

CHAPTER 2

The nature of the zodiac

In the previous chapter I said that the Earth, in the language of symbols, represents the human self. The zodiac then must be seen as the human environment, the world of the Earth; the personality, the cultural inheritance, of the Earth. On the birth chart the zodiac is to be taken as a series of points of reference which serve to plot the positions of Sun, Moon and planets in relation to the orbital motion of the Earth. I have come to see the zodiac as a living, vibrating mantle of energy, a patchwork quilt of life forces, a force-field which surrounds the Earth and controls or constrains the lives of its inhabitants, plant, animal and human. From the point of view of spirit, in respect of the Earth, the zodiac must represent no less than the bounds of materiality.

But what exactly is the zodiac, in sensible terms, if not simply that remote background of stars? It provides fixed references for each of the 360 degrees which custom has ascribed to any circle, so is it merely a convenient name, or series of names, for the path of the ecliptic, the track along which our Sun *seems* to move? That certainly is the usual definition of "zodiac" — the "animal belt". The line between symbolism and factuality becomes blurred when I say that the zodiac is indeed a spiritual matrix through which our planet must spin. In the astrology of the inner self, in the cycle of becoming, of potential wholeness, the zodiac must be taken to represent a sheltering cocoon of life forces, interwoven, vibrating in harmony, regulating natural instincts, bestowing human personality.

Many people, even a few astrologers, have been misled by the nominal link between the zodiac and the constellations which supplied the familiar names of the twelve signs. As everyone now knows, the grouping of a constellation into its familiar shape is little more than an optical illusion formed by quite unrelated stars many light years apart. From a rational point of view of course it is true that the zodiac is simply the Earth's orbit. But within this orbit, it is equally true to say, is contained all that is possible for all creatures on Earth, including humankind: within the zodiac is the potentiality for selfhood, and the possibility of that selfhood coming to completion.

I have said that the zodiac is a spiritual matrix. But if its function is to bind materiality around the Earth, it would seem to follow that it must stand in opposition to true spirituality. The two extremes seem forever at odds. But without materiality no creature could function or live. Our human bodies are solidly material; our very thoughts are products of our material brains. It is very plain that, whatever our spiritual aspirations, materiality is something that we could in no wise do without.

With this quality of materiality still in mind, the zodiac could be said to represent the substance of all life forms on Earth, and the familiar signs of the zodiac represent twelve distinct but basic types of life substance. Applied to human personality, the simplest analysis will show that within each basic type exist numerous subtle variations. There are no "good signs" or "bad signs", as far as people and their birth dates are concerned. Both the highest and the lowest of qualities may be found in any one of them.

Reiterated daily by popular astrologers, the traditional characteristics ascribed to each sign are well enough known. Although no fixed level of being, no moral or spiritual status, can be attributed to them, they do indicate basic personality traits in individuals, both human and animal, that fall under their sway. Remember that the zodiac represents a cycle of degrees, beginning for convenience with the northern spring equinox. Each degree (and in more general terms each

set of thirty degrees, each twelfth part of the whole) builds upon the preceding signs or degrees and reinforces them, justifies their characteristics, and carries their principles a stage further in every case. It will do no harm to restate their basic qualities in terms of human development:

Aries

carries with it the abstract idea of the egoistic self, the first realization of individuality, the sense of "I am" that, in its fully developed form, distinguishes humans from beasts. It exemplifies the will to *be*, to commence new growth.

Taurus

represents the developing substance of abstract Arien desire, a gathering of material evidence to the self. This sign inherits the basic idea and solidifies it in a tangible way.

Gemini

synthesizes the relationship between the previous two, self and substance. It integrates and digests these two basic modes of expression and projects them outwards, communicating them in understandable terms.

Cancer

again returns to new realizations, new individual beginnings; but being now in possession of both the expression and the synthesis, has the power to commence practical growth rather than merely to will it.

Leo

is all concrete expression, symbolizing solidly real projection of the principle of personal growth, with creative activity to confirm and strengthen individuality.

Virgo

brings discrimination and judgment to bear on the enthusiastic projection of selfhood. It considers the results of those past actions and modifies them in the present with the power of reason.

Libra

instinctively makes peace, acknowledging more fully than the previous types the rights and needs of others. It rejects the selfishness of "I am" and seeks to unite differences.

Scorpio

represents the substance of the Libran balancing instinct, seeking to unite with others in wholly practical terms. It represents a renewal of self-centredness, but in terms of *feeling*.

Sagittarius

conjoins the qualities of Libra and Scorpio, and expands them outside of itself through the urge to understand and experience new and more complicated relationships.

Capricorn

tames the Sagittarian spirit of expansion and builds a firmer foundation for outside relationships, expressing an instinctive longing for a human society of permanence and stability.

Aquarius

expresses these ideals of permanence in new emotional and creative ways, feeling a need for experimentation into the possibility of broader relationships and new modes of conduct.

Pisces

represents the process of weighing, summarizing and judging of all past ideals, discriminating, meditating inwardly upon outward qualities, and setting the pattern for a new personal cycle to begin.

When superimposed on the individual mandala, the zodiac begins to show something of the qualities that clothe and embellish the naked soul, as well as the primitive aspects of character that may lurk beneath the acquisitions of civilization. One needs to look beneath, around and above superficialities, both of personality and of inherited cultural attitudes, to discover the inner self — the subtle self which alone can contact soul, and which alone can hope to receive influences finer than those ascribed to the zodiac.

The elements

Fire, air, water and earth — each sign of the zodiac is said traditionally to possess the nature of one or other of these fabled elements. The idea is often expressed in somewhat simplistic terms, for instance, *fire*: the Arien personality is forceful and persistent; *water*: the Cancerian is emotional and deep; *air*: the Geminian is characterized by his restless thoughts; *earth*: the Taurean is down to earth and reliable.

But these similarities are coincidental. There is a far more subtle and diffused significance which can be attached to these four elements as they form part of the zodiac. As we are taking the zodiac itself to represent the web of instincts and the pattern of natural lifestyles here on Earth, rather than seeing the elements as passions that rule the individual, it will suit our special purpose better if we equate them with the "passions" that rule Earth itself — nature's life forces, as they affect humankind.

Our basic humanity, the inbuilt program that determines our biological characteristics, has already been determined before birth. The instincts which largely govern our behaviour and which I call the passions, have to be acquired from outside the physical body, via the instinctive level of consciousness. It is these instincts that can be described as embodying the quality of the four zodiacal elements: fire, air, water and earth.

It is no use thinking of these elements as possessing a stable quality, or occupying a known level of being. It will become plain that they each contain an unknown number of grades, or ascending cycles. Take "fire", for instance: there is smouldering fire, which can safely be held in the fingers; then there is raging fire which can form towering infernos capable of devouring steel and concrete. There is light earth, fine enough to trickle through the fingers; then there is hard clay and solid rock, and even molten metal deep within the Earth. Each quality of life force is a blend of these elements with an intelligence uniquely its own. Within this abstract blanket of cosmic elements, filling Earth's life forms under the general name of "instinct", there are the animal life forces, which provide the drive, in one, to behave and feed like a lion; in another, to behave and feed like an antelope; in another, like a snake. As animals are unrooted and free to roam, one can see that these animal life forces will be strongly akin to the element of air, although fire, water and earth will also play a part.

mutable		FIRE
fixed	HUMAN INSTINCTS	air
cardinal		water
		earth
mutable		fire
fixed	ANIMAL INSTINCTS	AIR
cardinal		water
		earth
mutable		fire
fixed	PLANT INSTINCTS	air
cardinal		WATER
		earth
mutable		fire
fixed	MATERIAL INSTINCTS	air
cardinal		water
		EARTH

The animal life forces direct the lifestyle and movements of the giant blue whale as surely as they do those of the microbe. They are responsible for social order in the teeming life of insects with their million-fold variety; with the shoaling of fish, and the amazing migratory capacities of birds. These instinctual life forces bestow energy and strength, arrogance and selfishness, forcing creatures under their sway to experience the joys of triumph and the sorrows of defeat. They lead

the hounds to outrun the fox, and equally they lead the fox to outwit the hounds. Thus they are constantly in a state of tension within themselves; but they are at one with the Earth, for they ensure an even balance of populations and resources.

Plants function on their own brand of instinct to exactly the same extent as the animals. No plant can think its way through life from the seed to the forest mould. The plant life forces — bestowing the urge to behave like an oak tree, or a nettle, a cactus, or a vine — may seem on first consideration to be serene and gentle. But on further consideration it will soon become plain that they are no such thing. Frequently it is the fate of plants to exist in hostile environments. They are bound to the earth by their roots, apart from tiny life forms able to float freely in the air or sea currents, and they cannot choose the place where they live. A plant must be ruthlessly competitive if it is to survive beyond the seedling stage. The life forces appropriate to them ensure that, if they cannot adapt themselves to the opposition of other plants, they must either overcome that opposition or succumb to it.

Animals usually have a sense of family, or group, or species, and may look after their own in various ways; but with plants there is no such consideration. The welfare of neighbouring plants — even siblings from the same pod or clones from the same branch — is of no account; their rule of life is "number one". In astrological terms, we can say that these plant instincts will have a special relationship with the element of water, which soaks into the earth and gives life to thirsty roots, although again the other elements too must play their part.

Through ceaseless internal strife, these fierce and selfish plant instincts balance themselves out over many generations, and lead to the creation of closely-knit plant communities able to function individually by inter-relating habits: roots feeding at differing depths, foliage seeking sunlight at differing heights. The numerous species provide for their own survival by means of incredibly varied modes of reproduction. Every unit seems to co-operate with the whole. But when an apparently peaceful plant community is disturbed, whichever plant finds itself temporarily advantaged wastes no time in taking over as much territory as it can, suppressing other plants in its path. The "peaceful" woodland community evolves only through the "passion" of ruthless selfishness.

To be identified with the abstract element of "earth", the material life forces can be said to provide a physical impulse for the behaviour of atoms and all the particles which make up the Earth, regulating the form and density of solids, gases, minerals and metals. They are perhaps the least subtle of these nebulous life forces. They are certainly the coarsest and probably the most powerful, and nothing material could exist without them. They constitute the mechanics of gravity and magnetism, controlling the tendency of matter to accumulate or disperse.

All these basic instincts will exist quite separately from the creatures which they motivate. A creature can lose its appropriate animal instincts if isolated from its proper environment for too long, cut off from the source. But it will never lose the basic physical instinct of continued existence. Fire, air, water and earth in their abstract sense must coexist in all life forms, but the wholly material "earth" will be the most pervasive and persistent. Humans, animals and plants are all material objects on Earth, and all are physically motivated by material energy.

Civilization, nature and intuition

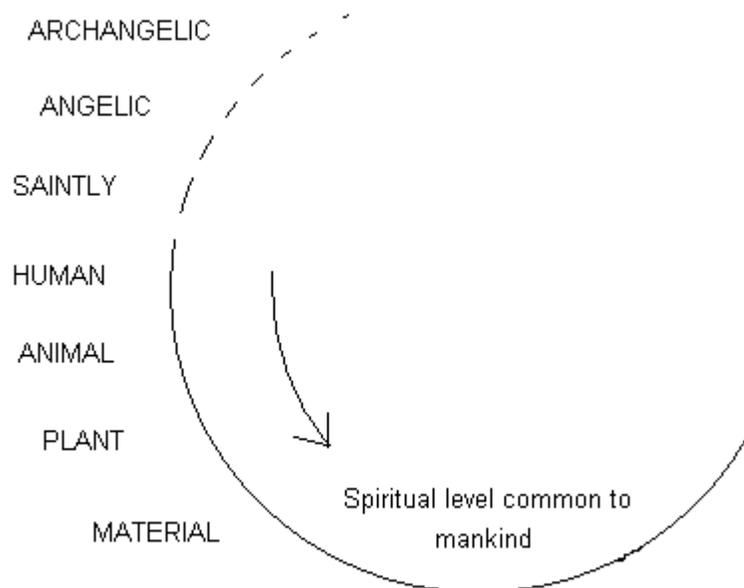
Fate has decreed that we as humans must imbibe a share of all the "lower forces". It is no bad thing, for they provide the wherewithal of civilization: instincts prompted by materiality may bestow greed, but they also bestow the ability to make and use tools, to build houses, to make and wear clothes. All these things are certainly part of the divine bounty for people on Earth, but as they represent the lowest force, the subtle force of materiality within the zodiac, they cannot be intended to form our psychic centre of gravity. They are far less than "human" in nature. As Hindu tradition has it: "There are three great powers in nature, created to govern the minerals, the plants

and the animals. When the soul of man is governed also by these powers, he strays blindly along the paths of illusion, wandering endlessly from death to death". Any creature governed by nature is automatically governed by the Earthly cycle of birth and death.

If plant forces introduce the passion of ruthless arrogance into the human psyche, they also instil the need for competition, for striving in the face of opposition. They are finer forces than the material, and they too are useful for the development of civilizations. But, like the material instincts themselves, as part of the laws of nature, they cannot be intended to dominate human actions; they too are far less than the truly "human".

The animal forces in their turn bestow pride and clannish behaviour, and often a seemingly insatiable appetite for sex. They are of a still finer nature than the others, and we cannot escape imbibing them. The very air we breathe is said to be full of minute organisms, both animal and vegetable, so there is a continual interflow of instinctual matter between human, animal, and plant. The animal forces too have their uses in human development, for without their instinctual drive there could well be no sense of culture, no urge to build nations, no determination to achieve one's ambitions. And, of course, they too are part of nature's laws over which we as humans *ought* to remain spiritually aloof.

Finer than the animal forces of the zodiac, fine enough indeed to permeate the web of the zodiac through its densest layers, are the instinctual forces actually intended for humans alone. These, expressed intuitively, give us the ability to judge, to observe, to discriminate, to do all those things that set us apart from the animals. It has been said that people at the time of Abraham were truly "human", being less influenced by the "lower" life forces. For reasons we shall soon discover, compassion was unknown to them. Their hearts and minds were not as active as are the hearts and minds of modern people, and they had yet to experience the competitive spirit of territorial acquisition, or the tenacity to manufacture and build. I am identifying this human life force with the astrological element of "fire". All the elements need to be present in all living beings, but fire, we might say, is the fire of life, and only humans are able to make proper use of fire.



The Descent of Mankind

The spiritual history of mankind is usually thought of as a slow climb from an animal-like or apelike state, through primitive stages of nature worship and sun worship to an ever more sophisticated understanding of one almighty loving God. This is the historical view, but it does not represent the spiritual reality of the situation. The reality of it can perhaps be best understood in terms of these life forces operative via the zodiac. If we plot a sequence in these terms it seems to confirm a quite opposite view: that our collective worldly advancement has been in a direction *away* from our high origins, and *down* into the depths of materiality. The spiritual direction of evolution has been away from the source, away from God, away from human childhood to the materiality of adulthood, coincident with the adult's capacity to think keenly and feel deeply. It would seem, in other words, that people cannot be truly adult, that civilization, arts and sciences cannot develop, until we have *grown out of being spiritually human*; until we have descended among the lower orders and become adulterated by them.

Nowadays, it is very clear, we humans have become thoroughly adulterated and filled with what are really subhuman instincts — in this sense, immersed in nature. But all is not lost. With the development of heart and mind, provided mind does not become too domineeringly powerful, may grow the capacity of intuition, and the intuitive realization that the positive qualities of striving, thinking and learning (that is, "the passions") are precisely the cause of this human descent. The hoped-for meeting of mind and soul, and the subsequent search for wholeness, for reunion with the source, cannot really be conducted with these instruments. The understanding must arise spontaneously that this particular journey needs to follow the direction of *human instinct*, an all but forgotten function that comes into operation only when the gross passions of "wanting" are stilled. The will — the everyday functioning of heart and mind — cannot be used for this noble purpose.

Another quote from the Upanishads: "Lacking spirit, the soul of man that governs body and mind is itself governed by the forces of nature ... By itself, soul is powerless to repudiate alien forces and seek such as are proper to the lives of men". Elemental life forces stand in the way of possible contact with spirit through the medium of soul, and those elemental forces cannot be put out of action by means of the will, since the will is subordinate to them and governed by them. Expressed somewhat differently, the direction of mental development is downwards, towards the centre of materiality. The insulating layer of the zodiac covers the Earth. The way to escape the zodiac therefore cannot be "downwards" by strengthening the mind, but upwards and outwards by way of the truly human instinct, through the oppressing passions, to and beyond the soul to the realm of spirit.

Because they do not *think*, creatures below the human level seem barely influenced by life forces which do not concern them. They follow only their own level of instinct. All flesh is grass, it is true, and all physical forms are material objects. But each life form has its own instinctual course and adheres to it. It is only when *we* take a hand and transmit *our* passions, that instincts may seem to have become adulterated. The pet dog, for example, influenced by human company, may begin to behave as though filled with the plant passion of competition, or the material obsession with possessions. The ability of humans to act as "channels" for forces both higher and lower than our own true nature is often unsuspected, and is a point to be touched on later.

It may not be out of place to stress that "spirituality" is not at all the same as "religion". Religious leaders are often described in popular terms as "spiritual leaders" when plainly they are no such thing. This is not to say that religion and spirituality cannot function together, though religion is often a matter of cultural background, an accident of birth. Essentially, spirituality is a matter for the soul, being filled with spirit. Religion is a matter for the heart, the symbolic human heart, the seat of emotion whose feelings may be noble or base. According to the Prophet Jeremiah: "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked".

Passion, in the Christian sense, means "suffering", but this is not what we usually mean by "passion", in the sense of vehemence or intensity. Suffering may be found at all levels of being,

but there are no vehement "passions" in the spiritual ethos. "Passions" are to be found in religion, along with fanaticism, because they reside in the heart. Both are of this Earth, and cannot approach the Almighty, cannot encompass spirit. You may feel something strongly, but this does not make it true. Truth is to be found in the reality of experience. There has always been a tendency among emotional people to suppose that strong feeling strengthens truth, or that the "passions" equate with truth.

Realization, through intuition, may creep up on one. There may come a distinct moment of change in the lives of religious people, a change of direction. John Donne wrote "I am a little world made cunningly of elements, and an angelic sprite". This angelic sprite may be behind it all. How else can we make contact with the centre of being, with the seat of human instinct, with the blank sheet of the inner self that receives all influences and can respond, not with passion but with wisdom: with the spontaneous awakening of the soul?

The cycle of the zodiac

In the first place, we should understand that our position in the zodiac is not limited, whatever our Sun sign or the rising degree of our ascendant. Governed by nature, human life follows the full cycle of nature — that is, the full cycle of the zodiac with all its possibilities. We can follow this in ways suited to our own cultural expectations. Our familiar system of astrology originated in the northern hemisphere. Nearer the equator and in the south people have evolved somewhat different systems. The northern seasons are distinct, and it is easy to see why the zodiac cycle, though continuous, is said by Europeans and North Americans to begin with the season of new growth, the spring equinox.

By experiencing seasonal rebirth every year, the Earth can be said to symbolize the collective life of humanity as it progresses from birth to death. From new birth, the human individual should progress through the spring-like flush of youth into the full bloom of summer, to ripen and mature during the autumn, finally reaching the winter of old age and death. In this sense the life of the Earth represents the whole of human life in each orbit of the Sun.

The table summarizes the steadily changing pattern of a maturing individual. This is the background familiar to the soul; though normally unfamiliar to the mind, it is the canvas upon which each life is painted. It shows how the driving instinct and the dominant passion changes as we become older, a subtle background that will show through the personality in a way adapted to the cultural background of the individual. The sequence is not affected by birth sign or ascendant degree. Those factors are always present, of course, and each newly formed personality will be moulded and stamped accordingly. But in the broader, cosmic view — essential when seeking soul and thereby spirit — all births can be said to take place at the spring equinox, the birth-point of the Earth. Every developing soul then has to grow through each of the zodiac signs in turn, progressively absorbing fresh characteristics as it grows.

All this, it should be stressed, takes place quite irrespective of individuality symbolized by the actual birth sign, logged by the Sun in space and the ascendant in time; irrespective, that is, of environment, fate, karma, heredity, or outside influence. Beginning with Aries the twelve zodiac signs, each a twelfth part of the Earth's orbit, are traversed by the self, taking seven years to log the thirty degrees of each. By this reckoning, to complete the cycle of nature, the ideal human life span would be seven times twelve, or eighty-four years. This, by tradition, is termed the "Lifespan of the Patriarch" or, equally, the "Matriarch". By the age of eighty-four, whether he or she realizes it or not, a person will have lived through the whole range of human characteristics, sampling every possibility open to them within the limits of their own individual capacity.

One can recognize the rhythmic changes in outlook that take place in oneself, if only by remembering how it was for you at some previous date. The characteristics attributed to each sign of the zodiac are well enough known, and overlaid on these, it becomes easy to see how the changing signs fit into the life pattern of any developing individual.

AGE	SIGN	LOOKING	PREOCCUPATION	QUALITY	DEGREE
0-7	ARIES	outward	Urgent projection	Awakening	0°
				Watching	15°
7-14	TAURUS	inward	Productive security	Feeling	30°
				Enjoyment	45°
14-21	GEMINI	outward	Adaptive variability	Desire	60°
				Striving	75°
21-28	CANCER	inward	Defensive protection	Daring	90°
				Sincerity	105°
28-35	LEO	outward	Authoritative power	Conviction	120°
				Explanation	135°
35-42	VIRGO	inward	Critical analysis	Invention	150°
				Experimentation	165°
42-49	LIBRA	outward	Harmonious unity	Rumination	180°
				Discovery	195°
49-56	SCORPIO	inward	Intense penetration	Memory	210°
				Valuation	225°
56-63	SAGITTARIUS	outward	Extensive exploration	Discernment	240°
				Freedom	255°
63-70	CAPRICORN	inward	Prudent discipline	Wonder	270°
				Dependence	285°
70-77	AQUARIUS	outward	Unconventional progress	Conservation	300°
				Anticipation	315°
77-84	PISCES	inward	Unworldly impressionability	Hope	330°
				Reassurance	345°
					360°

Lifespan of the Patriarch or Matriarch

As the table shows, every sign of the zodiac is regarded either as "inward-looking" or "outward-looking". The unconscious habit of looking inwards or outwards in one's approach to life — the introversion-extraversion factor — really does alternate, not only through adjacent zodiac "birth" signs, but also in 7-year cycles throughout an individual life. It indicates the changing outlook that any normal person experiences as they go through life. On this factor depends whether people look for causes within or outside of themselves, and it has significance for the progress of the awakened soul, too.

Most of us occasionally look back at our own lives. There were the formative infant years, when everything was urgent and immediate, and instantly expressed. At this stage the mental processes are only just awakening, and the feelings are projected outward. Then from the age of three or four, and still within the sign of Aries, comes the natural urge to "watch", to learn about life. Aries adults are not baby-like, of course, although there is perhaps a childlike sense of urgency about them. The breadth of the symbol should be respected. All life forms must experience their own specific version of the sequence. It would theoretically be possible to plot the inner progress through the zodiac cycle of any creature, elephant or starfish. From the viewpoint of nature, human progress is only potentially "human" in the spiritual sense.

At seven years of age the individual experiences a change of sign. From this time on comes an intensely sensual period of exploration, a greedy eagerness, as it were, to sample every new flavour or sensation. Later, this drive broadens and becomes more physical, developing into a search for active enjoyment around the age of ten and into the early teens. This is an inward-looking search: "How do I like this? How does that affect *me*?" This is the Taurean principle!

At around fourteen years children start looking outwards again. They have to fit in with their peers. Their desires are insatiable, and they really feel the need for someone outside of themselves to share their feelings with. This is a time too when youngsters branch out determinedly into all the activities open to them, in a spirit of adventure that soon develops into the competitive striving of young adulthood. These are typical Geminians, entering the difficult but exciting period of adaptation to maturity, their experiences pulling them first one way and then another. Though individually they are seldom aware of "soul", all this is soul activity, functioning irrespective of outside influences.

Next comes the Cancerian period lasting from the age twenty-one until twenty-eight, the period of "daring", when young adults are very much centred in personal feeling whilst they venture boldly into the unknown: an age for the pioneer. "Sincerity" becomes a way of life, though probably unformulated as such. But with this sincerity may grow a sense of guilt for all the various influences that have been entering the soul, unsuspected since childhood and only now making their nature known. Approaching the age of twenty-eight, we are fortunate if we can "make a ladder of our faults" and use them as a means for growth.

The onset of the span of Leo is often explosive and always unexpected. The latter part of this 7-year span may be deeply concerned with a search for enlightenment. The fruit of previous sincerity is an open acknowledgment of all shortcomings. There may take place an honest reassessment of one's situation, followed by the wish to create a more significant, more authoritative position in the world. This is often the most confident period of one's life.

The span of Virgo is the fruition of all experiences to date, resulting in an attitude that contrasts sharply with that of the ebullient, confident Leo. This is the time for the discovery of principles greater than anything hitherto known, a quest for influences finer than any normally supplied by the world.. Frequently this is the time when contact with the "great life force" becomes a reality. If so, it becomes a period of intense spiritual experience.

The span of Libra signals a more adventurous phase when having received the best of

available influences by way of the quietened, receptive soul, the individual quite involuntarily again turns outwards. The result this time is to bring the spiritual fruits of the ruminative phase to meet and mingle with the coarser influences of the world round about. The next seven years, typically, will be a time of intense physical activity, coupled with sensitive feelings.

At the age of forty-nine, the individual may quite suddenly tire of feeling like an emotional island in a sea of physical activity. It is time to become *outwardly* emotional whilst inwardly receiving finer influences that will give food for thought. On entering this phase of recollection and reassessment, the imaginative capacities will flourish as never before. Sexual impulses too will seem to grow from within, without necessarily finding a smooth outflow. Scorpio is very much orientated towards a sexual mode of expression!

The span of Sagittarius often brings with it a state of confusion. The individual will have been feeling a powerful need to look outwards, to broaden all experiences, physical, emotional, mental and intuitional. It is a time for adventuring with caution, examining new possibilities with care, and this time a suitable vehicle for expression is sought and probably found. It is the time of life when many people find their true forte, when their natural gifts and latent talents can be developed to the full.

Capricorn heralds a new span of gathering together, reassembling, and putting to good and profitable use. From the previously undisciplined application of newly discovered talents, a new and more controlled lifestyle can now be organized. Deep inside, the individual often senses peace, filled with an unexplained sense of gratitude.

Now, as the cycle of nature draws close to its completion, the symbolism of the outlying planets grows in importance as these collective factors grow in strength. From the age of seventy, the span of Aquarius signals an excellent time for quiet inward submission to a higher possibility — the collective soul of humankind. If the Capricornian span brought the possibility of reconciliation with Saturn, with the inevitability of death, this Aquarian span symbolizes the individual's ability to pass safely through this barrier, to leave heavier passions behind, and to experience the strange "collective passions" symbolized by Uranus, co-ruler of Aquarius.

Finally the ageing individual looks inwards once again, submitting to finer impulses from the inner self — impulses which, in astrological terms, may actually be capable of penetrating the Saturnian rings of death. As a symbol of the individual soul, the ruling planet of Pisces is Jupiter; but it is co-ruled by Neptune, symbol of the collective soul itself. This is the Piscean span that completes the whole eighty-four year lifespan, and as it draws to a close it embraces an increasingly unworldly sense of reassurance and peace.

Many people can see these changes very clearly in their own lives, up to whatever age they have reached. The cycle has been one of nature within the confines of the zodiac, but it has been operative by way of the soul. The closer a person is to his or her own soul, the clearer will the progression seem. When the soul is wide awake, it will be very clear indeed. Each change of perception during the cycle has its own distinctive flavour, like a vivid memory of times long past. Each change may have been instantaneous, even violent or brutal, occurring perhaps in a flash of inspiration; or it may have been gradual and barely perceptible. At all events, one usually gains the impression that life has somehow shifted gear. Each 7-year phase is in fact a barrier; a hurdle to crossed, and with some, the experience can bring with it an excitingly new understanding of the meaning of life.

Not everyone of course is fated to complete the Lifespan of the Patriarch, or Matriarch. It is certainly not a condition for advancement. It simply logs the birth, death and rebirth of the Earth in its orbit through the seasons. It is merely a chronometer, recording the progress of nature. But it does form a background which is common to all, and it is helpful to locate oneself within this cycle and from there to choose a promising time to contact the great life force, once the possibility of this encounter is known and understood.