

Vedic Astrology in the Spheres of Dharma and Moksha: An Introduction

1.1. What is the Spiritual Sphere of *Dharma*?

There are many nuances of meanings of *dharma*, depending upon the particular connotation we are looking at. In one sense, *dharma* is natural justice or social justice, social order or even social stability. And this has to be invariably rooted in social virtues. A collective manifestation of virtue in society at large must in turn only stand upon the ground of the moral order or moral virtue in the individual. *In ancient Hindu society, such an individual moral order had an undeniable spiritual foundation of profound depth.* It arose from the individual's thought and feeling, word and behavior, being inspired by an insightful understanding and devotion either to the imperceptible Inner Self, the *Atma*, or if this was too intangible, then, at least to an outer manifestation of that *Atma* as a worshipful Deity- *which like 'God' is but an objectified form of that self same imperceptible Inner Self, the Atma.*

As a preparation for the actual realization of this *mature form of dharma in later life*; children were initially anchored to a spiritual Master (*Guru*) and spiritual teachings (*dharma*) and also naturally, to the ethical values that spring from the soil of such teachings. This was achieved through a well thought out humane system of spiritual-education, commencing at the tender age of seven. You may introspect at this stage to find out whether you were fortunate enough to have this foundational basis in *dharma* during your early years of upbringing, or as a compensation for the precious time lost in the early part of life, it was only in later life, that you finally succeeded in finding a *Guru* and a *dharma*?

Importantly for the Hindus, *dharma* is also the very first of the four successive goals in human life. Etymologically it means, 'that which holds up or supports' (see glossary), namely, social justice, which in turn has to be supported by the individual moral order as well. The *Vedic rishis* (sages) used the effective model of *the metaphoric bull of dharma* to communicate what they had in mind regarding the different orders of social justice and moral stability that become possible in each successive age (*yuga*) of a civilization, as it inevitably succumbed to the natural process of the break-down, decline and fall of that civilization. They realized that this was anyhow bound to happen with the inexorable turning of the *cosmic wheel of Time* [*Kala chakra*]. *Kala* is cosmic Time and *chakra* being wheel.

1.2. The Model of the Bull of *Dharma*:

To secure deeper insights into the whole process of break-down, decline and fall of a civilization, they invoked this metaphoric bull in different postures of strength and stability (or of weakness and instability). When it would be strongest and possessing the utmost stability, it would naturally be standing firmly on all four legs. So, they called this *Sathya yuga*, the age of *Satya* (Truth), when *dharma* was also expected to flourish at its maximum strength of 100%. As the civilization begins to break-down, the bull must be expected to develop some weakness, say in just one leg to begin with, so that in this age, characterized by a break-down, it could still be standing though somewhat less firmly, but at least on the remaining three strong legs. They identified this as *Treta yuga*, the age characterized by only 75% *dharma* and 25% *adharma* (moral chaos or moral instability).

With the inevitable further aging of the civilization, which happens with the onset of decline, from among the bull's remaining three healthy legs, we may expect a still further weakening, say, again in one of the remaining healthy legs. However, even in this condition of increased weakness, even if the worst comes to the worst, the bull would still be able to stand with some difficulty, at least on two of the four legs, both of which may be supposed to still possess their full strength. This they called *Dwapara yuga*, the age characterized by 50% *dharma*, because the remainder has been eroded by the emergence of *adharma* (moral chaos).

As the process of break-down and decline continues further, the final fall is approached, and the bull may now be imagined to be standing most precariously, on just one leg only (suppose this acrobatic position were actually possible!), as in *Kali yuga* the darkest of the four *yugas*, we expect to have only 25% *dharma*, but 75% *adharma*. We may also take note that the four legs of the bull of *dharma*, would correspond to such macroscopic manifestations of *dharma* as, 'law and order', 'natural justice' as dispensed by the small and big courts in that society, 'ethical governance' dispensed by the king or the government, 'ethical values and conduct' of the subjects, etc. In *Kali yuga*, most of these pillars of *dharma* are so debilitated that they are close to tottering and falling.

According to Sri Yukteswar Giri, who was not only a fully Self-realized Hindu Master but also a *Vedic* astrologer, we are currently in the ascending cycle of the *Dwapara yuga* [5]. See the chronology of the *yugas* as given by him, based on the precessional cycle of about 24000 Yrs of the Earth's axis of spin. Considering the timing of India's independence (1947) and the strong spiritual ingredients of *satyagraha*, *ahimsa* and a general Hindu ethos of *dharma* enkindled

in the consciousness of all Indians during the freedom struggle by Mahatma Gandhi, and the emergence of so many illustrious Indian spiritual luminaries in the 20th century, it seems reasonable to suppose that this political and spiritual rebirth of India could have happened, only after she had emerged from the darkest period of *Kali yuga*, and entered into the more luminous age of *Dwapara yuga*.

<i>Śrī Yukteśwar Giri's model for the chronology of Yugas, based on the Precessional Cycle of the Equinoxes of roughly 24,000 years</i>		
	<i>Yuga</i>	Extent in Time
Descending Half of the Cycle	<i>Satya</i>	11501 BCE to 6701 BCE = 4800 years, inclusive of <i>sandhis</i>
	<i>Treta</i>	6701 BCE to 3101 BCE = 3600 years, inclusive of <i>sandhis</i>
	<i>Dwapara</i>	3101 BCE to 701 BCE = 2400 years, inclusive of <i>sandhis</i>
	<i>Kali</i>	701 BCE to 499 CE = 1200 years, inclusive of <i>sandhis</i>
Ascending Half of the Cycle	<i>Kali</i>	499 CE to 1699 CE = 1200 years, inclusive of <i>sandhis</i>
	<i>Dwapara</i>	1699 CE to 4099 CE = 2400 years, inclusive of <i>sandhis</i>
	<i>Treta</i>	4099 CE to 7699 CE = 3600 years, inclusive of <i>sandhis</i>
	<i>Satya</i>	7699 CE to 12499 CE = 4800 years, inclusive of <i>sandhis</i>

In the view of the *rishis*, after the completion of such a *Maha yuga*, the cycle was deemed to start afresh all over again, through a cosmic purgation and cleansing of the massive debris of the fallen civilization, through the proverbial 'flood', or cosmic deluge [*pralaya*]. It is important to note that the measure of *dharma* varied from one *yuga* (age) to the next, depending on which *yuga*, whether, *Sathya*, *Treta*, *Dwapara* or *Kali*, one was actually looking at.

1.3. *Dharma* as the Hindu System of Spiritual Education:

Being the very first goal of human life in traditional Hindu society, *dharma* was naturally centered on spiritual education and learning and *the understanding of the self and the world* on the basis of a *Vedic* and Divinity-centered world-view. In this way, Hindu male children studied for a period of fourteen years (up to their

21st year), at the feet of a competent spiritual Master (*Guru*) and his consort (*Gurupatni*) in order to gain a firm foundation in *dharma*. Such a foundation in spiritual education (*dharma*) was intended to serve as the bedrock for the whole of the future life, which was soon scheduled to unfold, the moment the individual completes this stage of spiritual education and steps headlong into the seemingly irresistible, yet also what will later prove to be treacherous waters of the mainstream of his adult life.

We may also mention in passing, a *Vedic* astrological insight, which may appear a little disturbing at first sight and which pertains to the question of whether *everyone in life* (at least the males of the species, as Hindus were thinking in the last five hundred years, in their fallen condition in *Kali yuga*) *will be fortunate in securing a Guru in life?* It is only when an individual has either a strong Jupiter in his birth chart, or a strong IXH (ninth house) or a good *Navamsha* DC (divisional chart) that the *Guru* manifests in life (*sutra*). Sometimes, individuals with abundant blessings in the birth chart (*Rasi Chart* or RC), may also be their own *Guru*, or the scriptures may serve the role of a *Guru*. In some cases, where the above astrological variables, which point to a *Guru* are afflicted, the *Guru* may vanish from our life, or relationship with him may be fraught with much pain. In fact the possibilities are too numerous, but *Jyotisha* helps us to see what Blessings are in store for us in this matter and what Wrath of *Isvara*, we must be prepared to face, as a result of past life *karma*. You are already seeing here the brilliant light *Jyotisha* is beginning to throw on the enigmas and paradoxes of life.

1.4. After *Dharma*, came the Goals of *Artha* and *Kama*:

The second and third goals (which always occur as a complementary pair) were called *artha* and *kama*. *Artha* was the seeking and subsequent attainment of wealth, status, professional proficiency, *but through compliance with dharma*. Whereas, *kama* was the seeking and subsequent attainment of the aesthetic enjoyment of all aspects of human life, including all the sensory gratifications and even the aesthetic enjoyment of the whole of nature, the arts, music, dance, poetry, theatre, *but again only through the compliance with dharma*.

1.5. *Artha* and *Kama* vis-à-vis *Dharma* and *Moksha*:

Before we venture to learn something about the esoteric notion of *moksha*, it might be good to begin by taking a bird's eye view of all the *purusharthas* (goals of human life) taken as a whole, namely, *dharma*, *artha*, *kama* and *moksha*. As we know these represent the four successive goals and aspirations of human life in a

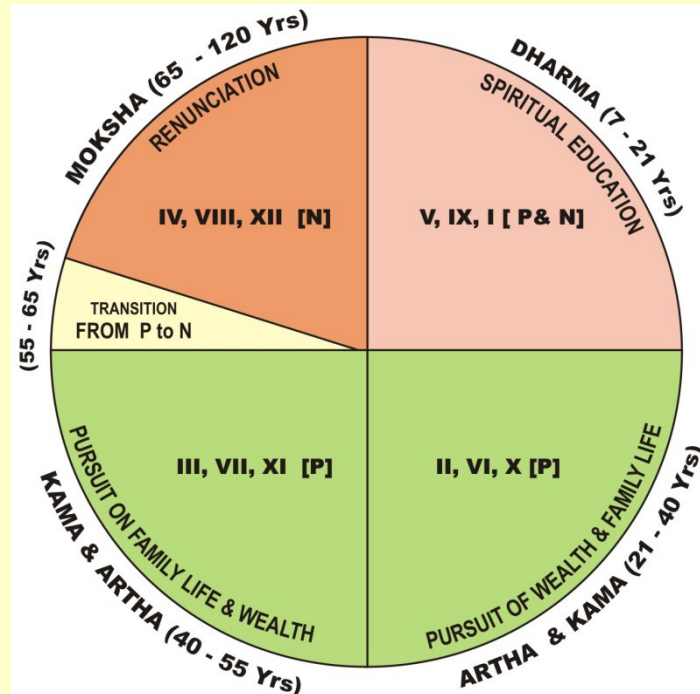
traditional Hindu society. Understanding the ramifications of these four goals of human life in that ancient society will give us a definitive advantage in that it will awaken us to the importance of having to constantly bear in mind the sphere of life-whether *dharma*, *artha*, *kama* or *moksha*-in which the individual in question is moving at the time, his specific astrological question is being taken up for analysis.

We shall see that these four goals and pursuits, taken together, will give us a highly satisfying and all encompassing picture of human life. In Isvara's (see glossary) beautiful creation, as man is a miraculous synthesis of body, mind and spirit, it was recognized by ancient Hindus that if society had to have stability as well as ample scope for creativity, then the fulfillment of the appetites of body, mind, and spirit had to be provided for. In meeting these requirements, they took on the challenge of satisfying the appetites of body and mind first, and once this was over and done with, they turned to the subtler challenge of fulfilling the appetites of the spirit.

The former appetites constituted the spheres of life called *artha* and *kama*, whereas the appetites of the spirit were dealt with in the spiritually more advanced spheres of *dharma* and *moksha*. The ancient Hindus achieved this by blending the 'worldly' aspect of our human nature which was brought to fulfillment and appeasement in the period of youth and middle age (*artha* and *kama* spheres), with the spiritual aspect of our human nature, which was brought to flower in the afternoon and evening of life (*dharma* and *moksha* spheres). *For the very reason that they accommodated the worldly as a prelude to the spiritual, ancient Hindu society had built into itself, ab initio, what may appropriately be called 'the completeness and fullness of human life'.*

Put differently, *artha* and *kama* provided for the fulfillment of humanity's physical, emotional, artistic, intellectual and social appetites. They took into account the important fact that humans were social beings who needed to relate to people, and that the seeking of skill, honor, achievement, vocation, status, wealth, property and prestige on the one hand (*artha*); and spouse, family, pleasure, enjoyment, children, home-life (*kama*) on the other, was but an inevitable aspect of being human, and that unless these appetites on the physical, emotional, intellectual, and social planes were fulfilled, there was not much meaning and purpose in the pursuit of a spiritual life in which there was not going to be room for any of these mundane cravings and satisfactions.

Goals of Life in a Traditional Hindu Society

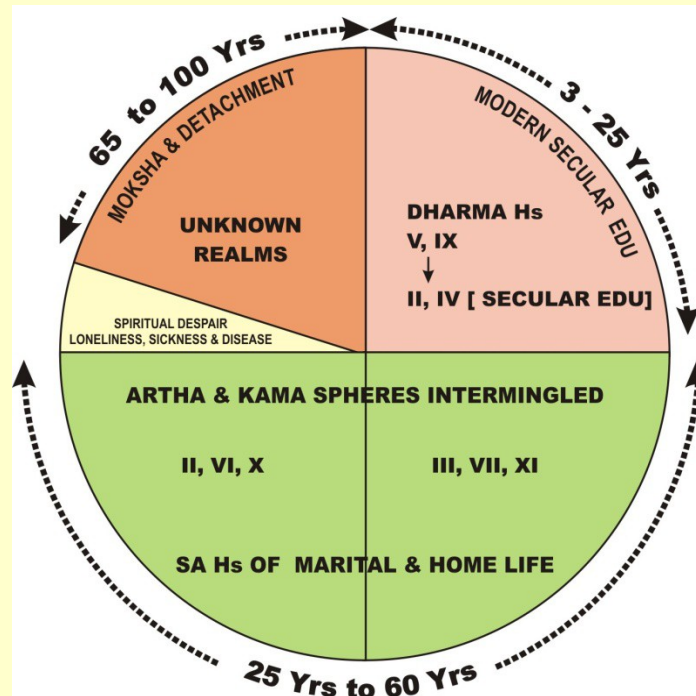


The above figure illustrates the progression of goals in a traditional Hindu society. We must start with the upper right quadrant and move in a clockwise direction to follow the progression of these goals. The first quarter of life (the school going years) was devoted to spiritual learning or *dharma*. *This was to be a spiritual foundation for the whole of the adult life to follow, but was to bear the highest fruit of moksha only in the last quarter of life, which was entirely devoted to the fulfillment of the spiritual life (moksha)*. Note that the spiritual goal of *dharma* was the first of the goals of life, whereas the highest spiritual goal of *moksha* was the last of the goals of life. The Roman numerals in the four quadrants of the following two figures refer to the ‘houses’ or areas of human life in *Vedic* astrology to which these goals or *purusharthas* correspond.

The second and the third quarters of life were devoted to *pravritti* [extroversion or involvement in the worldly spheres of *artha* and *kama*]. *Artha* meant the acquisition of wealth and achievements in life, whereas *kama* meant the graceful surrender to the temptations of life and the aesthetic enjoyment of the same, which marriage and family life provided for. Significantly, *dharma* was to

be the guiding light even as the individual traversed through these worldly spheres. Artha and kama are necessarily intertwined and constituted the second and third goals of life.

Goals of Life in a Modern Secular Society



Artha and kama were intended to bring about a full blown fulfillment to all desires; at the end of this journey, the individual was spiritually self composed and mature enough to *withdraw from worldly involvement, responsibilities and enjoyments through renunciation[nivrutti]*. To facilitate this renunciation and to make the transition to a profound spiritual life of solitude and bliss, smooth, ancient Hindus provided for an intermediary third stage of life called *vaanaprastha* or *withdrawal into the seclusion of a forest hermitage*. This intermediary stage was intended to make a passage to the profound spiritual goal of *moksha* devoid of any sense of shock on account of *withdrawal from the world and its enjoyments*.

1.6. Hindu Purusharthas Vitiated in a Modern Secular Society:

The above figure pertains to the goals of life in a modern secular society. In a modern secular society by contrast, the first goal of life, namely *dharm*, undergoes dissociation from its spiritual and religious roots with secular education taking its place. The spiritual and moral foundation for the whole of the adult life is now lost; even the possibility of *moksha* in the last stage of life becomes only

remote, if not an impossibility, as this *moksha* cannot come to pass, without the foundation of *dharma* in the first quarter of life.

The essential interconnectedness of *artha* and *kama* is as valid in a modern secular society as in a traditional Hindu one. Significantly, on account of the fundamental shift that has occurred in the nature of '*dharma*', the goals of *artha* and *kama* must now necessarily be pursued without the moral and the spiritual foundation that *dharma* had provided in a traditional Hindu society.

Worst of all, the aspiration to seek *moksha* does not even manifest, and old age, now bereft of spiritual wisdom and insights, becomes burdened with despondency and despair. Under these conditions, the last goal of life, namely, *moksha* becomes *terra incognita* for us moderns-*unless we seek this through our individual initiative in spite of our modern secular society remaining completely indifferent to our spiritual appetites.*

Once we have grasped the meanings of these four goals in the original context of the ancient society, it will then become possible for us to see what the transformed versions of these four goals are in our own contemporary Hindu society, which, at this hour, has unfortunately already succumbed to the pressure of Westernizing itself at the expense of losing its Hindu heritage. And this misfortune has struck more forcefully in an important section of the creative minority in Hindu society, namely the English educated Hindu intelligentsia.

Narrowing our focus to *moksha* now, we see that throughout human history, whether it was in the very ancient *Vedic* society or in the later civilizations of the world, *moksha* had always remained an esoteric affair, as the highest blessing in the spiritual life, which only a handful of fortunate individuals could receive. For Hindus, *moksha* has always held an irresistible fascination as the fourth and last goal of human life-the *summum bonum* of life itself. And as moderns who are quite out of touch with the spiritual ethos of our ancients we might well wonder what the nature of such an esoteric *moksha* could possibly be.....

At this stage, as a seeker, you may do some stock taking, and see if your life would fit into the model of the modern secular society, in which the Hindu goals of life are vitiated. You are naturally going to ask the legitimate question of whether under these conditions, there is not going to be any hope for building a spiritual life, without the foundation of *dharma*, in the early years of schooling and upbringing. A little reflection will tell you that in the circumstance when society does not by itself offer encouragement and opportunity for the pursuit of spiritual

goals, the impetus for the same, will have to come from your own initiative. Thus in the modern setting, you will have to pursue the spiritual life and build it, through your own effort and initiative, and this is the only way in which you may successfully compensate for the absence of a spiritual foundation in our modern secular society. *In fact this compensatory process is already underway, thanks to the numerous spiritual movements at this time offering encouragement and opportunity to attend to our much neglected spiritual flowering.*

1.7. *Moksha, after Artha and Kama:*

Moksha is the ending of all our inner sufferings that are rooted in past karma and in the egoistic and disorderly functioning of the 'illusory self'. This perception of moksha may be a little hard in the beginning, but as you ponder over it in the light of your own life experiences, everything will become clear in course of time. In our present disorderly state, the self appears intangible to us, only because of our excessive extroversion. For this reason, we are unable to know what it is, we are even unable to know that it is also illusory. In fact, it may even appear to be the most real thing so far as we are concerned. However, as we start an introverted observation of what is, which is our 'now' state of consciousness, we will be able to acknowledge the disorderly style of functioning of the self, and in this way, the self will no more appear intangible, and its illusory nature will also come home to us, as the effortless choiceless awareness of what is (in J. Krishnamurti's sense), just happens to us, as a Blessing.

Such a Blessing of *moksha* can come to pass only when a two-step process of inner purification and transformation attains completion. Firstly, there has to be an insightful meditative understanding of how this 'illusory self' functions in a self-centered and self-perpetuating way. Secondly, in the wake of this insightful meditative understanding there has to occur a phase transition, manifesting *either as a radical shift in the very style of functioning of this illusory self, or the self must spontaneously fall palpably silent.* This is the kind of structural change that physicists would describe as a *disorder-order phase transition*, such as occurs for example, when either the gaseous and disordered state of steam ('disordered' because of thermal agitation in the gaseous state) undergoes a condensation to the much more orderly and fruitful state of water. Or even better still, when the already *fairly ordered state of water* undergoes a *phase transition to the maximally ordered solid-state of ice* ('maximally' ordered, because in this solid state, the molecules of ice are arranged in a perfectly ordered crystal lattice).

In actual terms, it results at least, in a more or less perpetual and profound sense of inner well-being, clarity and serenity that is the fruit of liberation from all bondages, sufferings and from all ignorance (maya), which had in the earlier disorderly state, constituted the very stuff of the illusory self. Under certain conditions, when the same is also accompanied by mystical experiences of cosmic consciousness, or other esoteric manifestations of an awakened Kundalini, we may take that to represent the glorious and profound dimension of moksha.

Nevertheless it may be noted that the freedom from all sufferings resulting in a perpetual inner clarity and serenity, is what should be considered to be the primary hall mark of *moksha*, and not these transcendental states of the mystics. *The reason is that many seekers and mumukshus who experience these transcendental states for a while, can also be extremely confused with the yoke of duality and suffering still heavily upon their shoulders, with hardly an irrevocable understanding, as to what the Divine is, and more importantly, who they are, in relation to the Divine?*

It is the fourth and final goal of human life in Hindu society since very ancient times. In the *Vedic*-Hindu tradition, the ultimate unmanifest aspect of the Divine is held to be unknowable, beyond all understanding even, so that only the process of a chain of negations of every knowable thing, in an enquiry into the Divine (or into our true nature), along the lines, *neti, neti* (not this, not this; or neither this, nor that), was held to be the reliable means of ‘reaching’ the Unknowable, which paradoxically was also the imperceptible Inner Self (*Atma*). This kind of an enquiry alone was expected to burn out and terminate *becoming and searching*, and thereby facilitate the *abidance in being*, which is both, who we are, as well as the portal to the unapproachable Unknowable.


While Hindus were aware of *moksha* since the early years of their upbringing, it was really only after sixty-by which time, they would have become more or less free of the enticing pull of *māya*, and therefore, also would have handed over all their family & social responsibilities to their children- that they could take that final plunge with full dedication as full fledged seekers into the last goal of life, *moksha*.

Moksha as we have seen can also be taken to be that *insightful understanding* of the nature of Absolute Reality, the Unknowable and an *insightful understanding into the nature of the illusory self, as a prelude*; so that this understanding results in perpetual equanimity and perpetual clarity, serenity and empathy with the entire world, with the whole of life. An unceasing awareness,

fascination and oneness with the Divine in all its infinite mystifying manifestations is the wellspring underlying the blessing of *moksha*.

Artha and *kama*, which were the natural goals of life between 21 yrs of age and 60 yrs of age, were intended for the fullest fulfillment of the self, whereas, *moksha* (after 60 yrs of age) was held to be the result of an *insightful understanding of the illusory nature of the self*, and consequently, *implied a negation of the self into the Divine, an ending of the self*, so that this was also a total liberation from every conceivable suffering that human beings were heir to (because of this illusory self), in the three preceding spheres of *dharma*, *artha* and *kama*. The result if attained would naturally be a state of well-being, undistracted attention and equanimity, arising from the unity with the Divine, and even with the whole of life itself, which in the *Vedic* view was after all, only a manifestation of that same Divinity, the Source of our life.

-S. Bhagavadpada



|| Jyotiṣāmayanam Cakṣuḥ ||
(Vedic Astrology is the Eye of Wisdom)

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