

CHAPTER 9

The spiral of ascent

From the ascendant on the birth chart the point of self traverses by degrees the whole cycle of the zodiac, experiencing the abstract quality of nature symbolized by it. As it travels it acquires less-than-human characteristics, steadily gaining material strength but leaving far behind the initial contact of the newly born with the spiritual source. So having made what amounts to a quite involuntary descent amongst what we can now identify as increasingly coarse influences, through the instinctual worlds of humans, then animals, then plants, and then material objects, having as an adult person experienced their varied natures, there comes a time to gather these elements personally within the self, and begin the return journey. Now that we have become aware of the situation, we are in a position to put theory into practice, to put our own house in order. From this point on, besides our normal everyday pursuits, a submissive completion of wholeness should be a major aim in life.

The birth chart native's symbolic Sun needs to have been reached before this return journey can be made; but what does this mean in practical terms? The vague concept of a "redeeming spirit" has to come to reality; actual contact with spirit is a necessary precursor for the final path of the soul. This is the allegorical house-master come home, with authority to reinstate the steward and allow him to carry out his proper duties. Without real spiritual contact, without the correct channelling process and corresponding inner development, the abstract sphere of collective humanity will remain a nebulous world of dreams, a land of the unconscious.

Imagine the fate of a soul only partially "opened", perhaps by occult practices. By its own nature, it will receive contents and adopt them, believing them to be its own. Still bound by the abstract zodiac of materiality, such a soul trapped without spirit in collective realms is fated to remain tied to Earth after the death of the body. Existence on Earth without the physical principle of Saturn to give materiality or substance to individual passions, could only be a living death, abortive and empty. It might bring to mind Milton's *Paradise Lost*:

*As far removed from God and light of heav'n
As from the centre thrice to th'utmost pole.*

Pluto will have taken charge. As the governing symbol of collective mortality, Pluto is also the ancient god of ghosts, keeper of the dark underworld of the unconscious, far from the light and warmth of the Sun.

It really does seem that deliberately overruling or suppressing your own personality and concentrating on the abstract side of your nature, a purely selfish, occult cultivation of the soul without leaving room for spirit, can lead to a ghost-like state after death. Within Buddhism, personality is sometimes decried and often denied; the everyday material world of *samsara* is considered illusory, and much store is set on the meditation of *samadhi* to attain the cessation of passions, hoping eventually to reach the ultimate stillness of *Nirvana*. But, as hinted at in some of the ancient Buddhist "wisdom poems", all is not quite what it seems. The apparent peace of *Nirvana* may itself be contained within those deceptive passions, the calm eye of the hurricane:

*The tree of meditation and the fair tree of reason
Both grow on the edge of the turbulent sea.
Their fruits taste alike, first sweet and then bitter;
Their seeds float away on the tides of illusion.*

*The two fair trees spring from the same seed
And for that reason there is but one fruit.
Who sees them as one and perceives no difference
Is released from Nirvana and Samsara alike.*

In the Buddhist view the cycle of common humanity, with the inevitability of death within the laws of nature, may well result in rebirth in one form or another. And the same philosophical theme teaches that some individuals may lose the thread of humanity altogether by cutting themselves off, as it were, from the light of their own Sun. By this understanding, at death, instead of completing the zodiac-bound cycle of human-to-human reincarnation, they may become absorbed instead by whatever life forces have formed their inner centre of gravity. If their own nature has been unduly sympathetic, or antipathetic, towards these instinctual forces and the beings they govern, their soul may be drawn involuntarily into progressively more solid worlds of animals, plants, or even material objects, to experience who-knows-what future "lives" within these states.

Aspects of heaven

There are many varied traditions of heaven, hell, or after-life abodes of the soul, and any or all of these intuitively perceived states may exist as subtle realities. There are said to be sensual heavens, heavens of desire, each a material paradise of the passions at some symbolic point between Earth and Sun. These involve inner states wherein the soul may continue to enjoy food and drink, be waited upon by ephemeral beings of voluptuous beauty, eager to further gratify the senses; places where shady trees, cool fountains, luscious fruits, flowers and jewels abound. If such "lower heavens" can be pictured as existing beyond the self, they will necessarily be confined within the orbit of Saturn. The soul which has earned a sensual paradise may enjoy it for a brief while. But such a situation depends on the continuation of personal desires after death, still within the bounds of time; it too must come to an end along with those desires. Such a soul still belongs to Earth, and being drawn towards earthly desires, to Earth it will return when the time comes for renewal.

Any psychological or religious system worth its salt aims towards creating an eventual oneness; and if any of them are pursued thoroughly, they may well achieve this aim. Personal results may seem worthwhile, even saintly; they may seem to be "working", but having arisen through strength of will they are unlikely to result in spiritual development. The point is, spirit cannot be willed, and a heaven without spirit is likely to prove transitory: a heaven that will eventually lead back to a renewed cycle of earthly becoming. The biblical king Solomon with his wisdom and wealth epitomized humanity at the peak of material light-power, as one who had climbed by an interior route to reach the translucent but impenetrable roof of instinctual materiality. A temporary heaven without spirit could well be said to represent the "temple of Solomon". It has often been said that one person's heaven may be another's hell. The satanic forces and the life forces of materiality are but different names for the same thing.

The quintile aspects apply wholly to the individual. They symbolize the points of transition between major centres of gravity, between the qualities of different passions as perceived by the developing soul of a child. The descending point of self finds its own level, its own sticking point.

The septile aspects, on the other hand, apply to the progress or ascent of an individual within the cosmos. They symbolize the points of transition from one major division of zodiacal instincts to the next, the stepping-off point between mineral and plant, between plant and animal, animal and human. They represent the journey of a rising or transcendent point of self.

Refer back to the diagram of septile aspects in the previous chapter. It is equally a universal mandala: a symbol of the evolutionary process of the world. Above the horizon is the source of spiritual influence. Below the horizon is ordinary life as we all know it, under the laws of nature. The point of self, the soul, traversing or imbibing instinctual human life forces concentrated along the eastern (left) horizon near the birth ascendant, begins to shed the spiritual consciousness of the newly born as it leaves the *rochani* level of "higher humans" or saints. On the western (right) horizon of the descendant, the material, or mineral, or satanic life forces become open again to spiritual awareness as they approach their highest (and simultaneously, paradoxically, their lowest) level, close to the *rabbani* level of archangels. The descendant now is an archangelic descendant, the allegorical fall of the Archangel Lucifer.

It need come as no surprise to be reminded how close is the archangelic to the satanic. The illuminated space within which the light of wisdom descends does indeed represent the temple of Solomon. It is the place of material, sensual heavens. It is the same euphoric state as that said to be experienced, albeit briefly, by people subjected to super G-forces; the same as those whose near-death experiences give them a glimpse of the Elysian Fields. It is from this, the very lowest abstract point of the material division — apparently deep within the satanic realm — that a person may acquire marvellous knowledge. It may be scientific knowledge, or religious knowledge; or supernatural powers. It may even be the wisdom of Solomon: there is nothing "bad" about it. It is a place of miracles, but it is not the realm of the Holy Spirit. There is "a great gulf fixed" beyond which the human soul cannot travel in that direction.

Astrological pilgrim

In outer space there is no real rising or falling: both are the same. Similarly in inner space one may *seem* to be ascending whilst actually being drawn lower by the forces of material gravity. To sink deeper in spiritual terms can seem, in terms of worldly ambition, like climbing higher. When a newborn baby begins to learn and become less babylike as worldly influences encroach, dimming what we can now understand as the saintly light of closeness to the source, those subtle inner feelings become swamped until, by the time a child's mental powers have developed and the emotions are fully functioning, this inborn source of guidance is completely overshadowed. Of course it is good, and essential in any civilized society, to be able to experience to the full the world of things; but from the point of view of the soul it seems unfortunate. By the age of puberty, the individual will have sunk in spiritual terms from the original human level to the psychic level of materiality, and there the majority stay.

Adult people, with few exceptions, are psychically centred somewhere within the material septile zone, beneath the horizon of awareness. The wonderful zone of light is not far away, above our heads. Initial contact with spirit may nudge us gently into this zone to experience minor miracles for ourselves, a foretaste of spiritual awareness; but we will soon come to the understanding that this is not where we are to remain. This is not "heaven". It is an inferior "paradise". This place represents the highest point attainable directly from the material zone, and there is no through route to the spiritual worlds beyond; no way accessible from the side of the descendant. If we are to climb during this lifetime towards spiritual worlds, it has to be by way of the vegetable, the animal, and eventually the human levels, discarding by degrees those instinctual characteristics acquired on the way down — those characteristics that are more appropriate for the well-being of plants and animals than of humans.

When on receiving a divine spark, a person begins to develop or redevelop spirituality, and begins the slow journey back through the septile divisions towards the human level, a sense of loss may accompany that progress. Such a one may suffer the disappointment of seeming to

lose their sense of the miraculous; they may even, perhaps, feel abandoned by wisdom. Like John Bunyan they will feel that they have become pilgrims through a barren land. There is little enlightenment and precious few material rewards to be gleaned within the dull realms of the plants and the animals. A dark and barren course it may be; but only by allowing our souls to retrace in this way can we "become again like little children" in the Christian sense, and reapproach our own higher selves and the possibility of wholeness.

As this spiritual journey gets under way, though we may seem to have lost contact with the miraculous events that preceded it, as our viewpoint changes we can begin to understand and appreciate all the various religious teachings that have left us untouched previously. But this is not a path known to religious leaders of today, nor is it the ascetic's path of moral discipline; neither is it the callous chain of consequences within plant and animal life, as dictated by nature. This is the path of inner guidance, and all who follow it can be assured that their own inner self will guide them in the manner best suited to their individual needs. No-one else can now lead or direct. It is not something with which others need agree or disagree, approve or disapprove, praise or censure. None can stand between a pilgrim and God.

We can see now why the septile aspects of death are to be identified with the major divisions of cosmic life forces. During the course of our lives everything we have known, and more besides, has sunk into our innermost feelings, and in the normal course of events nothing of this can be taken away until we face eventual death. As a rule, therefore, any improvement in the status of our soul would have to depend on, or follow from, our own physical death. Saturn must have his way. But now, with spiritual contact, having touched our own Sun, it is not the soul itself but only the *contents* of the soul that must die, or seem to die, again and again if need be, as each septile aspect is reached and passed by the point of Self.

Looked at from the outside, an overall pattern may be emerging as you, the astrological pilgrim, begin this great spiral of ascent. Obviously enough, the "spiritual" level of materiality corresponds with the actual source of all material attainments useful to civilization. Whilst retraversing this division in the course of ascent, whatever you have been good at in the past you will be good at now — or probably better. Often, at this stage, outsiders might observe that you have indeed become in some way "spiritual": it is a time for strange phenomena. Later, when climbing through the tangled plant levels of being, miraculous happenings will dwindle; but your emotional awareness will be correspondingly heightened, your energy intense. Typically, though you may be at your most confident and energetic, you will seem to have lost contact with the means to make and hold on to money. The time will have come to "consider the lilies of the field" and have faith that the lord will provide — your own soul will be in charge of your welfare.

Later still, passing through the animal level of spiritual content, your brains will seem to be functioning in a more creative way than previously. Spiritual experiences may seem to be a thing of the past, but your imaginative, creative inspirations will excel. Then as you reach the beginnings of the human level, your intellectual prowess may seem to weaken, your brain may seem to falter and function on half-power; but to make up for this dullness your intuitive capacity will have increased. At this time you may seem oddly vulnerable, subject to criticisms and assaults, real or imaginary. But this difficult phase will pass as you receive finer influences directly from the intuitive centre of your psyche. This may prove an especially good time for artistic endeavour, for the kind of creative work, perhaps, that does not require keen supervision by the brain. But this phase too will pass, and you will find that you are now using all your faculties together, with increasing effect.

This sequence, of course, will vary greatly in detail and impact from person to person. But its ups and downs may cause family, friends and acquaintances to conclude that you have lost the once-keen edge of your mind, and this is because you, the astrological pilgrim, will have ceased to analyze critically. Perhaps for the first time you will be perceiving wholenesses wherever you look, and you will no longer be interested in separating and analyzing parts. All of your own past experiences will have become incorporated into this ever-increasing state of wholeness of being; everything is beginning to work in harmony.

Retrospectively, few of these ascending perceptions will have had the flavour of "spirituality", as do those experiences many people meet with when their souls are first opened within the material, occult zone. You will have been obliged to experience, as it were, the dull repetitiveness of plant life; the instinctively predictable and unadventurous passions of the animal world; the intellectual emptiness of primitive, unschooled humanity. All this had to happen as your own inner feelings were being exposed and shaken out. In effect, you have had to undergo the repeated death of soul-contents, and at every hurdle you may with justification have felt that something precious has been lost. But any such sense of loss is only temporary. The value: the lessons and experiences of the past, are all still there, within the inner self. They are merely in the process of combining, whilst the transcendent human passion is being formed from separate material, plant, animal and ordinary-human elements: the earth, the water, the air, the fire. All will be returned to awareness, correctly channelled, once you have reached your high-human point of ascendancy.

Elemental souls

To express the same principle in different terms: the strange succession of soul-content deaths experienced by those following this ascending course, can be looked at in a more individual way. Remember that the deaths take place on the level of the passions, the desires, only, and these passions can now be seen as lower souls, or separate aspects of the whole soul itself. Like members of a family within the individual, these lower souls are sometimes called "brothers", or "sisters". They are to be symbolized by the astrological elements, earth, water, air, and fire. All the soul-elements are present, even after the apparent death of one of them; but as a rule only one at a time can carry the centre of gravity and act as spokesperson. The individual's actions — your actions — will then be coloured by whichever soul-element, whichever passion, happens to be dominant at the time.

The "lowest" soul, soul-element of earth, manipulator of the material life forces, has been called "black brother". Magicians of old who practiced material, manipulatory magic, used to work on the development of this earth-soul, their own black brother, to such a degree that it is said he was able to take on a solidly tangible form, manipulate surrounding passions and attract material objects, especially money and valuables, to himself. When isolated in this way, the chief feature of this earth-soul is seen to be "greed". But it will also be seen that, when working in harmony with his "brothers" in a whole, spiritually inclined person, the sublimated quality of greed becomes the ability to acquire the essentials of life, assuring that you will always have enough for yourself and your dependants.

When standing alone as the occult slave of a real magician, the elemental earth-soul, with its most powerful of passions, represents the strength of materiality on the occult plane. When taking the place of compassion — the combined passions — as a quintile degree, the pentagram will point downwards towards the Earth itself, forming a pentacle. The outline of a pentacle is said to resemble the head and face of a billy-goat, with ears, horns and beard, and this occult creation is said to have a goat-like smell too.

I have mentioned the biblical Book of Job, which rationalizes the power of Satan in religious terms. It is this "black brother", this elemental earth-soul, that represents the human standpoint of the way in which "Satan" is able to function. As Job was to discover, one can only receive "the blessings of God" according to one's own nature: through one's own self, one's own natural set of instincts. The "temptations" of Job (at the beginning of an ascending spiral) were the exact opposite of the material temptations which we might expect to befall us today: they were brought about by the *withdrawal* of the satanic or material force; the *weakening* of Job's elemental earth-soul, resulting in his loss of health and wealth. There is a great deal of built-in contradiction in religious attitudes towards this "evil power" to which we are all subject. A person in whom Satan is not operative — cursed with a weak earth-soul — would have no possessions and no influence in the world. Remember the allegory of the great house and the unruly servants. Plainly, earth-

soul makes a first-rate and most valuable servant, but a ruthlessly dangerous master.

Continuing the spiral of ascent: when the appropriate septile aspect is reached marking the symbolic boundary between elemental earth and elemental water, the nature of water and the abstract nature of plants can be seen as though translated into human terms: changeable fluidity; violent action contrasting with dormant inactivity. Ruthless suppression and submissive meekness; anger, intolerance and aggression, but also mild defensiveness and the desire to live harmoniously in peaceful beauty. The urge to reproduce unrestrainedly, ranged against the need for strict discrimination and specific boundaries. The tendency to tower menacingly, or to creep surreptitiously. All these are the contradictory qualities of plants, and no less of the water on which they depend. In human attitudes, all are to be seen in the characters of those people currently being ruled by their plant-soul, whilst the water element is playing a major role in their soul-life.

When plants are not actually dormant, they can display surprising strength and tenacity: a humble dandelion can force its way through paved road surfaces; quite small creeping plants can smother and kill their neighbours. While passing through this phase on an ascending spiral many people actually feel drawn towards plants in practical commercial terms or in some other way. It can be a time of great activity; like the plants themselves their energy can be phenomenal. But whilst the wealth-orientated earth-soul is itself dormant, any such enterprise is unlikely to prove a financial success.

By esoteric tradition, plant-soul in human form, like earth-soul, is ascribed a colour. This is "red brother", or "red sister". As the point of self progresses, this red soul too eventually comes to maturity, goes through its own personal phase of suffering through the loss of its own passionate contents, and apparently dies. There is a powerfully emotional quality attached to this lower soul, and as the time comes for a further change in the spiritual centre of gravity, another hurdle of the septile divisions, a person may feel emotionally drained. They may find they have lost the will to work — or even at times, the will to carry on living. But this loss of inner confidence is a purely temporary, transitional phase. Very soon a new member of their personal family is born and comes to awareness.

Perhaps there is less to be said about "air" as an elemental soul quality, than can be said about "water", though the contents of an animal-soul person will be that much more varied and broadly based than those of the plant-soul body which preceded it. Such people are, of course, that much closer to the human norm than are the Earth-bound needs of the plant world. The name traditionally given to the soul filled with and motivated by animal life forces is "yellow brother", or "yellow sister". Perhaps we could say that the characteristic passion of this animal-soul, or the air element expressed in human terms, is "freedom of desire". Certainly the life of an animal within nature is limited not so much by long-term ambition as by the needs of the moment. In animal terms, the needs of the moment are usually connected either with food or with sexual relations. But animal patterns of social and sexual behaviour are more orderly, more temperate and less variable than the indiscriminate pollination and seeding, and jostling for place, that are typical of the plant world. Animals do tend to breed and order their social lives according to strict patterns and seasons, and they are usually unquestioningly faithful to their own inherited social structure.

By the same measure, animal-soul people normally follow a reasonably conventional life, seldom giving offence to the prevailing code of moral behaviour. But more important from our present viewpoint is the fact that animals, and animal-soul people, are to a large extent free agents, having become, as it were, unplugged from the Earth. The arrival of this "yellow soul", and the strengthening of the elemental animal nature as the centre of psychic gravity, means that the ascending personality is able to exercise a higher degree of free will in making moral decisions. Plant-soul people, logically, are still governed largely from "below", and even whilst following the guidance of their own awakened soul, their lives will continue to be coloured by accumulated karmic content. The transition from plant-soul to animal-soul involves a symbolic uprooting. Unlike plants, animals have a brain. As black brother received his life guidance into the coarse physical

body, and red brother received his life guidance directly into the feelings, so yellow brother now receives life guidance directly into the brain — into the thoughts.

When the time comes, as the next septile division is reached, animal-soul will falter, and as it does so the thoughts may seem to have become bemused. But again the lapse is only temporary, whilst a new lower soul gains strength and takes control. This is "white brother" or "white sister": a soul filled primarily with the influence of the human life force, representing the allegorical element of fire, and the zodiacal force that we must assume was created originally for the guidance of human beings on Earth. The subject with a predominantly human-soul receives instinctual guidance directly into the seat of consciousness, and in some ways this is a state comparable to that of a newborn child. If the human-soul can be said to represent a passion, it is the passion of observation, of seeing to the subtle core of any matter — the vision of ancient seers.

The inner self needs to have lived through the whole sequence of lower souls in order to approach the possibility of wholeness. It is of no use to imagine that the combination of soul-elements is the same whether the individual is ascending or descending, or whether the centre of psychic gravity is "material" or "human". For these lower souls to assemble themselves with materiality to the fore is symbolically to invert the quintile pentagram, to create a pentacle of occult intent. Human reassembly at this stage of inner development has to be centred in human-soul — a symbolic return to our lost spiritual childhood. There, we can await a further septile aspect — the most significant hurdle of all — and the emergence of the *real* human soul: the combined *rochani* soul of the whole human being.

The whole person

The septile divisions themselves, of course, can only represent a simplification of elemental realities. Within each division there are bound to be numerous "sevens within sevens". Dane Rudhyar visualized this apparent confusion as the music of creation, culminating in the transformation of human nature, represented by patterns of musical scales — for of course a musical "octave" is actually a recurrent sequence of seven — interplaying, swelling and fading, sometimes simple, sometimes intricate, crossing and recrossing.

The diagram which follows shows the familiar sequence of the "Lifespan of the Patriarch", but this time occupying the spiral of ascent, and representing an *upwards* movement. Earth-soul now occupies Pisces, Aquarius and Capricorn. The "unworldly impressionability" of mutable Pisces can now be identified as the light of spirituality able to shine in those nether regions of Earth — the dark approaches to the temple of Solomon — imparting an inkling of spiritual wisdom. Then follows the "unconventional progress" of Aquarius upwards towards the source, the "prudent discipline" of the cardinal Capricorn keeping the self on the right track.

Plant-soul now occupies Sagittarius, Scorpio and Libra. The "extensive exploration" of mutable Sagittarius is centred on the abstract nature of plants, deeply strengthened by the "intense penetration" of Scorpio. The "harmonious unity" of the cardinal Libra expresses the stability of a plant community at the peak of its development.

Animal-soul now occupies Virgo, Leo and Cancer. Free from the abstract roots which held the plants to Earth, mutable Virgo can now bring "critical analysis" to bear with a newly activated "animal" brain. The increasingly "authoritative power" of Leo is guarded by the "defensive protection" symbolized by the cardinal Cancer, building the defences that even the most advanced animals need when faced with the dangers of the world.

Human-soul now occupies Gemini, Taurus and Aries. With the newly acquired "adaptive variability" of mutable Gemini, with the truly "productive security" of Taurus, with intelligent

Once this amalgamation, this basic unity, has been achieved, each individual soul-family member, with their own unique qualities of persuasion, practicality, penetration, caution, daring, long-sightedness, judgment, and sensitivity, will be ready to step forward and take command as the need arises — with the support now of the whole family. Where material matters of profit and loss are foremost, earth-soul is truly able to cope. For situations needing expansive energy and aggression, plant-soul will come into its own. For clever brainwork and the regulation of desires, animal-soul can stand forward. And for any matters requiring "human" insight, careful observation and attention to detail, human-soul will be available with the necessary expertise.

The person whose psychic centre of gravity is the brown *rochani* soul, is truly well balanced. Such a person, you may say, stands at a halfway stage within the universal hierarchy; he or she contains something of the nature of higher things, of influences that originate above the human condition, whilst still a physical person of the Earth. The distinctive passion corresponding with this united condition is the outcome of all other passions when they are felt simultaneously: compassion, an all-embracing love.

If Adam and Eve existed in fact, it is reasonable to suppose that they were a brown-skinned couple. From that original allegorical unity, a gradual scattering of humanity resulted in all the different races with their varying colours, passions and prejudices. It is one way of looking at that fabled descent, or eviction from the Garden of Eden. We can now see that a return to that original spiritual "brownness" takes us to the very roof of the Earth-bound passions; to the symbolic point beyond Pluto where our spiral of ascent bursts through the zodiac, leaving planets, symbols and fragmented passions far behind; to the point where we are helpless to do anything but submit blissfully to the will of God.

We have travelled some way from the birth chart horoscope. Synchronicity is our key; astrology need no longer stand apologetically, confronting the scorn of astronomy, uneasily on guard against the assaults of science. Their aims are totally different. The innate truth which astrologers have always sensed lies hidden within this ancient art, can emerge from the hinterland of part truths and dubious facts served up, as a rule, with just a hint of wishful thinking.

I hope that this book has shown that astrology, by way of *symbolic* truth, is maturing at last into one of the many gateways leading to spiritual reality.

