, at the psychological level, to your sense of rootedness in something solid, reliable, fundamentally true. Where this emotional stability is lacking, confusion and perhaps manifestations of a "split personality" appear. But one can be so stable as to be rigid — indeed, a "living dead."

The Fifth House

In the fifth-house type of circumstances, we are tested as to the purity of our motives as we go out into the world eagerly wanting to "express ourselves." But what is this "ourselves" which desires expression? Is it the ego or the deep self and the rhythm of our essential individuality? Are we just "letting go" of our excess vital steam, regardless of consequences to us and to others; or are we consciously "releasing" power in terms of a fully accepted

purpose? The answers we give personally to these questions determine our lives; they make of us, in time, slaves or masters.

The Sixth House

The sixth-house test is that of suffering and also of service. Here we face circumstances that make us see and feel what we lack. This sense of lack and inferiority causes suffering and may manifest as the result of illness or failure. Courage is the positive approach to these circumstances; self-pity or surrender, the negative answers.

The Seventh House

In the seventh house, we are tested in our ability to meet people and the world. We can be so rigid in our "I" sense that every "not I" is felt to be a potential enemy; or we can both freely give and joyously receive in an open play of relationship. Mutuality is here the positive keyword — which implies sharing and reciprocal action, a give and take on the basis of essential equality of opportunity to grow and to let others grow through love and interaction.

The Eighth House

The challenge implied in eighth-house circumstances is to renew yourself — a renewal which comes only through interpersonal relationships and a full acceptance of values produced by interchange and "commerce" — i.e., the cooperation or merging of individuals in terms of a common purpose. The eighth house deals with business, the working out of contracts, but also with self-renewal through any kind of steady group activity.

The Ninth House

The basic test provided by ninth-house circumstances is the test of significance. There is always some way in which a person comes to see himself "expanding" into a greater area of experiences, whether at the physical or the mental-spiritual level. Will he give to this expansion a positive meaning and gain a broader understanding of the laws of life — or will expansion intensify personal ambition and ego pride? This is the test.

The Tenth House

In the tenth house, a man is tested by his personal attitude toward his achievements or his failures — thus, by the use he makes of the social position he has reached. Here comes the "proof of works." What are you doing with what you have attained? Are you using the power with which you have been entrusted by a social group honestly and for the sake of the group, or are you using it for your own self-aggrandizement as a master of slaves?

The Eleventh House

The eleventh house refers to circumstances produced by the results of success or failure in terms of the person's position in his community. As member of a community, a person has the possibility of enjoying social and cultural activities, perhaps together with friends. Will

he passively accept these opportunities, taking them for granted, as if due to him — or will he seek to improve and refine their quality, even to reform what he considers obnoxious or futile? There comes the test of discontent — of social progress vs. stagnation.

The Twelfth House

The twelfth house represents the end of a cycle of individual experiences at a particular level. One can speak here of the test of cloture. It is not always easy to bring a speech to a significant conclusion which will remain in the memory of the hearers; it is even harder to bring a whole life to a close which means real fulfillment and which opens very naturally the door to a new state of being. Here comes also the test of "severance" — how to let go of the past, to dismiss with a blessing the ghosts of our "unlived life." By this ultimate test, we shall be "judged"; and this judgment will decide the nature of our new cycle of experiences. It will establish the "Karma" of a future cycle.

So, from test to test and field to field of experiences, a person moves on. At each step, he becomes stronger or weaker. These twelve basic categories of circumstances, and the ten great planetary types of opportunities, are met by us perhaps every day of our lives, though some are more important at certain ages than at others. What is at stake at every moment is the integrity of our individual selfhood. It is the meaning inherent in our saying: "I."