

Understanding Astrology: The Sun

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Of all the many components that comprise astrology, the Sun is far and away the most important. It is the King of the Hill, the 800-lb. gorilla, the most powerful and central symbol in the entire hierarchy. Every other factor to which astrology assigns meaning pales in comparison with the Sun.

The general public, which knows astrology primarily and often only through the mass-market entertainment of Sun Signs, accepts this truism. Students of astrology, however, sometimes forget the core significance of the Sun. As they learn about the complexity of the astrological system and become more sophisticated, astrological students can at times become obsessed with other factors that hold compelling interest for them. Their view (and interpretation) of astrological charts may inadvertently demote the crucial importance of the Sun as they elevate other, relatively minor symbols and configurations.

This is why I open the essay with the reminder that nothing in astrology is more important than the Sun. As obvious as that may seem, it's critical to remember. Nothing outshines the Sun.

In any astrological chart, including the natal or birth charts of individuals, the Sun defines the central organizing principle through which meaning is created, revealed, or understood. When I use the phrase "central organizing principle," I mean that the Sun shows what we're here for and the kind of life we need to construct in order to have meaning and fulfillment. Every other configuration of symbols in the chart acts as a modifier to our basic, fundamental motivation to live a purposeful and meaningful life (in much the same way that adjectives modify nouns and adverbs modify verbs in grammar). The rest of the chart further specifies how we will naturally play out the manifestation of our core purpose, but the Sun remains the heart of who we are.

OK. How then do astrologers "decipher" or decode the core meaning and purpose of the chart mandala? In natal interpretation, we do this in three basic ways:

1. through the Sun's position in the ecliptic (most commonly interpreted through the sign of the zodiac where the Sun was located)
2. through the Sun's house associations (meaning its position within the personal space of the chart — above the horizon, below the horizon, rising, or setting)
3. through the Sun's aspects (meaning certain significant mathematical arcs that reveal the connection to and interaction with other symbolic energies or archetypes in the chart).

So, an astrologer might say, *"This chart has a Virgo Sun occupying the 8th house and ruling the 7th, with a square to Mars and a trine to Neptune."* Sign, houses, and aspects. Without making a reference to any of the other symbols or configurations in the chart, that set of Sun factors alone would give us a deep treasure trove of information.

When people talk about being a Sagittarius or a Taurus, what they mean (whether or not they realize it) is that they were born while the Sun was passing through that particular sign of the zodiac. How that has come to be regarded in pop culture astrology is akin to one's nationality or tribe. In other words, it's a stereotype. Actually, the Sun's sign position is only one of three basic ways to understand core purpose and meaning, and it's arguably the least tangible of the three.

The various "character traits" ascribed to each sign may or may not be reflected in a person's overt personality. So-called "Sun Sign" descriptions frequently go too far and confuse a simple archetype (i.e., one of twelve zodiacal signs) with the complexity of an individual personality. So, as a result of that confusion, all Scorpios are considered secretive, all Virgos detail-oriented and nit-picky, all Librans balanced and harmonious. Well, sort of, but not as overtly as such assignments make it seem.

That "secretive" Scorpio Sun person's chart might contain many other factors that indicate openness, a more light-hearted approach to life, or other not-like-Scorpio qualities, all of which would belie the "deep and often dark passions" to which Sun Sign interpretations refer for the fixed water sign. That doesn't mean that the person would have no secrets or darkly emotional depths, but those attributes wouldn't be visible or otherwise apparent in the expressed personality and behavior. Instead, they would exist within, at the person's core. Everything else in the chart and in the overt personality would eventually be routed for assessment into and through that Scorpionic core.

In both practical and metaphorical ways, the Sun is the source of our power and light. If we think of the universe as a gigantic stepdown transformer, where

everything orbits around something else, then those orbits are analogous to primary and secondary coils in a transformer that enable the transfer of life-force, consciousness, or whatever we want to call that ethereal energy. The Sun is our first upward coil in that chain. Put another way, the Sun is our most direct connection back to Ultimate Oneness — our most obvious pathway toward Cosmic Central. I'm not suggesting that we "worship" the Sun, rather that we acknowledge it as our highway.

So, our solar system runs on the energy of the Sun's battery. By analogy, astrology presumes that we must be built with something similar inside ourselves — a power source that provides the energy for life and connects us to the mysterious, infinite All and Everything.

Speaking more practically, our charts begin and end with the Sun. Whatever the fundamental meaning and purpose described in a given chart by the Sun's condition — whether learning, creativity, perspective, achievement, cooperation, or transcendent surrender (and while those examples are general, every chart is amazingly detailed about meaning and purpose) — it is the center of gravity in our charts, the part of our life-journey through which meaning emerges.

The positive effect of "doing one's Sun" is not simply meaning and purpose, although both of those are significant elements of fulfillment. The benefit emerges from increased *coherence*. Although we are composed of many different functional parts, we are not simply an assemblage of those parts. Living life well means that our wholeness is greater than the sum of our parts. And viewed from astrology, the Sun interpretation in our charts defines experiences that further our wholeness by increasing coherence and integrity.

If we have a small pile of iron filings on a tabletop, they'll be randomly dispersed. Hold a magnet near those iron filings, however, and all the separate pieces of filings line up, pointing in the same direction. Doing one's Sun has a similar effect on the rest of the chart (and on our lives). All our parts and pieces began to line up coherently.

So, when you need to energize yourself, go with your Sun. When your back is against the wall, do your Sun. If your life disintegrates into shards, the Sun provides the superglue that gives you the best shot at putting it back together.

What happens if — for any of a myriad of reasons — we do not or cannot live out the experiences symbolized by the Sun in our charts in ways that are effective or correct? Does that imply that our lives will fall apart or obviously fail? No. History is full of people — whether living or dead — who go astray, whose Sun experience is negative or corrupted. Such individuals may amass great power and influence, but their impact produces immense harm to themselves or to others. Christians might say that such people have fallen prey to the Devil or to evil. Buddhists might say that they are caught in the Wheel of Samsara.

Occultists might say that they have succumbed to their dark sides. And this applies not only to the rich, famous, and powerful people in the history books, but also to a fair percentage of ordinary people as well.

“Doing one’s Sun well” — with grace and integrity — is no guarantee of a happy experience free from suffering or tragedy, since those are an unavoidable part of life. Nothing in anyone’s chart provides such insurance. So, I don’t wish to imply that a positive Sun experience will protect us from life’s slings and arrows. It won’t.

What it will do, however, (or at least can do) is give us a better possibility of creating lives with meaning, coherence, and fulfillment. Depending on the particular individual, those benefits may be concrete or intangible, obvious or subtle, visible or invisible, but they are profoundly significant in our life-journeys.