

# Purpose Versus Mission in Astrology: *Part One*

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Over the nearly half century that I've studied and practiced astrology, certain presumptions have formed the backbone of my understanding and work with clients. Some of these have been orientations that I brought to astrology, various filters through which I interpret the symbolic information from the astrological data. Other perspectives have come directly from astrology, informing my interpretation of charts and cycles, and sometimes even changing the ways I see life in general.

The distinction between purpose and mission is an example — the most important one I know — of a way of seeing life that astrology taught me. Purpose and mission are words that some people use interchangeably. I don't. I use those terms as shorthand tags for symbolic indications in natal charts that are substantially different.

Let's start with purpose. For decades, I've been asking people, my clients mostly, to tell me how they see their purpose. I don't use that word when asking. Usually I'll say something like, *"Out of all the different experiences — all the rides on which we go here at the Carnival of Life — what experiences are most important and central to you?"* Responses vary widely, of course, but two are repeated time and again. One is, *"I don't know. That's one reason I'm having you interpret my chart."* The other is, *"I'm here to love and serve others."* Both answers may or may not be accurate. Apparently, many people don't know why they're here. Others do, but verbalizing what they know is not simple or straightforward. The second answer is, to my way of thinking, usually false. Yes, some people are here fundamentally to love and serve, but most are not. I don't mean to denigrate the spiritual importance of love, but that second answer typically falls into the category of things-we-learned-to-say-in-kindergarten.

Astrology can shed light on our purposes — what we're here for as individuals, and which kinds of experiences are most centrally important in our lives. That information doesn't necessarily make life easier, but it can help make life clearer.

Where does astrology reveal what I call purpose? That resides primarily with the Sun in an astrological chart.

Within astrology, different symbols are not weighted equally. Some are naturally more important than others in the hierarchy of interpretation. The Sun sits atop all the other bodies as the central symbol in astrology. Other symbols may be elevated in significance within a particular chart, but the Sun is critical in every chart. While it's only one of billions of stars in the Milky Way galaxy, the Sun is our very own local star (or, more objectively, we "belong" to the Sun as one of its planets). That's why we call the astronomical neighborhood in which we live the "solar system." After the Earth, which is truly our home, the Sun is our next station up the chain that leads back toward Cosmic Central — Earth to Sun to Galaxy to Cosmos. The earth revolves around the Sun, which revolves around the Galaxy, which revolves around the Cosmos. Think of that as a gigantic transformer that transmits and distributes energy by induction to each successive step-down coil.

The astrological symbolism of the Sun is not, however, what many people believe. In pop-culture kindergarten astrology, people refer to themselves as a particular sign of the zodiac. They say, *"I'm an Aries,"* or *"She's a Capricorn."* Whether or not they know it, what they mean is that, from our vantage point on Earth, the Sun at their birth was passing through a certain 30° arc of the ecliptic — the Earth's yearly path around the Sun — also called the Zodiac of Signs. *(An interesting side-note is that "Sun-sign astrology" was invented in the 1920s by some astrologers and publishers as a lowest-common denominator way of mass-marketing the astrological system to the public by dividing humanity into twelve "types." Serious astrologers have been paying for that mistake ever since...)*

The Sun's placement in a certain sign may or may not be reflected in what people refer to as "personality." Sun-as-personality is about as squishy and generic as it gets in astrology. Are Virgo Sun people picky critics? Are Piscean Suns wishy-washy dreamers? Sometimes, but sometimes not.

OK, so if the Sun doesn't indicate personality in astrology, what does it symbolize? Well, the Sun is about vitality and core life-energy, about the power source that animates the psyche, about the most basic ways we interpret reality, and about having a gravitational center that provides coherence for all of the psyche's other facets and promotes a sense of wholeness and meaning.

That last word — *meaning* — is critical. Humans need to feel that our lives are meaningful, that how we spend our time and what we do matters to us. Lives without personal meaning eventually disintegrate into emptiness and despair.

That's finally what the Sun is about in astrology, the ability to create personal meaning and live in ways that make sense to us, so that all our various facets align to serve a central, core wholeness that grows and matures over time. In my astrological work, the word I use to shorthand that complex function of psychological organization and physical vigor is *purpose*.

If we live our Suns, we may not be happy, we may not be successful, we may not get everything we want, but our journey through life will be meaningful. Our lives will make sense to us. We'll own them. We'll know who we were supposed to be and who we are. And that counts.

So, how do we reveal and flesh out our purpose from the chart? As I wrote above, we look to the condition of the Sun.

"The condition of the Sun" in a chart doesn't just mean the Sun's zodiacal sign. Sure, the Sun's sign does indicate ways of perceiving life and behaving that are relevant to purpose: A Libra Sun is purposeful whenever perception and behavior involve considerations of grace, mutuality, and balance, and a Scorpio Sun is purposeful whenever intensity, depth, and penetration are invoked. But those are not very individualized qualities, and the natal chart goes far beyond that in defining personal purpose.

The Sun's sign is only one of numerous factors used to determine its condition and interpretation in a chart. Two other major factors are equally important: the Sun's house associations (occupied and ruling houses) and its aspects to other symbolic points in the chart (connections to planets, angles, etc.). In the basic techniques of natal astrology, all three levels contribute to the overall condition.

I regard the occupied house of the Sun — which is revealed by the time of birth — as the baseline for purpose. Below is a short list of the core, textbook meanings of the 12 houses as areas of experience:

- 1st** house ..... 5-7 a.m. .... self-expression (natural and spontaneous)
- 2nd** house ..... 3-5 a.m. .... self-worth (self-judgment, wealth through personal effort)
- 3rd** house ..... 1-3 a.m. .... concrete mentality (reasoning, speaking/writing, learning)
- 4th** house ..... 11 p.m.-1 a.m. .... personal security (home and family)
- 5th** house ..... 9-11 p.m. .... conscious persona (performance, personal creativity, giving love)
- 6th** house ..... 7-9 p.m. .... systems analysis (health and service)
- 7th** house ..... 5-7 p.m. .... equal relationships (cooperation, negotiation, commitment)
- 8th** house ..... 3-5 p.m. .... shared worth (union, sex, death, legacies, judgment of others)
- 9th** house ..... 1-3 p.m. .... abstract mentality (philosophy, morality, travel, teaching)
- 10th** house ..... 11 a.m.-1 p.m. .... career (livelihood, authority, leadership, responsibility, respect)
- 11th** house ..... 9-11 a.m. .... group involvement (friends, shared creativity, receiving love)
- 12th** house ..... 7-9 a.m. .... transcendence (selflessness, withdrawal, universalization)

Each house has many more associated meanings beyond those listed. For instance, the 1st house is linked with "dawning self-awareness" through activity, problem-solving, and general vitality. The 3rd and 9th houses are likely to involve both teaching and learning. The 12th house includes hospitals, monasteries, and prisons. In addition, the experiences of any house may be pleasing or not. The 6th is both wellness and disease/breakdown. The 10th house may bring respect or infamy.

From the starting point of the Sun's occupied house, other factors indicate the further definition and custom-tailoring of purpose. To the Sun's sign and aspects, we add the planetary ruler of the Sun's sign and its condition in the natal chart by sign, houses, and aspects. For a Libra Sun, the planetary ruler is Venus. For Scorpio, it's Pluto. The interpretation of the Sun correctly includes the Sun's ruling planet as part of the assessment of purpose.

For beginning students of astrology, such layering-on of technique quickly becomes complex to the point of bewilderment. Two planets, two signs, perhaps four houses, with aspects on top of that is altogether too much, since thousands of possible interpretative combinations exist. With time and experience, however, an astrologer learns to hold a myriad of interpretive possibilities in mind — all specified by the chart — without consciously focusing on any one. They become part of an instantly accessible database. In my case, since I deal with actual clients, that becomes an interactive and co-creative act of interpretation. Conversation with my client (who has a real life) opens doors that confirm the relevance of certain interpretations, which are then immediately available to be shared. This isn't merely reacting to cues. It's fitting together the pieces of a living puzzle through the mandala of the chart.

I admit, however, that I'm not really fond of interpreting charts in the abstract, without a person with whom to interact. Charts provide too much information, much of which is arcane or theoretical, with no accurate or easy way to separate the wheat from the chaff. That's one reason among many that my work for nearly 50 years has been built around astrological sessions with clients.

A friend of mine who knows her chart, with whom I've discussed purpose, told me that, having never been married, she didn't understand how she could have a 7th-house Sun, since the textbook interpretation of that position places primary emphasis on marriage. Did that mean she'd missed out on her purpose? I explained that "Marriage" as a traditional pair-bond is merely the Cliff's Notes version of the 7th house. More truly, the 7th is the area "mirroring," of seeing oneself reflected in others. Further, the 7th is about cooperative relatedness with equals.

With her Arian Sun and natal opposition to Neptune on a Libra Ascendant, my friend didn't need to marry in a traditional pair-bond to fulfill her purpose. A two-minute interaction with the checker at the grocery store could suffice as a micro-marriage, as could interactions with the other players at her weekly Mahjongg game. My friend was fulfilling her purpose in learning to be with all sorts of people in mutually respectful ways. She's the only person I know who regularly attends both a Christian Church *and* a Buddhist Temple (angular Sun oppose Neptune). I think her purpose is doing just fine.

Fulfillment of purpose doesn't demand a simple or obvious form. We may focus on a primary activity or experience, or rely on a multi-faceted approach. We

don't need to resonate or behave purposefully every minute of the day, but more frequently is definitely better.

Purpose may be linked with an occupation or livelihood, which is often convenient. If health is significant in one's purpose (as it definitely is in some charts and lives), the person might become a health practitioner or caretaker, but even being a receptionist in a medical office might be enough. On the other hand, purpose need not be related to work in the marketplace at all. Just falling ill and going through recovery or acceptance might be sufficient to achieve coherence and meaning if health is central to life-purpose. There are a million ways to fulfill one's purpose, and each person builds that foundation differently.

Should everyone have his or her chart done? No. One doesn't need to consult an astrologer, study the system, or even know anything about astrology to live well. Resonating to our purpose is natural — or should be, all other things being equal. That said, it's easy to lose our way and become confused about who we are and why we're here as individuals. The information from astrology about our purpose can help to clarify and remind us about what's most central in our lives. A little extra consciousness can go a long way.

Astrologically, the Sun is the personal vehicle we drive toward fulfillment of our life-journeys. For lack of a better phrase, the Sun in our charts "belongs to" each of us. We own it, and how we choose to express our Suns matters. Life involves more than just choice, of course, and developments we did not choose and cannot control intercede in our lives, for better or worse.

Some of these "acts of fate" are more predictable than others. A genetic family history with vulnerability to specific diseases indicates increased risk that we may suffer it eventually. Other intrusions are seemingly more random — being in the right place at the right time (or the wrong place at the wrong time). Life is full of surprises, symbolized in astrology by the outer planets, which are wild-cards and jokers in the deck — and are consecrated to a sensibility beyond our will, consciousness, and understanding.

Nevertheless, throughout much of our lives here on Earth, we are responsible for the choices we make. Literally, we respond to whatever life throws at us, and our abilities to respond and choose make a significant difference, sometimes all the difference.

We may succeed or fail in our expression of purpose. This will become clearer in Part Two when I define mission astrologically and contrast it with purpose. For now, it's enough to state that every chart and life has a purpose, that this custom-tailored, multi-dimensional, kaleidoscopic endeavor can yield coherence and meaning, and that it's ours to make of whatever we can.

*[In Part Two of this Commentary series, I'll discuss **mission** — what it means, how to determine it in charts, and how it differs from purpose.]*