

The Spiritual Dimensions of Vedic Astrology, by Robert A. Koch

(Review by J.I. Abbot)

Understood in its traditional Indian context, Jyotish is a sadhana or spiritual pursuit; more to the point, it is deemed the "eye of the Veda" and as such yields insight on all forms - intellectual or material - that require light. Its capacity to time life events in a precise and pragmatic way can for many students new to it belie its vast spiritual moorings and purpose.

For this reason, veteran Jyotishi and Bhakti yogi Robert Koch's magnum opus, *The Spiritual Dimensions of Vedic Astrology*, provides a much-needed corrective for anyone whose Jyotish studies have perhaps become too mechanistic or existentially isolated. Koch's first of two major sections in the book situates Indian astrology within a classical, indeed Vedic, cosmology and worldview, with sub-sections treating topics as varied as the six orthodox schools of Indian philosophy, divine incarnations, and various planetary yogas found in the charts of spiritual aspirants. The second section exhaustively unpacks the workings of the Drig dasha ("Drig" - akin to darshan, the meeting with a higher being; "dasha" - the cycles of time tracked in a horoscope), a rashi or sign-based system ideally suited to pinpointing milestone dates in the horoscopes of saints, mystics and other religious seekers.

Koch, himself an initiate in the Gaudiya Vaishnava school of Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, founder of ISKCON, is now a Jyotish guru who has been associated with Pandit Sanjay Rath's Sri Jagannath Center, an organization with a Parampara (lineage) historically intertwined with Prabhupada's tradition. (Prabhupada's lineage hails from the sixteenth century Bengali saint Sri Chaitanya; the Sri Jagannath Center dwells on the traditional Jyotish of Sri Achyuta Das, a great daivajna, or seer, and an associate of Sri Chaitanya.) Koch's authentic role as a transmitter of his lineages should not be underestimated. Yet at the same time, his research on Drig dasha and many other

topics here is highly original and innovative. Both the traditional orientation and the fresh investigations are enormous assets for the serious student of Vedic astrology. In fact, I expressly recommend this book for intermediate to advanced students of Jyotish, who will ideally be able to recognize the volume's anchor in Parashari and Jaimini Jyotish and thus identify and contextualize Koch's commentary, which is steeped in the specialized theology of dvaita (dualist) Vaishnava theory and practice.

As a lineage holder as well as seasoned scholar, Mr. Koch may well have ushered in a new chapter in the contemporary Jyotish renaissance, both by means of the high caliber of the astrology itself proffered and the near-encyclopedic scope of topics treated: everything from the investigation of the postmortem destiny of a number of Indian saints to a window on the phenomenon of stigmata or blessed wounds in the biographies of Christian holy men and women. Koch handles the identification of key events such as meeting with spiritual mentors, Diksa (initiation), progress of spiritual training - and nearly every topic central to seekers - meticulously, via the technology of relevant dashas. It is within the unfolding of these dashas and their subdivisions that the powers of planetary yogas and other combinations in both the rashi and divisional charts are triggered. Amid the spectrum of themes and topics the author addresses here, perhaps the only singular religious phenomenon one won't find is the activity of spiritualists (conductors of s,ances), whose practices are probably outside of the purpose of the book anyway.

Dedicated supporters of Vedic astrology who study and practice within our exquisitely diverse Jyotish community may hope that we will soon see expositions of Indian astrology at this impressive level of erudition and technical sharpness from other theological standpoints: e.g., perhaps non-dual Shaivite, Devi-centered Shakta, ecumenical Smarta, Buddhist, Jain, Sikh...the list goes on. It is this reviewer's prayer that the intellectual and visionary

blessings this book can open up in our practice will seed many new dimensions of research and several generations of spiritually nourished astrologers.

— J.I. Abbot