

**An Introduction to Karmic Astrology**

**Volume 1**

# **Foundations and Planets**

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**Richard Brown**

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## SUMMARY

More than twelve years in the making, this first volume of the multi-volume series is the groundbreaking introduction to the new field of Karmic Astrology.

Picking up where Dane Rudhyar left off in his last book, this first volume of the Introduction to Karmic Astrology gets the astrological student or working professional off to a solid understanding of both the metaphysics and mechanics of this new development in natal Western astrology.

Even the general reader can grasp the first section of the book which outlines the metaphysical and philosophical underpinnings of reincarnation and the soul's evolution through the material plain in non-astrological language, a rarity for an astrological book.

For the astrologically knowledgeable, the book then dives into the ten planets of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century astrology to expound at length on their karmic, dharmic and evolutionary dynamics in the natal chart, something never done before in Western astrology. The author thus sets the stage for his later volumes which are to include the signs, houses, aspects, and new planets of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

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# *Introduction*

**Y**ou are holding in your hands the first volume of the seeker's handbook to deciphering the soul's spiritual journey on planet Earth, as written in the natal astrological chart.

This book is the first volume of something new: a comprehensive introductory text for Karmic Astrology. While the first part of this book may be understood by anyone, including those with no background whatsoever in astrology, from Part 2 onwards the intent is to provide to the knowledgeable amateur or professional astrologer an introduction to the new and growing field of Karmic Astrology. Beginners may feel stretched in Part 2 onwards, but perhaps this will provide incentive to continue study of this most ancient of sciences.

These books are not and cannot be the final word in Karmic Astrology, the subject matter being too cutting edge and seminal for that, but they are a solid first step which allows the serious student of astrology to grasp the analytical fundamentals and enormous potential of this new way to look at natal astrology.

All the main points found in a natal chart will be covered in this series of volumes: old planets, new planets, signs, houses, aspects, chart synthesis. But they are covered from the point of view of spiritual evolution of the soul while in physical form.

This first volume covers the theoretical foundations of karmic astrology and the ten planets common to astrology in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, from Sun to Pluto. This is territory already familiar to the working astrologer or student. It is easiest to begin the expansion into a more spiritual approach to astrology with what is already known. The reader will quickly recognize that I have taken the traditional approach to the planets found in Western astrology and elaborated upon it considerably. That is the idea. What the reader already knows is the basis upon which the new material is introduced and built.

Another volume in the series will cover signs, houses and aspects. Current plans also call for a separate volume for chart synthesis, which will examine the entire natal chart as a whole (as opposed to specific small sections of the natal chart) as a document showing an individual's accumulated karma and dharma as well as the inextricable link between the two.

Amongst this somewhere will be a volume devoted to the new planets, including Chiron, Quaoar, Sedna, and Orcus, which are among those discovered and named at this writing. These new planets are both the *terra incognita* and cutting edge of astrology, where we plunge into the hitherto unknown. These new planets are redefining astrology and deserve a separate volume as they do not conform to our old way of viewing the solar system.

While on the one hand the broad sweep of the natal chart as the repository of a soul's total evolution are outlined through this series, these volumes also give the detailed analytical tools for the natal chart's main features (which are first required to grasp the broad sweep). Transits and progressions are an additional volume far down

the road at a still later date, and who knows when that might be published. This is a big multi-volume project, in other words, but then so is life. Be patient about the release of the next volume(s). It took me 12 years (a Jupiter cycle, wouldn't you know?) to get to this first volume written and published. Not to worry, though. Jupiter is in my ninth house of publishing. So is Venus for that matter. Writing is well in progress for the later volumes.

This is a multi-volume project, but then so is life.

That's the plan for now, but it's not etched in stone, and please don't hold me to it too rigorously. Understand that this is a rapidly changing field, and new developments or discoveries, particularly with the new planets, could quickly amend the plan.

My work has been made easier because much valuable preparatory exploration has already been done by other authors, for the most part delineating and illuminating specific narrow corners of Karmic Astrology. Martin Shulman's book on the Moon's Nodes, and Jeff Green's first book on Pluto being two (of several) good examples of a detailed look at small subsets of this field.

As valuable as these earlier works are, no one has yet attempted to pull these limited loose threads together into a broad framework. That is not to say the theoretical foundation for such an endeavour is lacking. That foundation has been there for a quarter of a century, yet no one to date has seized upon it. The theoretical basis for Karmic Astrology goes back to Dane Rudhyar's final book, *The Astrology of Transformation*, published in 1980. It was his final volume before he passed on in 1985, and he called it his "testament," a most apt description.

In that book Rudhyar described what he called "transformational astrology." It was (and is) for me a stunning vision of what astrology could become. The archetypes ringing through the

book are breath taking. The Moses archetype: Here was the Grand Old Man of astrology, after a life time's journey, standing on the mountaintop seeing the promised land of astrology unfolding in front of him but knowing that due to his advanced years he would not himself live to see it. So he took pen in hand (or perhaps typewriter – there were no computers in those days) to describe his vision in the hopes others would do the work he knew he would not live long enough to do.

He describes the archetype of souls separating from their Source and descending into an unknown sea of density to be enmeshed for who knows how many eons of karmic entanglements, pain, and suffering. Yet within those vessels lies the spark of The All, yearning to return home, the archetype of the prodigal child. And finally there is the archetype of the all-loving Source, eager and willing to descend to assist in that return.

With broad strokes Rudhyar paints his picture. Astrology, and the natal chart in particular, is the roadmap home. For the soul seemingly bound in the snare of the material plane, astrology offers the individual path his/her path back to Source and shows how the inherent imperative of physical incarnation, matter ascending, may be fulfilled.

In addition, the natal chart also shows how Spirit descends to that individual to meet the ascending matter. Here is the genius of Rudhyar at work for he concludes that when the individual ascends to the point that Source can descend to connect, there is a cosmic infusion, which I often call dharma, that allows the individual to return to Source while Source works through that person on the material plane. And, according to Rudhyar, the astrological chart maps out that entire process for the individual willing to take the journey.

What the book here in your hands right now does is fill the gap between Rudhyar's grand vision, and the patchy and sometimes

overly-detailed approach which is scattered amongst a half-dozen volumes or more available today. There's nothing wrong with the detail (after all, I am a Virgo, so I know a thing or two about detail), except that there are huge gaps no one has written about and there has been no practical framework within which these detailed efforts can function coherently.

**Astrology  
is the  
roadmap home.**

This series of books offers that coherent framework. It gives the working professional or knowledgeable amateur astrologer the tools to answer questions like: What is my karma? How do I resolve it? What is my dharma? How do I find it? What about karmic relationships in my life? Is my job or career karmic? What is my spiritual path in this life? My kids, my spouse, my boss, are they karmic or dharmic? What can be done about them?

One of the key tools Rudhyar offered in his book was the idea that astrological configurations operate on more than one level of spiritual evolution, from the wretchedly dense right up to the blissfully cosmic. Few authors have seized upon this notion (perhaps because they have not themselves taken the journey out of density), but it is central to understanding Rudhyar's approach. What I propose to do in this series is systematically bring together all components of a natal chart (sign, house, planets, aspects, etc.) into Rudhyar's schema of levels of evolution. By so doing, we can understand exactly where a soul has come from, is going to, and in practical terms what has to be done to get there.

This multi-level approach also gives a very different method of natal chart analysis. Many will say that the analytical approach to natal chart components in this book is new, and I expect there will be those who agree and those who don't. I accept that. Perhaps this

might spur others on to do their own research and analysis.

I am critical of “one-size-fits-all” astrology. In its day, which has now been measured in millennia, it was all we had. One of the themes of this book is that now is the time to set aside this outmoded approach and move on to a new, more dynamic and flexible approach.

For the record, the material here has been vetted over the past few years through experience: by my many astrological clients in their readings, by my astrological students, and by the numerous kind professional and amateur astrologers at Astrology Toronto who have so often invited me to lecture. I am most grateful to all of these fine people for their support and feedback. A second special thanks goes to my clients, who have not realized how much they were (and still are) teaching me.

This series of books began with an original outline and a few trial chapters written as the Uranus/Neptune conjunction sat on my Ascendant in the spring of 1993. It has been revised and rewritten off and on since then as I have grown and come to understand the material with greater clarity and insight. It took a whole new turn in the early 21<sup>st</sup> Century as a series of new planets were discovered outside the orbit of Pluto. This first volume, however, gets the ball rolling and gets the reader up to speed with the better known ten planets with which astrologers of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century are already familiar.

I repeat: mine is not the only approach to Karmic Astrology. It is instead an initial attempt to bring together many loose threads into a cogent whole understandable by any who care to take the effort to study it. It has been a gift which has been slowly given to me over a period of years, and I now am delighted to begin sharing it with you.

*Richard Brown*

Toronto

May 2, 2006

# CHAPTER 1

## Metaphysics

**K**armic astrology carries with it a few basic metaphysical assumptions, plus some essential theoretical foundations from Dane Rudhyar, the 20<sup>th</sup> Century's giant of astrological thought. Before we actually begin looking at the details of the individual planets, which will be done in later chapters of this book, we need in these early chapters to look at the metaphysical and philosophic underpinnings of this new branch of astrology.

The essence of karmic astrology is not a tourist trip through past lives (*"My goodness, you should have seen the Sphinx when it was new!"*), but to bring the lessons learned and unlearned from the past into the light of the present so that we may exercise our free choice wisely based not only on where we might have been, but more importantly on where it is we are going.

To do this requires that we jump out of the three-space box of the material world and learn to think metaphysically. For openers, we begin with certain basic metaphysical assumptions which are relatively easy to comprehend. Reincarnation is the first of them.

Whether you wish to call it a soul, a point of consciousness, or some other cosmic name, karmic astrology assumes there is something metaphysical which survives what is called physical death, carries “memories” of one sort or another, and continues on eventually to be, at least in part, the cause of a new physical human incarnation at a later time with the “memories” on board in some fashion or another.

It is not the purpose of this book to enter into a discussion about so-called “proofs” of reincarnation. I assume the reader has already delved into that subject for him or herself and has concluded reincarnation is a valid perspective. Likely that is the case, or you would not have read this far into the book.

For the sake of convenience, I will use the word soul to describe the surviving metaphysical “something” which exists from one life to the next, not out of any theoretical preference, but for the simple fact that it is the word most people in the western world understand. In karmic astrology, the metaphysical hair splitting involved in the debates (whether “soul” or “point of consciousness” is the most metaphysically “correct” term is a common difference) adds nothing to the understanding of spiritual evolution and only serves to confuse the introductory-level metaphysical student. In other words, this particular debate over nomenclature is not an important item for an introductory volume such as this book.

The next assumption is that the soul has the capacity for change, for better or for worse, over a series of incarnations. By necessity this implies that free choice exists, for what agent of change could there possibly be other than free choice, unless one wishes to move into an exercise of nihilism or existential determinism.

There cannot be karma without free choice nor can there be free choice without karma. Free choice allows individuals to make such decisions as they see fit, but requires that they live with the consequences of that decision (karma). Free choice also means

individuals can choose wisely or can choose unwisely their course of action (or inaction), and either way they live with whatever destination their chosen path takes them to.

If one decides one does not like the consequences (karma) of a specific act, then one simply exercises free choice to act differently and the consequences (karma) are different. Sorting out karma really is that simple, although heaven knows people go to unimaginable lengths over eons of lifetimes to make it more complicated, often enough for reasons completely unfathomable to the outside observer. Human nature is endlessly complex and inscrutable at times.

**Karma requires free choice, but then free choice requires karma.**

Our third assumption is that there is something beyond any word(s) or description, and it is that something out of which the soul has been created. Students of Vedanta will recognize the philosophical bent being used here. This something beyond any word or description is so vast that it cannot be known or understood to those of us in physical form, and indeed any attempt to do so is doomed to failure.

Nonetheless it is the reason for our existence. Without it, we would not and could not exist. Eastern Sanskrit literature speaks poetically of a causeless cause, the first without a second. Again, language fails us, but literary convention requires this book choose a noun as a linguistic shorthand, and I will therefore use the word Source, knowing full well it is inadequate. Note that I avoid using the word, god. Sadly, religions around the world have hijacked this particular word for their own venal worldly purposes, and thus have stripped it of any valid or constructive meaning. I use, therefore, a word less burdened with the baggage of human folly. I shall call it Source.

Additionally, since the word metaphysics is liberally sprinkled throughout this volume, it is necessary to pause here and define that word clearly, as well as the difference between the physical and metaphysical worlds.

Again, we shall begin with that which we know, the material plane. The physical world, or material plane, or physical plane, however one wishes to describe it, consists of those things which exist and can be defined in terms of one or more of the five senses: sight, sound, taste, touch, and smell. For instance, the text you are reading right now exists in the physical plane because you can see it, and if you are holding the book in your hands you can also feel it. Because it is definable by one or more of the five senses, in this case sight and touch, the book exists. This definition of the material plane is easy to understand. It is the basis for all contemporary science and technology, and interestingly enough is also the main limiting factor of all contemporary science and technology.

By comparison, the metaphysical plane(s), or dimension(s) or world(s), consists of those things which exist and *cannot* be defined by any of the five senses. The human mind is a good example. We know it exists. After all what is reading and comprehending the words you are reading but your mind? *Cogito ergo sum* was the Latin expression the French philosopher and mathematician Rene Descartes used several hundred years ago to say the same thing. Loosely translated, his Latin aphorism means: "I think, therefore I am." In other words, by the very process of the mind thinking, personal existence is proven. The individual exists because the mind exists.

However the mind cannot be defined by any of the five senses. One cannot see, hear, taste, touch, or smell the mind. Therefore the human mind must be metaphysical. Mind is metaphysical, a great occult truth known in secret for centuries but only now beginning to be fully understood by the public at large. Creative visualization,

amongst other contemporary practices, is based on this premise of mind being metaphysical, as the traditional teaching is that the metaphysical is causal to the physical, so that if one creates with the mind (metaphysical) events occur in the physical world. In a later volume we will explore those astrological aspects which indicate an individual's propensity or lack thereof in this field.

We can logically go further and say that if we have one existing item which is metaphysical, in this case the mind, then logically there may well be other items. In karmic astrology we take this a step further and acknowledge not only the existence of the metaphysical worlds but we seek to know our place within them, and in particular how that place affects our material world existence in human form.

# CHAPTER 2

## Levels of Evolution

Next in our exploration of the background material for karmic astrology, we move on to Dane Rudhyar, whose early works, such as *The Astrology of Personality* (1936) and *Person Centered Astrology* (1972) to name but two of his most well-known volumes, served to drag western astrology out of what can only be called the backward, even regressive, thinking of the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century and establish that astrology is the study of dynamics rather than the elucidation of pre-ordained static and confining structures.

That emphasis on astrology as the study of the dynamics of personality, of personal evolution, was not only a revolutionary break from western astrology's entrenched medieval thinking but also a break from the known history of all branches astrology going back several thousand years. "One size fits all" astrology, as I call it, had been not only the norm but the doctrinal ossification of astrological thought for as many thousands of years as we have history for astrology. This is a very long time when you come to realize that

astrology is the world's second-oldest profession.

Inflexible interpretation of the natal astrological chart began in ancient times, millennia ago, in societies rigidly stratified and defined, which was just about every society around in those days. The implicit assumption of this ancient astrology was that any given astrological configuration, say Sun square Mars, was the same energetic dynamic regardless of person, place, time, background or individual point of view.

This was consistent with the shape and form of the traditional ancient society where social/cultural norms are clearly defined. Narrow standards for all human behaviour and thinking were accepted as givens, and deviation from the narrow standards unheard of. Such patterns were the rule for the few thousand years of recorded history which have been preserved for us to study.

Notwithstanding any ethereal or even eccentric predispositions individual astrologers might have had (a well-known quality amongst astrologers today, but not so in ancient times), as a social institution astrology fell, often unconsciously, into the role of helping to preserve the narrow structures of the ancient society in which it dwelled.

From ancient right up to modern times societies functioned from the base of ingrained restrictive, and often repressive cultural programming which perpetuated a world-view that everyone must conform to society's current way of doing things or suffer the sanctions, sometimes quite serious, of not doing so. What today is called "thinking outside the box" was not encouraged, and indeed, usually punished. Such narrow thinking came to appalling fruition in the 20th Century's horrible wars and unspeakable atrocities.

Historically speaking astrology has not been immune to this process. Because astrology has always been tightly integrated into the societies in which it exists, regardless of the level of acceptance

astrology might have had by the society's elites (and historically astrology has ebbed and flowed in social acceptance over the centuries), astrology nonetheless always came to reflect the social values of its host culture, and thus fell into the same trap of narrow thinking, which I call: "one size fits all."

While the decline of absolutist values and the social structures which supported such values was slowly creeping along in the western world during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries, that process began to accelerate in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century as a gradually expanding collective awareness of the mindless shackles of the past took hold and people consciously looked for something better than mayhem and violence.

More relativist but often self-referential approaches to life were experimented with, various nihilist and existentialist philosophies being amongst them. Astrology moved into its "psychology" phase, which while not a philosophy *per se*, is certainly self-referential, attempting to replace the negativism of its past with an attempt to show a unique and non-absolutist psychological development of the personality. But ultimately that approach grows hollow, for all that is being developed is a more sophisticated ego, and the spiritual emptiness inside for a continuing number of people continued unaddressed by this form of astrology.

This is where the genius of Rudhyar showed itself, for while he was responsible for much of the outlining of this personality oriented astrology, he did not rest there. He moved on realizing more needed to be done. His life journey brought him to the conclusion that the internal crisis people were feeling had little to do with personality. It was a spiritual crisis, and until that spiritual dimension is addressed, there is no peace.

It is in the spiritual evolution of the individuals as reflected in the natal astrological chart, and not the psychological evolution, that

individuals find their peace. And for that to happen the natal chart must be addressed from the point of view of its potential to grow over time from the abyss of density and its horror to the peaks of spiritual ecstasy and beyond that to the quiet bliss of equanimity. Suddenly Sun square Mars is no longer just an absolutist statement of ego-mania, but a potential to shed those very chains and allow Source to motivate the individual's will and Higher Purpose on Earth.

One size does  
not fit all  
anymore, but  
then it never did.

By the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, astrology had long since fallen from its once lofty place as the sacred tool of society's elites, and in one of those ironic twists for which history is so well known, astrology had become the recipient of scorn from those same elites who in earlier times once were astrology's protectors and patrons. This may turn out to be one of the great blessings which astrology has received from the modern world. For no longer was astrology bound to defend a social, political, moral, or spiritual order which clearly is suffering a major crisis of internal contradictions. Fortunately, it is no longer astrology's job to support the contradictions of a declining system riddled with rot and decay.

As we move into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, astrologers are now free to explore new ways of looking at the world, and karmic astrology does just that. One size does not fit all any more. Frankly, it never did in the past, but it is only just now that we are free to say so publicly. The point of astrology today is not to preserve a social order which has flaws all too obvious, but instead to offer an alternative ways (1) to view one's self, (2) to view the world, and (3) to take charge of one's life constructively.

Karmic astrology addresses the first of these, an alternative

way of viewing one's self. By implication that leads to the second, for once an individual knows who s/he really is and why s/he is really here, viewing the world in a different fashion becomes a relatively easy matter, for the reference point of self/Self is at last anchored and grounded in the spiritual planes with the material plane manifestation as a temporary state.

Upon that foundation wise free choice may be built. Of course, once one has a solid view of both self/Self and the world, how to interact with the world becomes much easier, in fact, quite easy compared to the old ways of endless struggle. Rudhyar's break from past rigid thinking was enough by itself to ensconce him as the 20<sup>th</sup> Century's preeminent astrologer. Indeed, contemporary astrologers are still trying to digest fully the implications of his earlier works, albeit with varying degrees of success.

Yet, Rudhyar did not stop there. He finished his *oeuvre* of more than two dozen books with *The Astrology of Transformation*, written in the late 1970s (at the time of the discovery of the planetoid, Chiron, which likely is no coincidence) and published it in 1980. This book, his final volume, serves as the specific philosophical foundation for the concepts contained in what is today known as karmic astrology. Rudhyar called it "transpersonal astrology" in his book, which in many ways is a quaint reflection of the cultural limits placed on English nomenclature in the 1970s.

One of his shorter works, at less than 200 pages in its initial printing, the book was his final legacy to the world of astrology, a legacy he himself called "my astrological testament." It was not a memoir looking back but instead a view looking forward in which he outlined his vision of the future of western astrology in broad strokes, knowing full well that at his advanced age he would not live to see the fulfilment of that vision. Five years later, in 1985, he died at age 90.

Yet, unlike his earlier works, which were written in exhaustive

detail, Rudhyar's vision is only sketched out in general terms, perhaps because of his advancing years. Nonetheless, even minus the detail (or perhaps because of the lack of detail) it is a most remarkable vision. Fair warning here: even without the exhaustive detail, the prose is dense, multi-layered in meaning, and difficult to wade through. This is not weekend recreational reading. Genius can be like that.

While *The Astrology of Transformation* remains recommended reading to the serious student of astrology, for the hurried reader of these words I will give a brief summary of some of the key ideas contained within it. My terminology may differ somewhat from Rudhyar's terminology as his dated nomenclature needs a more modern rephrasing, but the ideas are the same.

Rudhyar's final book begins by building upon his earlier works, acknowledging how astrology provides the map for an individual's evolution of personality, but then quickly departs from the limitations of his earlier works. The major limitation of his earlier work was the emphasis on personality development while ignoring spiritual development. But in *The Astrology of Transformation*, Rudhyar immediately enters the realm of the metaphysical. With deft strokes he does something no previous astrological writer had successfully attempted, he married the metaphysical evolution of the human soul over several incarnations to western astrology.

The key concept he introduced he called: matter ascending and spirit descending. The concept is deceptively simple. Clearly drawing upon his knowledge of eastern Sanskrit writings, Rudhyar postulates two concomitant imperatives in all things physical and metaphysical. Matter ascending may be described as the imperative which exists within all things manifest in the material (physical) plane to raise their vibrational level, both physically and metaphysically, to reach and touch that which created them, in other words to make contact with Source.

Conversely, spirit descending refers to the simultaneous imperative on the part of that which did the creating, ie Source, to make contact with that which was created. The object of the exercise is to make and maintain contact. As we will see below, that fulfills the desire of the created to return home, and it fulfills the desire of Source to manifest its purpose through that which it has created. This is astonishingly simple, which may account for why so many miss it entirely. We live in a society which requires great ideas to be complex. Alas, the more complex things become the further from The Truth we have wandered. Yet as things become simpler, we approach essence.

Rudhyar zeros in on the soul and plugs it into these two imperatives saying the soul's sole motivation in all existence may be found in the imperative of matter ascending to contact Source, and that the study of astrology is the study of the soul's roadmap to make this contact. In other words, astrology is the roadmap for the soul's journey home to reunite with Source. At the same time astrology also shows the parallel imperative of spirit descending by showing how it is Source seeks to descend through and to the incarnate soul so that the soul may manifest Source on the material plane through this specific physical individual.

In other words, astrology is also a roadmap which shows how Source seeks to express through an individual. This process of mapping matter ascending and spirit descending in the astrological chart is the mapping of a sacred marriage between soul and Source at an individual level.

As lofty, profound, and blissful as those imperatives may be in theory, the reality on the ground on this planet is that such a noble pursuit of spirituality is rarely evident, at least not at this juncture of human evolution. Again, drawing on his knowledge of eastern writings, Rudhyar explains that souls enter the cycle of physical incarnations in ignorance of their true nature, and it is only through

the experience of being in physical form that souls gradually, over who knows how many lifetimes, reacquire the knowledge of who and what they really are and thus claim their passport home, so to speak.

This is an essential part of Rudhyar's theory, that souls over time, and even within a specific incarnation, display varying levels of ignorance and enlightenment, sometimes simultaneously. The net change over enough incarnations,

is from ignorance to enlightenment, but this is a journey which is not the shortest distance between two points. Rather it is a journey of distractions, stumbles, mis-steps, stupidity, and even ugliness at times, particularly in the early

stages, and even in the later stages when spiritual awareness is expanding and there is a conscious desire to connect with Source, miscues and fumbles can abound. Humanity has never failed to find new and creative ways to stub its own toes.

Yet within that there still exists definable stages of evolution ranging from ignorance to enlightenment, albeit with many curious interludes between. Rudhyar identified four such distinct stages of evolution. He called them: the biological level, the socio-cultural level, the individualistic level, and the transpersonal level.

The biological level deals mainly with survival issues, the socio-cultural level deals with mindless self-serving behaviour governed by ego and cultural programming, the individualistic level deals with emerging awareness of something greater than self and society, and the transpersonal level deals with what is loosely thought of as some sort of spiritual enlightenment.

While Rudhyar defines the first level of evolution, the

Levels of evolution range from ignorance to enlightenment, with several curious places inbetween.

biological level, for the most part both Rudhyar and his subsequent students have dropped it as an analytical tool for astrology, and for valid reasons. People struggling to find food, water, and shelter to survive are unlikely to have the inclination to consult an astrologer, and there is not much an astrologer could do for them in those circumstances in any event. Like Rudhyar and others, I have dropped this level from my analysis and focused on the remaining three levels, the levels astrologers are likely to meet in their life and practice and for whom astrology has a worthwhile contribution to make.

Students of Rudhyar's work invariably rename these remaining three levels, as I also do, but the general sense of what each level represents remains essentially the same. Terminology in the contemporary world evolves rapidly, and a more up-to-date reflection of the concepts aids in understanding the concept.

What Rudhyar called the socio-cultural level I have renamed as beginners level; intermediate level is my name for what Rudhyar called the individualistic level; and spiritual level is my name for what Rudhyar called the transpersonal level. Nonetheless, as Shakespeare said, a rose by any other name smells just as sweet. These three evolutionary levels are defined in greater detail in later chapters.

While at times his work meanders, explicitly or implicitly Rudhyar made four key points about these stages of evolution, and these four observations form both the philosophic and pedagogic foundations of karmic astrology.

First, there is no clear dividing line between the four stages. In fact it is more likely a fuzzy blur, or better yet a fade out/fade in. Human evolution rarely, if ever, is identified by clear demarcation points any more, if indeed it ever was in the past. Often enough even amongst the spiritually aware, growth and evolution sneak up on individuals and it is not until they are clearly in a new stage that they realize a transition has taken place. The stages of evolution, then, are

broad general indicators, rather than specific definitions etched in stone. Treat them as guidelines and not as legislation.

Secondly, everyone has to go through all the stages. There are no shortcuts here. We experience them all, at some point in time and space, in some lifetime or another, on some planet or another. And if it is not in this lifetime or a past lifetime, then it will be in a future lifetime. However, keep in mind that evolution is not always a continuous forward process. In fact, quite the contrary. It is common, so common that I am tempted to call it normal (as much as I find the word normal impossible to define), for individuals to move forward to a new higher stage of evolution, and then move back to the previous stage.

Beware using pejorative terminology to describe this. Spiritual journeys commonly entail two steps forward, one step back as a way of doing things. This is neither good nor bad, right nor wrong. It is simply the way things seem to unfold on this planet. While we observe this, perhaps not fully understanding it, we do not judge the process.

In addition there are those who choose, for whatever reasons, to stay at a particular level of evolution, however uncomfortable or painful it may be, for what to others may appear to be a completely inordinate amount of time or number of lifetimes. Again, we observe the process but do not judge. Free choice is at work here. Each path is different. Each journey unique.

Your path and my path are not the same path, something for which we both may be thankful. Keep in mind that in the end all paths eventually lead to the same place, so in the greater scheme of things, which path a person chooses is not all that important. The point here is that sooner or later we eventually will experience all the levels of evolution, one way or another.

Rudhyar's third point is that both an individual's karma and

dharma may be found within these levels in the natal astrological chart. A couple of definitions are required here. Karma is best defined as an unlearned lesson. Period. Full stop. Karma has nothing whatever to do with sin and punishment. (Kindly note that John Calvin is dead. Thank you.) All the law of karma says is that whatever a person sends out, comes back.

In fact, metaphysically speaking, karma is a neutral concept: it is neither good nor bad. It is simply the metaphysical mechanics of the universe within which we live. Metaphysically speaking, if we did not have the mechanical process of karma in this universe, we could not have time, space, or free choice, either, all of which are intertwined, and indeed, are among the characteristics which make this universe unique and distinctive as compared to others.

At any rate karma is ridiculously simple to sort out, and perhaps it is because of this essential simplicity that so many people get it snarled up. In one sentence: If we get back something we do not like, then perhaps it might be a good idea to send instead out something different which we do like. As teenagers are fond of saying these days: “Like, duh . . .”

Dharma is one of those delicious Sanskrit words with a multitude of meanings attached to it. While dharma can refer to the evolution of humanity (which is beyond the scope of this book), it also refers to an individual’s right path, his/her high spiritual road on this planet (which is within the scope of this book). I will use dharma in this latter context. Dharma is why an individual is here when the individual gets it right; it is Source manifesting through the individual. It is spirit descending.

Karma and dharma are linked. Karma comes first and sets the stage for dharma. Sorting out karma is simply a process of learning to pick up one’s feet so as not to stumble over the stones of density in this world. For most, it entails time to learn, as one feature of karma

is that it sometimes, but not always, takes lifetimes for everything to return to the individual. Given that individuals have as many lifetimes as they may want or need, this is not the problem it might first seem. In other words, if a person does not put the pieces together this time around, there is always the next time around.

Karma does, then, imply mistakes, but mistakes made out of ignorance (sometimes great ignorance). Once individuals learn from their mistakes, then the situation does not return. That is not to say errors are not made out of malice. That does happen.

**Karma is just an  
unlearned lesson.  
Nothing more.  
Nothing less.**

But behind the malice is an ignorance of the consequences of the implications of the action. Know that the law of karma is absolute. The malicious will live with the karma of their actions, if not in this life then the next. What is sent out comes back. Sometimes the coming back of karma in a subsequent lifetime occurs without conscious recollection of the sending out. There are reasons why nasty things happen to nice people. This is but one of them.

In particular when karma which returns in a later lifetime, it is sometimes referred to as justice without emotional gratification. In such a situation the individual is forced to dwell on the consequences of an action which appears to come from someone else, but in fact was initiated by the individual's own actions in a previous life. In the previous life the individual did not think of consequences of the action. In the subsequent life the individual has little choice but to deal the consequences of the action.

If in dealing with the consequences the individual resolves that the precipitating action is inappropriate, then the lesson likely is learned. But if in dealing with the consequences the individual vows revenge, for instance, then more karma is created, the karma of

revenge in this case, and the individual consigns him/herself to a long cycle of sending out and coming back. Eventually individuals learn to pick up their feet so that they do not stumble over such obvious stones. They learn to think of consequences before initiating action. Western culture has what is known as The Golden Rule, which I like to rephrase as: *Do unto others as you would have them do unto you, because one day that is exactly what's going to happen.*

Over time, patterns emerge. As individuals learn to pick up their feet, they walk more smoothly in the material plane, and life flows more smoothly. This is simply because individuals have learned from (sometimes bitter) experience that certain things work and other things do not. Some actions bring a pleasant payback, others do not. Individuals begin to exercise their free choice to avoid the ugly paybacks and select the actions which bring constructive paybacks. This really isn't rocket surgery, but it does take time.

In the early stages of evolution in the density of the material plane, things move slowly. That is the nature of density. However, as learning takes place, evolution can accelerate, imperceptibly at first but at a steadily increasing rate. Eventually, and this usually takes many, many lifetimes, individuals have learned enough lessons that they begin to realize it's not about struggle, it's about being in harmony with the environment.

Another step forward in evolution takes place and individuals begin seeking something greater than self. When that something greater than self is found they realize that all those long and sometimes maddeningly difficult lessons have taught them and brought them the tools which they otherwise would not have had to do something quite wonderful, and that the something quite wonderful comes from the wonderful place/thing to which the individuals have come to aspire to return to.

In other words, learning the lessons of karma gives the

individuals the tools they need to manifest their dharma. Had the hard lessons of karma not taken place, the individuals would not have had the tools required to give their dharmic gift to the world. To put it in sutra form: Karma is the crucible within which dharma is forged. Rudhyar's states in this third point that the relationship between karma and dharma is writ large in the natal chart.

Fourthly comes Rudhyar's very important observation about the natal chart, which the vast majority of western astrological writers have either missed or failed to comprehend fully. Every single item in the natal astrological chart (ie, planets, signs, houses, aspects, etc.) is at one of the three stages of evolution, but not necessarily at the same stage as a different item of the natal chart.

**Karma is the  
crucible within  
which dharma  
is forged.**

Rudhyar goes further and suggests that over a lifetime, different items in a chart will function at different levels, sometimes in partnership with other items, and sometimes not. This point is key to understanding karmic astrology. An example will help to clarify. An individual may have Moon in Pisces in the 7<sup>th</sup> house which is manifesting as a dysfunctional codependent marriage, an obvious beginners' level situation. At the same time this same individual may have Mars in Capricorn in the 10<sup>th</sup> house which is manifesting as organizing a successful lecture series on spiritual growth, an intermediate level situation.

Contradictory? Of course. But we are talking about human beings here, and contradictions come with the territory for this particular life form. I trust your life experience has brought you to that conclusion as well. Our example gets even more interesting. Suppose there is a sextile between that Mars and Moon. That sextile could be

operating at any of the evolutionary levels regardless of the level of the Moon or Mars, although most likely the sextile would be operating somewhere between the beginners level of the Moon and the intermediate level of Mars.

That sextile also provides a opportunities to the individual. Is the individual using the sextile to let Mars pull the Moon up in evolutionary level, or is the individual using the sextile let the Moon pull Mars down in evolutionary level? Observe your client, and you will find the answer. Using this approach things can get complex in a hurry, especially when one considers the number of planets, signs, houses, and aspects contained in a natal chart, all of which could be operating at any level, having a variety of impacts on other items in the chart.

Suddenly a natal chart appears to have become ever so complicated, although appearances, as we shall see, can be misleading. Still, it is true that complex people do exist. Have you ever met a complex human being? (Hint: look in the mirror.) Ever wonder where that complexity comes from? It is this multiplicity of evolutionary levels rubbing shoulders simultaneously which gives us the rich and sometimes contradictory tapestry we call the human personality. Sorting out this complex tapestry and making sense of it is part, but by no means all, of the job of the karmic astrologer.

Rudhyar did not delineate the levels of evolution for the individual items of the chart, such as signs, planets, and aspects. Instead he gave at best a cursory glissando (he was a musician, too) to a few as a sampler to whet his readers' appetites. By this point in his career he was not bothering with cookbook astrology. Nor did he explicitly place the levels of evolution in a spiritual context beyond that of his Sanskrit studies.

The result is that while his final book is a *tour de force* of astrological theory, it leaves begging the practical application of that

theory for one's self or for one's clients. The book you hold in your hand is designed, in part, to begin to fill that gap, and is dedicated to the detailed delineation of the levels of evolution for each of the planets, signs, houses, and aspects in the natal chart for the working astrologer or serious student of astrology. Sigh, yes, a bit of cookbook astrology here, but with an expanded context of a broader spiritual evolution than just that of the Vedic literature, which I trust will give the reader a realization that each individual item in the chart is to be taken in the context of the larger spiritual journey. For without the larger spiritual journey, the individual items in the natal chart, frankly, have little or no meaning on their own.

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*Richard Brown*

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