

LEARNING SOME ASTROLOGY

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One thing I hear a lot from my Facebook friends in messages and emails is how might one go about learning astrology? Of course, like so many things, the deeper I get into astrology (fifty years and counting), the simpler it gets in my view, but conveying that simplicity also gets harder and harder. I have learned that experiential knowledge cannot simply be handed over and shared, but only pointed out. The reason is that each of us must experience life for ourselves, and this includes astrology. I first learned this truth when studying Tibetan astrology many years ago. Perhaps a few words on that experience might be useful.

Because of the Tibetan diaspora, back in the 1970s and 1980s there were (and for the first time) many, many great Tibetan lamas (high rinpoches) living outside of Tibet, at first mostly in India, but eventually they began to reach North America and the U.S. And at that time Tibetan Buddhism was virtually unknown here and these lamas often were willing to travel wherever they were invited, like to my house and center. The highest lamas, almost at the level of the Dalai Lama, stayed at my home and, sometimes, for up to about a week at a time. Just imagine that. And this went on for years.

Of course, with all these great lamas, rinpoches, and eminences staying at our meditation center here in tiny Big Rapids, Michigan, I wanted to ask them about Tibetan astrology, and you know I did – over and over and over again. Yet there was never much coming back to me in response to my questions. Why was that I wondered? Was I so unworthy?

Gradually I began to believe that Tibetan astrology must be a well-kept secret, not a subject these high lamas were willing to share with a beginner like me, or something like that. That's the whole point. I couldn't figure it out. And this went on for years.

To make what was for me a very long story short, Tibetan astrology, like so much of Tibetan Buddhism is "secret," but not in the way I had first thought. It is what the Tibetans call "self-secret" in that it hides itself from us, not in a dark hidden recess, but in a much harder place to find -- more or less in plain sight. Of course, I never would have thought to look there.

A better way to phrase this might be that I was unable to look there because I didn't know how to be just "present." The obvious is too much with us all the time and is therefore, in its own way, invisible. We often don't see what is most important and right before our eyes, like air and breathing. I know you have heard this before, and so had I, but I had never done anything about it until then.

It was not that the Tibetans would not share this self-secret knowledge with me but rather that I could not receive or "get" it. I just did not get it. What I needed in order to get it was something akin to sensitivity training. I had to learn to just relax and be more present, and then I could get it. But how?

Well, that training was a long and involved process which I will not take up your time here to explain. The Tibetans I worked with ever so gently taught me to relax and let go of whatever I was fixated on and just learn to be present, to be here now as we use to say in the 1960s where I came from. And of course, the knowledge I had been searching for could only be found in the

present, which means when I was present. But I first had to learn to be present. To make it worse, I had already always assumed I was present, and so on. Don't you feel you are present right now? Well, "present" is a relative term.

It is much easier for me to tell you "about" being present than it is to actually be present. We all know that. And I tell this story because learning western astrology is a lot like my learning Tibetan astrology, or any astrology.

Many of you who like astrology use the popular sun-sign astrology of the type "You are an Aries," and so on. Of course I speak sun-sign astrology. I know sign-sign astrology and, although I can speak it with the best of them, I never speak it when I am alone because for me it does not capture enough of what astrology is all about. It is unfortunate in my opinion that this is what most people associate as astrology. But that's life.

My point here is that while there are thousands of books on astrology (and I have most of them here in our library), books can only take us so far. As my first dharma teacher would say to me back in the late 1960s, over and over again: "Michael, someday YOU must be the book!"

It took me many years to realize that the Tibetan approach to learning astrology, first learning to be present, and only THEN learning astrology, was not just true for their particular kind of astrology, but also true for western astrology, for all astrology. If we cannot relax enough to be aware in the present, to be personally present, we cannot see what is to be seen and known there.

In other words, there is no direct line into the heart of astrology except through the present moment and, if we cannot be fully present, we can't take advantage of what is there to be seen and learned. So an indirect path to more awareness turns out to be the most direct path to learning astrology, at least the astrology that I consider worth learning.

Isn't it maddening to always be shown what appears to be an indirect path to where you want to go? There is a reason for that my friends and it took me far too many years to finally get around to actually taking the indirect path to get directly where I wanted to go. I refused to take that indirect route. I was too much in a hurry to go directly where I wanted to go to, follow directions, and take the time to actually get there, if that sentence makes sense.

In my opinion, the one tool we need to learn astrology, what the Tibetans call the "wish-fulfilling gem," is greater familiarity with the mind itself. It is our most precious possession and like the old phrase "you cannot salt the salt," there is nothing that can be added to the mind but learning how to better use it. Altering the mind in any way does not improve it.

The mind is perfect just as it is and all that is needed is to learn how to use it to be more present and aware. And we all know that the present is the gateway to any future we can imagine, just as it is in the present that all that we call the past is first made.

So if you really, really, really want to know the proper way to learn astrology, first learn to know and train your mind. It is the most direct way. As for how to do this, I have posted for years about mind training on Facebook and elsewhere. A booklet pointing out some general ways to learn to use the mind called "Training the Mind" can be found here:

<http://astrologysoftware.com/books/index.asp?orig>

I would be glad to help anyone get started on this. Just ask.