

**ARE YOU READY
FOR
SATURN?**

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DEDICATION

To my two marvelous,
exemplary grandmothers,
Meera Jaya Simha and Sharada Subbarao
– they showed how to live in difficult times
with dignity and tolerance.

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A SCARED YOUNG WOMAN

Sara walked fast, her pace reflecting her anxiety. She kept her quick and nervous stride, despite the steady drizzle, the puddles on the cracked sidewalk, and the many hurried pedestrians. “Delhi looks so sad when it rains,” she thought, and silently cursed herself for forgetting her umbrella.

She arrived at the bus stop and waited. Her dark thoughts reflected the color of the sky; her gloomy mood reflected the chill in the air. After a few minutes she looked at her watch and impatience was added to the mix of emotional turmoil; the bus was late, more late than usual. “Could it be,” Sara thought, “that Saturn’s influence already started to make my life miserable?”

She was going to see an astrologer. She had never met him before but had heard very good things about him. Her friends said that he was very wise and wasn’t money-minded. He wasn’t just trying to sell you gemstones or some other trinket and he wasn’t peddling pricey remedies and lucky charms. Yet, Sara wondered how much he could help. Perhaps all this consulting of astrologers was simply superstition, something awkward and strange for her as an educated, scientific-minded, twenty-first century woman? Or was all this last-minute uneasiness just fear of what she might discover? Anyway, now that she had made up her mind to go to see him and she had taken the appointment, there was no going back.

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Her Jupiter period had been good, Sara thought. The last sixteen years – of her total twenty-seven – went by pretty smoothly. She had never been so much into astrology, but lately she had become more interested because of her friends. She had learned that she was born in the Rahu period, a time of upheaval and change, often painful, and that had resonated with her: At eight she had lost her younger brother to typhoid fever. For most of her childhood her family has been moving around India, following her father, an officer in the Air Force, and that, her friends said, was another symptom of Rahu's influence. She remembered struggling in school, another typical sign.

At eleven Sara had “entered Jupiter,” known as a phase of stability and progress, and her life had indeed taken a turn for the better. Her father's string of promotions meant better living quarters and facilities – and social respect as well. Her grades had improved, to the point of Sara becoming an honor student in College. She went into Computer Science as she had always been good in Math and in tasks that required concentration, patience and sheer determination. Soon after getting her degree she had landed a job with a multinational aerospace company as a software engineer. That was a stroke of luck.

Sara had put so much energy into excelling at her studies that she had mostly disconnected from the traditions, the rituals and the notions of her background. Nonetheless, she had never rejected her cultural roots. In fact, she had felt proud of her heritage in reading of the achievements of the ancient Indian sages in fields such as medicine, psychology or astronomy. She sensed that there was a lot to discover in the wisdom of the past, but she just never had the time to pursue such topics.

But some of her friends were really into astrology. At first Sara took them as impressionable, gullible girls. Their dalliances with natal charts, romantic compatibilities, horoscopes and predictions appeared

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to Sara as childish fantasies. But later, as she delved more into science and the study of space, she discovered that many famous scientists – fathers of modern astronomy such as Tycho Brahe, Galileo Galilei and Johannes Kepler – held astrology in high esteem. She still had questions and doubts, but she had tentatively concluded that there must be some substance, some value, in something researched and practiced for millennia by all great civilizations, from China to ancient Mexico. This, in one sense, made the present situation even worse, because what was coming up next scared her so much: She was going to enter the Saturn period; a whooping nineteen years of dread! At times the thought of the troubles ahead kept her awake at night.

The bus finally arrived and Sara boarded. In forty minutes she reached the vicinity of the address. She found the street and the street number, walked the three flights of stairs, and saw the sign: “Vishwa Goswami – *jyotish-shastri* – Astrological Readings,” and knocked on the door. “Come in, it’s open,” said a voice from inside. Sara wondered, “Who, in Delhi, leaves the front door unlocked nowadays? Does he know the dangers to which he is exposing himself?” But that was a fleeting thought; she had her own dangers to worry about.

She was surprised by how many books were in the house, They were, for the most part, neatly packed on shelves along the walls, but some were also piled on any available surface, such as tables or chairs. She noticed that even in the kitchen, on the fridge, there was a stack of books!

She entered the studio and there he was, sitting on an arm-chair, behind a table – also filled with books, some papers and a computer. He sat poised, elderly, steadily gazing at her with an understated, serene smile. His eyes were friendly but penetrating, a steady-burning light in his focused expression. He had a prominent nose and a white-grey beard; but it wasn’t one of those ostentatious beards, nurtured for

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status by people trying to look dignified or venerable; his beard looked more as if he didn't find the time or inspiration to shave for a few weeks and, she noticed, it was of roughly the same length as his hair. On the wall were a number of photos and other images, some familiar to Sara, but mostly unknown. Vishwa Goswami, appearing relaxed but alert, showed her the chair in front of the table and, as she sat, asked in a courteous tone, "What can I do for you?"

WHAT'S ASTROLOGY ALL ABOUT, ANYWAY?

Sara wasn't sure where to begin. Sitting on the edge of the chair and tightly clutching her bag with both hands she blurted out, "My Jupiter period is finishing and, you know, Saturn is coming. Everyone is telling me that it will bring misfortune, lots of pain, and perhaps the death of my parents... I want to get married and have a family but they say that marriages done during Saturn don't work but how can I wait for nineteen years? I will be too old and..."

Goswami raised both hands, palms facing her, gesturing to pause. Once she fell silent he sighed, took off his thickly rimmed glasses and placed them on the table. Without glasses his bushy eyebrows looked even bigger, but his glance looked more... innocent. With a grandfatherly smile and shaking his head as if to correct a child reciting poetry in the wrong way, he said, "It's not exactly like that."

"But everybody says so!" Sara protested.

"Everybody? Everybody who?" he said, lifting an eyebrow.

"Well, my friends... a book I read... websites... other astrologers..."

Goswami chuckled, placing his arms on the armrests and looking at her with a slightly amused look mixed with what, to Sara, seemed a sense of compassion.

Sara paused. Goswami kept looking at her, both eyebrows raised, stroking his chin. He appeared as he was thinking how to summarize for her some complex concepts, excerpts from the vast repertoire of

his experience, to express them as simply as possible for her understanding. In that moment of silence, looking at the elderly man looking at her, Sara felt as if he was considering... adopting her. That didn't make much sense, but that's how she felt.

Finally, in a serious mood, Goswami said, "Look, you can't listen to everybody. Astrology is a difficult science, because everything is connected with everything else, and those who only know a part of this knowledge can do more harm than good. Would you travel on a car that has lost a wheel or an airplane that has lost a wing?"

Sara wouldn't, but she didn't think he really wanted an answer and so she kept quiet.

"What is your name?" He asked.

"Sarasvati, but everyone calls me Sara."

"See, Sara, four activities are common to all human beings: eating, sleeping, mating and fearing. Of the four, fear is the most prominent; fear is all-pervading in human society. At least a part of our mind is constantly absorbed in fear, on every minute of our waking life – and often even during dreams. We are in anxiety because we fear unpleasant experiences, and this fear takes innumerable forms,"

Goswami punctuated his speech with his lifting of his eyebrows and of his index finger, emphasizing the seriousness and urgency of his message, "We fear physical pain, we fear rejection, economic duress; we are afraid that others won't like us; we are worried that we may fail a test, that we may say something stupid, or that we may lose our job. We are always in some sort of fear. If we watch sports we are afraid that our team will lose. We fear accidents, some people fear spiders, some fear the police; many fear public speaking, darkness and almost the whole world fears death. And then," he said with a mischievous smile, "there is fear of Saturn, which brought you here today."

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Sara had to agree; what Goswami said made sense. Yes, at that moment she realized that she had always lived with some level of anxiety, that gnawing feeling of fear that something bad could happen. But although it all sounded rather pessimistic, what Goswami said somehow had a soothing effect on her, as becoming aware of some tension in the muscles helps to relax it.

“But there are much more fearsome things than Saturn!” he said. He looked at her and she didn’t seem ready to explore bigger fears. Saturn was looming big enough in her mind and so Goswami chose to focus on that preoccupation for now, thus he asked “But, what do you know about Saturn, by the way?”

Sara didn’t expect the question, but she had taken so many exams that answering questions had become almost second nature for her. She quickly accessed her memory and started reciting, “Saturn – known as Shani in Indian astrology – is embodied in the sixth planet from the sun and rules Capricorn and Aquarius. The name Shani comes from the Sanskrit expression *shanyae kramati sa*, ‘the one who moves slowly’ as Saturn takes twenty-nine and half years to orbit the Sun. A person with a malefic Saturn in the natal chart will encounter troubles of various kinds, such as business losses, disease, even imprisonment.”

Sara sensed that she was sounding a bit like Wikipedia, dishing out data she had very little insights about, and so she stopped there.

Goswami nonchalantly accepted her explanation, “That’s all right” he said, “but there is more... much more. And actually without understanding the whole universe you can’t understand Saturn.” He had clutched his fist as if hiding a secret within it, “without grasping the meaning of the universe you can’t really grasp Saturn.”

Grasping the meaning of the universe?! That was a tall order; certainly more than Sara had bargained for... but, again, it made sense.

Without understanding the nature and workings of a complex system, how could one understand the function of a single element of that system? Certainly Saturn could not be considered separately from everything else.

“But... how to do that?” Sara said, a bit overwhelmed by the prospect. “How to grasp the meaning of the universe, the meaning of life? Through astrology?” Goswami partially acknowledged the suggestion with a nod of the head, “Astrology can help,” he said, “but what do you mean by astrology anyway?”

From the tone of his voice she gathered that he wasn't really expecting an answer, a definition; so she chose to keep quiet and wait for his answer. She began to be fascinated by the exchange, glad that he wasn't in a hurry; that he was a 'big picture' person and didn't jump to diagnosis and prescriptions. She had always felt pulled to the why of things, and his probing approach thrilled her.

“Our psyche is a microscopic part of the universe,” he started, “the word universe comes from the Latin unus, ‘one’; and so the universe is a single composite system, a wholesome, all-integrated mechanism – and our psyche, our body and the rest of the universe are all configured from the same elements: false sense of self, intelligence, mind, earth, water, fire, air and ether. All of this are useless, inert and dead without the conscious element. There is individual consciousness – the self-awareness of every living being; and then there is the overarching, all-encompassing consciousness, the all-pervading awareness of the Supreme Being.”

She carefully listened, she was surprised that he would take the time to explain all these things to her; she felt... important, even honored. And she quickly realized that the tons of books in the house had not been there only for show.

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“Our desires and actions in this world,” he continued, “create consequences that shape our destiny. The unfolding of this destiny, our karma, takes place through the influence of various celestial agents, who facilitate our experiencing of our *karma*. Ancient seers and knowledge revealed from higher spheres described nine main “influencers,” known in Sanskrit as *grahas* – from the idea of holding, seizing. In English we call them, colloquially, as “planets” – although not all of them are planets.” Sara sensed that he wasn’t endeavoring to recall and express this information, but he appeared to be cautious to avoid delving into too many details and explanations.

“The position of these nine *grahas* in our astrological birth chart traces the trajectory of our *karma*, pointing at our past choices and the lessons we need to learn in this life.” Sara was familiar with the idea of reincarnation – it had always appeared natural to her – but it was perhaps the first time in which someone was talking about previous and present lives in a way that made it real to her. At school and at work people, generally only worried about this life and its immediate needs.

But Goswami’s consciousness obviously wasn’t just stuck in the ‘here and now.’ Sitting behind his book-flooded table, he kept giving his summary, as if the cosmos was his courtyard. “Each of the nine planets – Sun, Moon, Mars, Mercury, Venus, Jupiter, Saturn, Rahu and Ketu – rule specific areas of life; their combined position in our horoscope is like a photograph of our *karma*. They don’t cause our karma, but they are instrumental in our experiencing it. When our body becomes old and useless, we transition to another body at the time of death, a new birth situation sculpted by our desires and credits.”

“Credits?” Sara asked, “What do you mean by credits?”

“It’s like a cosmic bank account,” Goswami replied, “you make deposits by striving towards perfection, by working to unleash your full

potential, by helping others and so on; and you make withdrawals by hurting others, by indulging too much in sense pleasures, by wasting time and by neglecting opportunities for growth... Your bank account can go so much in red that you won't even be able to afford another human body. At that time you slip into a body of a cat or a dog."

"And where does Saturn fit in all this?" Sara asked.

"Saturn is the most misunderstood of all planets. One of his duties is acting like the '*karma* police.' The police catch the criminals – of course nowadays sometimes policemen are more dishonest than the outlaws, but that's a different story. In the higher realms of the universe, there is no gross corruption as in our modern society. Anyway, the police catch the criminal and the justice system punishes them. Of course some crimes are more serious than others; if you kill someone you might spend the rest of your life in jail, but if you draw graffiti on a wall or litter the street – some act of vandalism – you might just have to pay a fine."

Sara started wondering if her astrological chart would reveal the karmic crimes she had committed – if any – and what consequences she could expect.

"Of course," Vishwa Goswami continued, "we could be able to escape human justice, but cosmic justice is not so easy to evade. The universe has eyes everywhere. The cosmic police work to punish crime but also to curb it, to prevent it. Saturn keeps a watch on people; he helps them to keep their lust, greed and anger under control. It's a thankless task, but he is eminently equipped to perform it." Goswami now appeared pensive, almost sad because of Saturn's bad reputation. He shook his head, "People don't understand him. They should be grateful to him."

Vishwa Goswami, who obviously knew his subject, was gradually re-calibrating and re-orienting Sara's convictions. She thus felt almost

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guilty; but mostly she felt confused; she had always assumed that some planets are ‘good’ and some are ‘bad’ – and Saturn had been on top of the malefic ones.

Almost as if reading her mind, Goswami addressed her bewilderment, “Many people are victims of the misconception that some of the planetary periods are ‘good’ while others are ‘bad’, therefore often people have high expectations for the ‘good times’ and they worry about the ‘bad times.’ The truth is that each planetary period is like a different season in the calendar for agriculture. During each season the fields have to be prepared in a unique way; you plant certain seeds; you harvest some crop; you store some kind of food. Different seasons demand different types of work – which, if done diligently, will produce good results in the next season. If the farmer is negligent or lazy during one season and fails to buy seeds or to prepare the soil, he will suffer in the next season.”

This image of the agricultural seasons clicked with Sara and she wanted to know more. “If each planetary period is like a season, what do we have to ‘plant’ in each?”

Goswami smiled and explained: “Different people have different moods and ‘plant’ different things. Some go for immediate results; some are wiser and shoot for longer term’s benefits... It’s a question of one’s paradigm. One who wishes to reach the ultimate goal will plant seeds of eternity in every season.”

THE SEASONS OF LIFE

Goswami could see that Sara was very attentive and was eagerly taking in his explanations; and so he felt comfortable to continue and to go deeper; offering her a proper background and framework. “We all go through a cycle in which, one after another, each of the nine planets particularly influence us. These phases are called ‘astrological periods’ or ‘planetary cycles.’ In Sanskrit they are called *dashas*. Different people calculate these periods in different ways, but the most prominent way – known as Vimshottari Dasha – describes an overall cycle of one hundred and twenty years. Because nowadays hardly anyone lives to be a hundred-twenty, practically nobody goes through all of the nine periods in one life.”

“What’s the sequence of the planetary periods?” Sara asked.

“The nine planets follow this sequence:” he said, “First there is Ketu, for seven years – but this doesn’t mean that everyone’s life starts with Ketu; one can be born at any point of the cycle. One might be born, say, at the beginning of the Mars period or at the end of the Mercury period... how old are you?”

“Twenty-seven.”

“So, if you – like you were saying – are at the end of the Jupiter period...” he quickly mentally computed twenty-seven, her age, minus sixteen years of the Jupiter period minus eleven years she spent in Rahu, “you were born in the second half of the Rahu period. Anyway, after Ketu comes Venus, for twenty years; Venus is followed by Sun,

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the shortest *dasha*, with six years, and then comes Moon, for ten years; then Mars for seven years, Rahu for eighteen years and Jupiter for sixteen years. Then there is Saturn, for nineteen years, and after Saturn, Mercury, for seventeen years – for a total of hundred and twenty years; then the cycle start again, like the seasons.”

“How to find out in which *dasha* one is born?” Sara asked.

“You have to calculate your birth star – the Moon’s *nakshatra* – but don’t worry about that for now. The main point is that each planet ‘rules’ a certain number of years and within each of these periods there are shorter sub-periods – called *antar-dashas*, sub-*dashas* or ‘inner phases’ – unfolding in the same sequence as the nine periods. In other words, each *dasha* has nine *antar-dashas*, starting with the planet ruling the main *dasha*. For instance, the Mars *dasha* – seven years – is divided into nine sub-periods starting with Mars and continuing with Rahu, Jupiter, Saturn, Mercury, Ketu, Venus, Sun and Moon.

“As far as length, these *antar-dashas* maintain the same ratio of length of the larger planetary periods, and so, for instance, the Sun sub-period is the shortest and the Venus is the longest. Each of these shorter periods is also subdivided into nine divisions, according to the same sequence and ratio of length, and so on. One can go down and calculate the specific influences at the various levels, but in normal circumstances only the first two or three are considered. So, even in your Jupiter period you experienced a strong influence of Saturn; for about two and half years. That would have been some sixteen years ago.”

She was startled by this information. Sara quickly remembered those years and was relieved to note that nothing particularly bad had happened. And so she thought that there was hope also for the longer Saturn period just ahead.

“Give me your birth details please.” Goswami asked.

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Sara shared the information of place, year, month, day and hour of her birth. Goswami swiftly entered the data in his computer. She was surprised how deftly he keyed in the info, without looking at the keyboard. She had expected a more laborious typing from such an elderly man.

“See,” he said, “Right now you are in Jupiter-Rahu-Mercury.”

“What does it mean?” She wondered aloud.

“It’s a time of transition, of preparation. Rahu being the planet of change, he is readying you for change, for the unexpected, for hard work... it’s a time of growth. Jupiter is ‘giving’ you Saturn... It’s like, say a child gets a good mark at school, you might tell him, ‘Good, here is some candy!’ but when he grows up and, say, he completes high-school, you won’t reward him with candy anymore; this time you will tell him something like, ‘Very good; now go on to college.’ You will push him to greater responsibilities and achievements. Mercury indicates learning,” at this point he softly chuckled, “and that’s why you are here.”

“But,” she said, “what if, following your analogy, I didn’t want to go to college, so to say. What if I wasn’t willing to take up more, heavier duties?”

“Then you will curtail your growth.” He said plainly, “People do that all the time! They refuse to learn the lessons that life, in the form of the cycle of *dashas*, offers them. Would you think there would be so much strife and distress in the world if everyone focused on growing and be the best they can?”

“So...” she spoke almost as if talking to herself, “there are lessons to be learnt at every step of life...”

“Of course!” he said, “but because there isn’t a big sign over planet Earth with ‘SCHOOL’ written on it, many people think that they

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have already learned all there is to learn. They think they already graduated... but many are not even in kindergarten yet.”

“So, what’s the special lesson for each planetary period, for each *dasha* and sub-*dasha*?” Sara eagerly asked.

He smiled at her enthusiasm; he knew that the answer to her question would take months of dedicated study – for a gifted student, one with the karma for astrological subtleties – to fully grasp, but he didn’t want to discourage her and so he chose to give an ‘it depends’ answer.

“There are many factors to consider,” he began, wishing to give her at least the broad picture, “everything is very personal. The influence of the same planet can act very differently according as to where it is situated in the astrological chart of the person. There are also the choices of the person, the way one chooses to interface with the situation. Other issues are: Is the planet exalted or debilitated? Retrograde? And so on... but there are general considerations on how the planetary cycles show our *karma* unfolding; there are general characteristics in the lessons they bring.”

“You said, for instance,” Sara probed, “that Mercury indicates learning, right?”

“Yes,” he replied, “the *dasha* of Mercury – seventeen years – is generally a period of learning, experimentation, curiosity and mental stimulation; but it could also be a time of excessive stimulation and unfocused action. Mercury – Budha in Sanskrit – is the lightning-fast quality of the mind, speech and discriminating power, the capacity to take a look at all possibilities in a situation and to evaluate them accurately.

“But everything is relative: Someone with a very weak Moon won’t become a great communicator only because he is going through Mercury. In fact, during Mercury one’s career could skyrocket, but also

plummet. One could get stuck, overwhelmed by too many details and resort to escapism, lethargy and fruitless fantasizing.”

“And after Mercury?” Sara asked.

“After Mercury there are seven years of Ketu. Mercury is proud but detached, sort of equipoised; which is good for preparing for the detachment instigated by Ketu. Some people suffer losses at this time – it might be loss of pride or of tangible assets – but Ketu only hurts us when we are too attached to unnecessary things. The pain he brings should open our eyes to the temporary nature of this world, and connect with our sub-conscious. Mostly though, Ketu *dasha*, is ‘hot’ and ‘fast’ and can make life appear out of control. The end of this period is generally not a time for taking long-term commitments, as life may change drastically. For those who have worked on strengthening the mind Ketu will support their inner search; sincere seekers may meet authentic life-teachers and transcendental, esoteric texts; but those with weak minds, those with an undeveloped sense of their subconscious activities may become over-dependent on superficial, superstitious approaches to astrology, tarot readings or other forms of divination and occultism.”

“And after Ketu?” Sara asked.

“After the pride of Mercury – ‘I know everything’ – and the subtle cleansing by Ketu, the person should be ready to enter Venus with an ethical outlook. This period of twenty years – Shukra in Sanskrit, the longest *dasha* – is generally pleasant; Venus wants to give. Wealth, children, marriage, worldly happiness and affectionate partnerships are often prominent at this time, but we must be careful not to become victims of the charms of such external pleasures and neglect our growth. Venus is a gentle teacher a motherly personality. The best way to utilize this period is to be of service to others, show compassion, give charity... spiritual practices will be blessed with deep realizations.

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Venus represents Mother Lakshmi, the goddess of fortune, the ultimate caretaker; she is the eternal consort of the Supreme Lord, Vishnu. As she happily serves her Lord, she desires that every soul develop loving service towards God. She will remain only where her husband is respected. Those who neglect Him lose her blessings.”

Taking the cue from his pause, Sara continued to enquire: “And after Venus, what happens?”

“After the likely excesses and hedonism of the Venus period,” Goswami explained, “the Sun comes along to burn away the impurities we accumulated so that our individual identity can emerge and shine forward. These six years are a time to purify and hone our self-expression, to leave only what really serves to take us to the heights that we can achieve. The Sun – Surya, in Sanskrit – lights up the whole chart; he is the planet of confidence and charisma, the one with most inherent strength. We may find the power to influence the world around us in a big way; but if in our chart the Sun is weak, we may experience a crisis of confidence, feeling disappointed for being unable to project the self-assurance and self-reliance we had hoped for.”

Sara was fascinated by these brief but powerful descriptions. It gave her a glimpse of the universe not as a cold, deterministic, mechanistic and lifeless apparatus, but as a personal and ultimately educational setup, vibrant with meaning and personality. It was as if Vishwa Goswami was painting a fresco of the whole human existence and its connection with the celestial sphere in quick but colorful strokes. She was seeing herself and others in those psychological portrayals. She was eager for more.

“And after Sun?” she asked.

“After the intensity of the Sun-*dasha*, after his burning influence, come the soothing rays of the Moon - Chandra in Sanskrit. Once the

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Sun establishes an identity, the Moon helps to connect that sense of self with others in a meaningful way; it's no longer enough to shine ourselves. This period lasts ten years, and it's a time to learn to see ourselves as a reflection, through the eyes of others. We become more aware of others and of their needs. In this *dasha* we tend to seek connection; marriage, family, motherhood will be themes; it will feel important to stake a claim in the tangible world, by starting a business or buying a home. If the Moon is strong or well-placed in our chart it can make us deepen our thoughts through contemplation and introspection, but a weak Moon can make us feel mentally disturbed, confused and vulnerable. The Moon is a gentle and compassionate planet, the most sensitive – in fact we might feel as sensitive as an awkward teenager.”

Sara smiled and asked, “And then, who comes next?”

“After the restoring, nourishing Moon period, we should be ready for action!” Goswami was enjoying sharing his knowledge with this eager young woman; her curiosity and her enthusiasm to learn was intellectually energizing. He was pleased to have a chance to create clarity and broaden her perspective. “And then we march into the Mars period, seven years of striving to improve our life through disciplined action. Mars is known as Kuja or Mangala in Sanskrit, his nature is to fight for what's right and the competitive spirit will be prominent in this *dasha*. Through courage and bravery, sustained by the expansive and rough energy of Mars, we test our principles in the world, focused on pursuing our goals with passion. But if we become too obsessed with results we may jeopardize our relationships and teamwork. With a compromised Mars we may feel frustrated at our lack of valor, at our ineffectiveness. This may bring complacency or open conflict through arguments and power struggles. And when fighting, the chance of being defeated is always there.”

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“I could use some of that Mars daring myself sometimes...” Sara thought. “And what happens after the seven years of Mars?” she asked.

“After Mars, Rahu rules for eighteen years. In the Mars period we should have developed the strength to fight even bigger battles, inner battles. Rahu stands for revolution; he destroys old patterns of thinking; our ambitions and motivations get tested; and our life may appear chaotic, as our obsessions become prominent and strange desires take center stage. Rahu’s energy clouds our subconscious and inhibits our discrimination. We may end up in unconventional situations and make unconventional choices, which may bring unexpected results. The challenge of unexpected change is a theme of this period, but this phase also offers the chance to work on the qualities we need to become whole and complete. Rahu and Ketu are very connected – Rahu is the head and Ketu is the body of the same demon – but Rahu represents upheavals that are visible, while Ketu indicates inner strife. The weird cravings are smashed, destroyed by Rahu – sometimes in dramatic fashion. Besides trials, temptations and tribulations, Rahu brings also precious opportunities, for instance to break free from the limitations of social conventions, or to seriously dedicate to spiritual cultivation.”

“So,” Sara said, in a pensive mood, “it seems that with all these influences people are actually more disturbed than what they may appear... and not only during Rahu.”

“Yes!” Goswami emphatically confirmed, “There is so much going on in peoples’ minds underneath the surface. Social norms keep them somewhat in line, but turmoil constantly brews underneath. It might be envy, desperation, carnal attractions, anger or plain stupor; but hardly anyone is fully... sane. The Vedic literatures say that, generally, the conditioned soul is mad, because of always engaging in activities that cause bondage and suffering.”

“But,” Sara wondered aloud, “how to get out of this cycle of up and downs?”

“Up and downs; a good image,” he said, “it reminds me of how, in ancient times, the king’s men would take a criminal in a boat to the middle of the river. They would grab him by the hair and would thrust his head under water. When he was almost drowning and his lungs were about to bust, the king’s constables would pull him out of the water and allow him to breathe; and then they would again dunk him in the river to suffocate. This is what happens to everyone; everyone goes through the terrible pains of birth, death, disease and old age – plus many other unpleasant experiences such as feeling thirsty or hungry, suffering the cold or the heat, feeling tired or restless, feeling frustrated, exhausted, upset, anxious, fearful and so on and so forth, ad nauseam and ad infinitum – but when we somehow encounter fleeting moments of pleasure – the birth of a child, the passing of an exam, the promotion at work... which are like the brief relief the criminal feels in the river – and immediately we become infatuated again with material life, thinking: ‘Yes, after all there is happiness in this world.’ We are mad. And times like Rahu intensify our madness.”

“But... then... what to do?” Sara grasped the truth of Goswami’s statements and felt deeply uncomfortable. She knew that although what he was saying was so bleak and negative, Goswami was right; he was offering a valid description of reality. And he wasn’t doing it out of spite; there was a subtext of compassion in his words. “That’s why we need a teacher,” Goswami said, “and that’s why after Rahu comes Jupiter.” “So,” Sara thought, somewhat hopeful, “there is light at the end of the tunnel...” and she became even more focused, more attentive to every word he would speak next.

“Jupiter is a time to reclaim our inherent wisdom. Insanity is only an acquired condition for the soul, not his own nature. During the

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Jupiter *dasha* – sixteen years – we get the chance to get back in control of our mind. Jupiter comes to provide insight, maturity and life lessons. He is also Guru – that’s his Sanskrit name by the way – the teacher. As *guru* Jupiter always teaches us something and also gives us something. Often this period brings children, marriage, wealth... also titles and honors. Jupiter is the planet of hope, faith and optimism; it allows us to keep going by provoking the belief that our best days are yet to come. Jupiter can make us religious, put us in touch with spiritual wisdom and realized teachers; he gives us moral awareness, the sense of choosing good deeds instead of bad actions. When Jupiter is weak in the chart, one may become unrealistically optimistic, and develop a mood of self-entitlement or even arrogance. One may get attracted to false gurus; but Jupiter is a gentle planet; he has a way of putting us in situations that increase our understanding, that broaden our perspective. It’s not rare that during this period some apparently random event will change our life for the better. Jupiter is God’s grace; that ineffable force, that good karma that leads us higher.”

Sara remembered that she was at the end of her Jupiter. Looking back at the last sixteen years she had to admit that it had been a good period for her, a time of progress and success. She did very well in school, and her getting a job as programmer in the aerospace industry immediately after graduating surprised everyone, even herself. For a moment the thought crossed her mind, “Could this meeting with Vishwa Goswami be another gift of Jupiter?”

SATURN, LORD OF DARKNESS, GIVER OF LIGHT

“**A**nd of course,” Sara said with a half-smile, “after Jupiter comes Saturn...”

“Yes, Saturn...” Goswami said, with a hint of a mischievous smile. They both knew that her fear of Saturn had pushed her to come and see him. The descriptions of the other planets and periods had been informative and even revealing, and Sara was starting to see things from a different angle; nonetheless spending the next nineteen years – a big chunk of life! - in Saturn-*dasha* didn’t seem very appealing.

Goswami knew her fear and he knew that her trepidation was not entirely unjustified. Saturn-*dasha* was, for many, a very tough time; but tough doesn’t necessarily mean bad. He was going to explain things in depth, but this time, he decided, he was going to take a different approach.

He cleared his voice and started, “Yes, the next period is Saturn. Nineteen years... but let’s start to understand the person Saturn. He has many names in many cultures of the world. In Vedic culture – the oldest, the original – he has been known as Shanideva; he is a *devata*, a demigod, a celestial being involved in the administration of the cosmos. He is the son of the Lord of the Sun, Surya, and his wife Chaya, therefore he is also known as Chayaputra, the son of Chaya. There are hymns with more than one hundred names of Saturn, each of them

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emphasizing a different aspect of his. He is represented as having a blackish/bluish complexion and four arms. In his four hands he holds different symbols representing his power and his role. In one hand he holds a bow, a weapon that shoots arrows after keen preparation; this indicates that Saturn quietly prepares the foundation upon which the effort towards a goal is made. His bow's main arena is the psychological realm; he prepares our mind to make progress. In another hand he carries an arrow. Placing the arrow upon his bow Saturn launches attacks upon our accumulated *karma*, piercing the darkest and most stubborn psychic knots, the inner bundles that bind us; he releases their effects so that we can become free.

“In another hand he holds a javelin, a spear; but sometimes this is represented as a trident or some other bladed weapon such as a dagger. Arrows pierce their targets from a distance, while these other weapons strike from close quarters, with more intense blows. The javelin indicates that Saturn doesn't always act from the background; he is not afraid of facing any foe, any amount of accumulated, obstinate, residual karma. His fourth hand is empty and is raised in the posture of benediction. This should correct all those who consider him merely an agent of grief. Saturn's real and only intention is to bestow the greatest blessing upon the soul: enlightenment.

“Those who approach him as teacher receive his kindness and are spared from the brunt of his arrows and spear. Actually, even materially, Saturn's blessings are unrivalled among the planets. Those who have been pious in previous lives receive abundant facilities and opulence in the Saturn period. He is like a judge sitting on the cosmic bench: To one he might award prison, in the form of many limitations, loss of freedom, etc. but to another he might award rich compensations. This duality as a stern punisher and as the bestower of plentiful gifts; this polarity in his behavior, is reflected also in the English language.

The adjective saturnine means gloomy, bitter or melancholic; but saturnian can also mean prosperous, happy or peaceful.”

“So... if I understand you correctly,” Sara suggested, “Saturn is not that bad after all...”

“Saturn is not bad at all,” Goswami emphasized by raising both hands, palms up, “What is bad is our ignorance; What is bad is our accumulation of selfish desires; what is really bad is not knowing who we are and what we are doing in this world!”

Sara wasn't going to argue.

“But let me tell you also about his personal carrier, his vehicle,” he continued, “Shani-deva rides a crow; sometimes it is said that it's a raven or a vulture, in any case these species are only an indication; it's a mystical bird, not one within our limited experience. Some say that there is a special significance in Saturn's vehicle being a bird and not a horse or some other quadruped.

“The foremost among the birds is Garuda, the carrier of Vishnu. Birds are enemies of reptiles, especially snakes. While birds take flight, representing the higher aspirations of the self, snakes slither on the ground, signifying lower ambitions. The Vedic literature describes a special race of snake, the Nagas. They are highly evolved in the occult sciences but have very materialistic natures; they are always after the nectar of immortality, to avoid interrupting their mundane pursuits. The birds, headed by Garuda, harass and devour the snakes, keeping the Nagas from getting the nectar.

“Saturn's task, riding upon his black bird, is to destroy our illusions of immortality. He brings forward decay and death, grinding forward the heavy wheel of time. He shatters our foolish daydreams, so that our higher aspirations might develop. Saturn's extended hand of benediction must always be remembered. Sometimes Saturn will bestow

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great material benefit and fantastic longevity to a person. The point is that he bestows whatever is most favorable to prepare us for spiritual evolution. If we require long life and material stability for our inner growth, Saturn may give them to us. But, if to awaken our higher impulses we need to see our material prosperity smashed, shattered, then Saturn doesn't hesitate to destroy our plans.

“So, in terms of the cycle of the nine planets,” Sara asked, “how to understand Saturn?”

“After the enthusiasm of Jupiter, Saturn will bring us back down to Earth and make us face reality.” Goswami said, “Reality is not the optimism of Jupiter; it is the cold, hard facts of Saturn. Those facts are the death of the body and the temporal nature of all material life. In Saturn one begins to grasp the futility of planning for happiness in this world. One comes to understand that human beings don't control much. And people don't like to realize the precariousness of their situation, the inevitable, ultimate defeat of their hopes. But Saturn brings challenges in proportion to our avoidance of reality. The more we are attached to worldly gain and pleasures; the more Saturn will look like an apocalypse.”

Sara's present life was one of hard work to secure money – especially for the future – so as to have some facility later on... His words had created a doubt in her mind. “But,” Sara said, “is it wrong to work towards some worldly gain, to build a family... to develop a career?”

“No, there is nothing wrong with living with a degree of comfort, with some wealth, or to marry and have children; what's wrong is to think that they will last forever, that they will protect us in the long run. The mind needs companionship, the body needs some wellbeing – within the limits of measure and morality; some good food helps the mind to be peaceful. Some clean, tastefully decorated apartment helps in relaxing after the day's work. Living in harmony and affection

with our spouse helps us find our emotional and psychological balance... but all these things won't last forever; these objects and relations will slip away in the river of time. When we forget that these circumstances are only supportive elements in our journey – and not the goal – then our awakening will be brusque, even traumatic.

“How comfy can you make your desk in school? You are there to learn, to pass an exam, and to get out. How much will you invest in decorating your desk, padding your chair with cushions or studding your lunch box with diamonds?”

Sara fleetingly visualized a few of the classrooms, desks, seats and lunch boxes she had been through during her years as a student. Yes, she had to agree, they were all temporary stations, left behind with no particular regret, as she moved on to higher classes and higher things, to graduation, to getting a job, to getting a life.

“OK,” she said, “so if one is clear on the goal to achieve he could, so to say, proceed in relative comfort, right?”

“Yes,” Goswami confirmed, “in principle it is possible; many great kings of ancient India had fantastic material opulence but were also very enlightened yogis. Maharaja Yudhisthira, for example, ruled over the earth and the seas assisted by his loving brothers. There wasn't any shortage; no draught, poverty or mental agony; it is said that due to their fatty milk bags and cheerful attitude, the cows moistened the grazing ground with milk. But when the time came to renounce, to retire, the emperor just walked away, literally, to the Himalayas.”

Goswami stopped for a moment, in appreciative contemplation of the feat of detachment exhibited by Maharaja Yudhisthira. “But,” he continued, “there are also many who, once they have access to a little wealth and comfort, forget everything about higher goals and remain attached till their last breath.”

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“In that case,” Sara offered, “Saturn will act as a party-pooper for them.”

“Yes,” Goswami was pleased that she was getting the hang of the topic and was encouraged to continue. “Saturn knows, ‘These people are partying but the house is on fire; let’s wake them up from their delusion’; and therefore he makes arrangements for them to realize that danger is close at hand and that they should stop jumping and dancing around, celebrating little pleasures while their bodies decay and move towards obliteration. There is a story told by Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura... have you heard about him?”

Sara hadn’t and shook her head.

“He was a great spiritual leader from Bengal; most probably the greatest scholar of the twentieth century; he was known as the ‘living encyclopedia’... in his youth he had been a great astronomer and astrologer, but later he gave it all up for higher pursuits. Anyway, Sarasvati Thakura was expert at creating short, simple parables to illustrate deeper truths.

“One of these is the story of some children who were playing with kites on the roof of a house. They were laughing and having fun, oblivious to their surroundings. They were so absorbed in looking at the kites in the sky that they didn’t realize that one of them was stepping closer and closer to the edge to the roof. A gentleman saw the scene from the street; ran up the stairs and grabbed the boy about to fall off. But the children took this intervention as a disturbance to their amusement. Instead of thanking the savior, they started complaining that the man had interrupted their fun.

“The story was originally used to illustrate the behavior of the materialists who complain when a holy teacher tries to bring their attention to godly topics, but the story also fits with Saturn’s efforts to wake people up, and how the foolish complain and criticize him.” He shook

his head. “People waste their lives, but when Saturn shows them the ‘facts of life’ they blame him as the cause of their situation.”

“So,” Sara said, “although many don’t recognize it, Saturn ‘the party-spoiler’ is actually the real party-saver...”

“Yes,” Goswami nodded, “he is interested in people having an eternal party; not a temporary, illusory and miserable picnic in the garden of death.”

Sara was enjoying his colorful, though forceful imagery. Goswami continued, “This world imposes limitations that people don’t like; so people live in denial, as ostriches hiding their heads in the sand, as if to exorcise their limitations. Saturn exposes these limitations; he doesn’t create them. He makes us aware that we are not as perfect, beautiful and powerful as we think we are.

“The Saturn *dasha* is a time when we face our limitations, the inescapable truth that one day, sooner than later, our body will perish; and Saturn may teach us this through bodily aches and pains. As such the Saturn period can be a time of awakening, of substantial spiritual progress, a time of assimilating the truth, thriving in introspection and avoiding mundane distractions. We can’t obtain peace if we remain unwilling to recognize our bodily limitations.

“As Krishna says in the Bhagavad-gita, ‘One who has taken his birth is sure to die, and after death one is sure to take birth again. Therefore, in the unavoidable discharge of your duty, you should not lament.’ Everything we hold dear – our bodies, our relations, our memory, our possessions – is subject to decay and disappear. The most shining car will be a piece of rusty junk tomorrow; the most attractive woman will turn into a wrinkled, toothless wreck. Of course she could put new, false teeth, but you know what I mean... Imagine a huge grindstone, relentlessly smashing our hopes to dust; that’s how Saturn feels like.”

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Sara found the image quite brutal but effective. The simile reminded her of the episodes of pain and death that she had experienced, in her family or in her circle of friends. She remembered attending the funeral ceremony of her grandmother, the burning of her remains... An English saying crossed her mind and she quoted it, "Time and tide wait for no man."

Goswami nodded in agreement.

"When Saturn teaches his lessons, the foolish react by becoming more stubborn, as if they could compete with time – or with Saturn. But, to those willing to embrace his teachings, Saturn grants detachment, which brings inner peace. Jupiter and Saturn both seek to elevate the human spirit, but Jupiter's approach is, so to say, positive – our good deeds are rewarded – while Saturn's methods are, in one sense, negative; he punishes our ignorance and forces us to face our limits. Saturn's influence is harsh for the ego, but good for the soul, the real self; he drives us from *karma* to *dharma*. He shines light on the darkness, without which, darkness is taken for light."

Sara found all of this revealing and even poetic. There was an intrinsic beauty and truth, she felt, to all that Goswami said. By expanding her point of view she felt a sense of relief; she felt these insights releasing her from a foggy world view in which mysterious forces dominate powerless humans. She was starting to see harmony within the universal plan; and that gave her hope.

Goswami wasn't finished, "Saturn is the planet of pressure, internal and external, the planet of practical efforts and perseverance, of sense of responsibility and ambition; but when these drives are focused only on external goals, and we avoid the inner work, Saturn may bury us beneath a mountain of responsibility until we either relent or break down physically and emotionally."

Saturn, Lord of Darkness, Giver of Light

Sara was listening carefully, trying to identify the likely challenges she would face ahead, in the upcoming nineteen years. She was looking for direction and she was getting plenty.

“Saturn gets strengthened,” Goswami said, “and becomes beneficial when we get involved in social service, such as helping old people and other charitable pursuits... he hates egoism; through pain he smashes our ego and teaches us humility and sensitivity to others; because when we suffer we can develop compassion for others – interestingly, the word compassion comes from the Latin *com* ‘together’ and *pati*, ‘to suffer, to endure’; to suffer together, to share in someone’s pain.”

Sara took an internal note to look into ways of helping others. She felt inspired not only to look for ways to neutralize adverse effects, but also to find the way of getting rid of selfishness.

“At the same time,” Goswami continued, “great success in this world is also possible. No other planet is comparable with Saturn in terms of blessings. Saturn corrects our immoral acts by creating frustration and delays, but to those who have already gone beyond that stage he may give high positions and all sorts of benefits. But one can’t whimsically expect good luck without any work, without having done some good. If you don’t have money, you can’t buy a Rolls-Royce; maybe the best you can do is to go by bicycle or just walk ... and some people can’t even afford a pair of working legs. They don’t have enough good *karma* even for that. If you don’t have pious credits, you can’t expect that fortune and facilities be showered upon you. There’s no free lunch in the universe.”

Sara wondered: Would her Saturn *dasha* be a time of thriving and abundance?

“So,” she said, “Saturn deals with different people in different ways. It’s all very relative...”

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“Of course,” Goswami confirmed, “everything is very personal and personalized. Some will experience him as the great *karmic* judge who rules with an iron fist, others will experience him as a benevolent master. According to one’s previous deeds, in previous lives, Saturn will be placed differently in one’s chart, with very different results.” He paused for a moment and turned to his computer and went on the Internet.

“Here is how a gifted astrologer from America summarizes it.” Goswami said as he opened a site. “He is gifted with the ability to condense complex concepts in a colloquial, conversational fashion. This is how he puts it, focusing on the experience of the person, on one’s psychological dynamics.” Vishwa Goswami read from the screen:

“Too much” Saturn: We see the bad in everything, and almost no one can correct or show us another viewpoint. We are critical, and spiteful. Disliking most other people, we prefer to keep to ourselves and our own ways; thus we become strange, abnormal and perverse. Dull, menial, and slow in mind and body – we live weakly, surrounded by decaying things, filth, and illness. We age prematurely and are tormented to live out a long, tasteless life.

“Not enough” Saturn: We are frivolous, short-lived, short on attention, and attracted to any fluffy object that promises quick happiness. We flee from all critiques. We are impatient, give up easily, lack seriousness, hate to work and are gullible suckers for any idea that sounds optimistic and hopeful. We have unusual fear of death, and prefer to keep old and sick people out of sight.

Just right: We are realistic, patient, perseverant, and detached – able to discard garbage and walk away from things that serve no purpose. We enjoy working, and

Saturn, Lord of Darkness, Giver of Light

work hard in whatever capacity is required of us. We can improve any idea. We are not afraid of sickness and death. We live long and seek true knowledge.

“So,” Goswami concluded, “it’s like with the stock market, if we have invested our money well we’ll get good returns; but if we squandered our assets we’ll find ourselves bankrupt. To receive the favors of Saturn we need to use our freedom wisely.”

SATURN AND THE DIVINE TORTOISE

Sara asked: “But how to counteract the influence of Saturn, or how to build the strength to appreciate his lessons? Is there any remedy, any procedure?”

Goswami smiled and started explaining, “See, the planets and their lords are not independent from the Supreme Lord. Each reports to and worships a specific, divine form of God. For instance, over the Sun is Ramacandra and over Venus is Parashurama. Over Saturn is Kurma, the turtle or tortoise avatara of Lord Vishnu. Therefore a remedy to the challenges brought about by Saturn is worshipping Kurma and meditating on his divine activities, on how he supported a mountain in the churning of the ocean of milk. Saturn is strong and hard, and can serve as a great support in life if we know how to use its energy, its influence. Saturn gets his strength from Kurma; that’s where he gets his specific qualities of endurance, resistance, patience, humility and so on, reflecting the quality of Kurma. And worshipping Kurma, the Lord Tortoise, would grant us the strength to deal with Saturn. It will bestow the connection to the supremely powerful support of the universe, transforming and channeling the energy of Saturn.”

Sara had a vague acquaintance with the story of the churning of the ocean. In fact she recognized it as one of the common themes of classic Indian dance, painting and sculpture. Sara had discovered that the story was part of the cultural heritage of various places in South

East Asia as well. She remembered how, to her great surprise, she once found a huge display of churning of the ocean right in the Bangkok airport! But she didn't know the details of the sequence of events and she asked, "Can you tell me more about that legend?"

Goswami looked at her and, lifting a finger, mildly but firmly corrected her. "I wouldn't call it a 'legend'... These accounts may be far from us, in time, in space and in scope, but they are nothing less than historical. They may sound fantastic because the powers of the personalities involved are inconceivable to us, but there is nothing mythological or imaginary about such stories. Otherwise the great sages would not have described them as factual."

Sara nodded. He understood that she had at least accepted in principle the possibility of the story being a factual recounting of real events, and so he started: "We are in the middle of the seventh *manvantara*, a period of about three-hundred-million years. In the previous *manvantara*, an incarnation of the Supreme Lord named Ajita – which means unconquerable – took the shape of a tortoise and, holding the Mandara Mountain on His back, churned the ocean and produced nectar for the demigods, the pious celestial beings. The demigods, having been cursed by Durvasa Muni, had been defeated in battle by the demoniac forces, the *asuras*, and had lost their heavenly kingdom. The demigods went to the shore of the milk ocean to offer prayers to Vishnu, the Supreme Lord, and He appeared before them. Siva and Brahma pleased Him with highly philosophical prayers and Lord Vishnu advised the demigods to make a truce with the demons, so that they could together churn the ocean and obtain the nectar of immortality. The rope would be the biggest serpent, known as Vasuki, and the churning rod would be Mandara Mountain. But the demigods shouldn't become angry if there were some disturbances. After advising the demigods in this way, the Lord disappeared from the scene."

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Sara was enthralled, “And then?”, she asked.

“Following the instructions of the Supreme Personality of Godhead,” Goswami continued, “the demigods established peace with Bali Maharaja, the King of the demons. Then both demons and demigods started for the ocean, taking Mandara Mountain with them, but because of the great heaviness of the mountain, they all became fatigued, and some of them actually died. Then the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Vishnu, appeared there on the back of His eagle carrier, Garuda, and by His mercy He brought these demigods and demons back to life. The Lord then lifted the mountain with one hand, placed it on the back of Garuda, and sat on the mountain. Garuda placed the mountain in the middle of the sea and the Lord asked him to leave that place because as long as Garuda was present, the serpent Vasuki could not come there. And so Garuda left and Vasuki arrived, to act as the rope for the churning rod. The demons held the snake near the mouth, whereas the demigods held the tail of the great snake; with great endeavor, they began pulling the snake in both directions. Because the churning rod, Mandara Mountain, was very heavy and was not held by any support in the water, it sank into the ocean, and in this way the prowess of both the demons and the demigods was vanquished. That’s when the Supreme Lord appeared in the form of the tortoise, Kurma and supported Mandara Mountain on His back.”

“And then?” Sara asked. The goal of telling the story was to give some background about the form of the Lord worshiped by Saturn, Kurma, but Sara wanted to know how the narration would end and so Vishwa Goswami continued. “At that time the churning resumed with great force. It first produced a huge amount of poison and Lord Siva agreed to drink it all, to protect everyone else. He took the poison in his hand and drank it. After he drank the poison, his neck became bluish. A small quantity of the poison dropped from his hands to the

ground, and it is because of this poison that there are poisonous snakes, scorpions, toxic plants and other poisonous things in this world. After Lord Siva drank all the poison, both the demigods and demons took courage and resumed their churning. Then a *surabhi* cow was produced – from the transcendental *surabhi* you can take as much milk as you like as many times as you want. Great saintly persons accepted this cow to derive clarified butter for performing their fire sacrifices. Thereafter, a horse named Uccaihsrava was generated and it was taken by Bali Maharaja. Then there appeared Airavata and other elephants that could go anywhere, in any direction. The gem known as Kaushtubha was also generated, and Lord Vishnu took that gem and placed it on His chest. Thereafter, a *parijata* flower and the Apsaras, the most beautiful women in the universe, were generated.

“Then the goddess of fortune, Laksmi, appeared. The demigods, the great sages and others offered her their respectful worship. The goddess of fortune could not find anyone to accept as her husband and at last she selected Lord Vishnu to be her spouse. Lord Vishnu gave her a place to stay everlastingly at His chest. Seeing Laksmi and Vishnu together, all those who were present became very pleased. The demons, however, being neglected by the goddess of fortune, were very depressed.” At this point Goswami smiled, savoring his visualization of the events.

“Then Varuni, the goddess of drinking, was generated, and by the order of Lord Vishnu the demons accepted her. Then the demons and demigods kept churning and this time a partial incarnation of Vishnu called Dhanvantari appeared. He is considered the founding father of the medical science in the universe; he was very beautiful, and he carried a jug containing nectar.

“The demons immediately snatched the jug from Dhanvantari’s hand and began to run away. But after some time they started to fight

among themselves for possession of the nectar. The demigods became very morose, but Lord Vishnu solaced the demigods, who therefore remained silent and did not fight.”

“Actually Lord Vishnu had already told them not to be disturbed or angry if something untoward and unexpected would happen, right?”

“Ah, yes!” Goswami was pleased that she was carefully listening and so he continued with renewed enthusiasm. “While the demons were fighting among themselves, the Lord appeared as the incarnation Mohini, the most beautiful woman in the universe. She appeared before the demons and they all became stunned, captivated by her enchanting form. And so the demons selected Mohini as the mediator to settle their quarrel. Taking advantage of their weakness in this regard, Mohini, the incarnation of God, got the demons to promise that whatever decision she might give, they would not refuse to accept it.

“When the demons made this promise, Mohini-murti had the demigods and demons sit in different lines so that She could distribute the nectar. She knew that the demons were quite unfit to drink the nectar. Therefore, She bewildered them and distributed all the nectar to the demigods. When the demons saw this cheating of Mohini-murti, they remained silent. But one demon, named Rahu, dressed himself like a demigod and sat down in the line of the demigods. He sat beside the Sun and the Moon. When the Supreme Personality of Godhead understood how Rahu was cheating, He immediately cut off the demon’s head. Rahu, however, had already tasted the nectar, and therefore although his head was severed, he remained alive. After the demigods finished drinking the nectar, the Supreme Personality of Godhead assumed his own form.”

Sara could get a glimpse of how everything is connected, from time immemorial. She could recognize that Rahu is one of the nine main astrological planets, so she became thoughtful, reflecting on how many levels and layers of meanings and hierarchies the universe includes

“In conclusion,” Goswami interrupted her reverie, “by reading and meditating on the story of Kurma, the story of the churning of the ocean, one can gain the strength to deal with the challenges of Saturn. You can find more details and read about the intricacies and esoteric significance of the story, in chapters five to nine of the Eighth Canto of the Srimad-Bhagavatam, the Bhagavata Maha-Purana. And then the story goes on, because it’s the history of the universe.”

“That every planet has his Lord is very intriguing – it’s a great revelation for me,” Sara gratefully said, “But is there any simple remedy or mantra that one can use to counteract any planetary influence? Is there anything that one can perform in general, to improve all aspects of one’s life?”

Goswami looked at her and for a moment and it seemed as if he was weighing within his mind if she was ready for the next revelation. “Yes, there is a universal remedy, a universal *mantra*.” Goswami said matter-of-factly. “It’s called the *maha-mantra*, the great deliverer, the sound vibration that removes all problems at the root. The root-cause of our problems is forgetfulness of our loving relation with God, and the sixteen-word *maha-mantra*, composed of the names of God, is the most powerful, radical remedy. It is:

*Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare
Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare*

This is a request, a prayer for being engaged again in loving service – all potencies are within these holy names.”

Sara respectfully took note, deciding to research more about this *mantra* on the internet. Still she added: “And this is also good for Saturn, right?” Goswami smiled. The question was unnecessary, but he obliged an answer anyway. “Yes, it is good for everything, including Saturn. These are the names of the source of all powers, all potencies, and all solutions.”

MYSTERIOUS SATURN

THE ENIGMA PUZZLING HUMANITY

FOR MILLENNIA

Sara realized that, throughout the centuries, many intelligent, insightful people had given attention to studying the universe in its multi-faceted, esoteric manifestations. She felt like a small girl on the shore of the ocean of knowledge. She was just getting her feet wet, but she wished to fully dive into it.

“Now,” Sara respectfully asked, “the Vedic tradition offers a very detailed description of Shani-deva, Saturn, describing his personal features and mentality, but, if I understand correctly, many ancient and recent people had some familiarity with Saturn, both astronomically and astrologically, right?”

Goswami confirmed with a nod.

“Therefore,” she continued, “why should we take the Vedic references, the ancient Indian tradition, as the most accurate?”

“Oh,” Goswami said and smiled, welcoming the question, “The Vedic worldview offers the most advanced description of reality, the most detailed map of existence. It’s not just a matter of faith; it’s a matter of walking on the paths described on that map and seeing the parallels for oneself.”

Sara found the answer a bit... esoteric, but Vishwa Goswami’s serene, serious expression told her that he entirely meant what he was saying, and that he possessed considerable personal experience.

“Everyone can experiment and observe.” He continued, “Vedic knowledge is open to everyone, from any background – in fact ‘Veda’ simply means ‘knowledge.’ One can study the map, the description of reality, and through certain practices can start realizing its validity. Having validated certain areas of the map one gains confidence about the accuracy of the rest of the map. That’s the Vedic revelation. Yes, there are descriptions of dimensions and places that are not immediately accessible, but the process of accessing them is also provided, if one is willing to take the journey. So, one might not have yet gone to every place depicted on a map, but having verified a few places described on the map – yes, this river is there; this town is also there; and, yes, that’s the name of this hill - it’s reasonable to conclude that the rest is also there.”

That made sense to Sara. She couldn’t challenge a map until she traveled to at least some of the places portrayed in it.

“As far as astrology, it’s very simple,” he continued, “I have personally considered, studied the various systems – both in terms of calculations and in terms of prognostications – and concluded that the Vedic astrological method offers the most accurate description of one person’s life and psychology. I tested various astrological procedures with people I know very closely and I saw that the Vedic approach gave the best results.

“Western or Eastern, the foundations are common as we deal with the same universe, the same celestial arrangements, but, with high respect for all traditions – and for the men and women that have sincerely labored to uncover astrological truths – there is no comparison between the sophistication of Vedic astrology and other systems. In fact, entire sections of Vedic astrology – important sections – are not even present in other schools. Many astrological traditions don’t even know about Rahu and Ketu, two of the main *grahas!*”

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Goswami's tone, Sara thought, wasn't sectarian or nationalistic. Again his calm, assured reply gave her a sense of solidity, of substance. She didn't fully grasp all aspects of his answer, but his confidence inspired her trust.

"So, the various traditions basically agree in their views of Saturn?" Sara asked, wishing to continue exploring her main immediate interest.

"There are similarities," Goswami said, "but, of course, when we come to other cultures the names change and things can get a bit confused and confusing, with various traditions influencing each other and overlapping. In Babylon, for instance, Saturn was called Ninib; the Chaldeans would call him Alap-Shamas; he was Osiris or Seb for the Egyptians... and I don't think we should get into the idea that Saturn was Earth's 'original sun'... There have been theories and counter-theories swirling around for millennia! Notwithstanding, some of the characteristics of his influence and power are commonly accepted, despite the differences in the languages or symbols."

He lifted a finger in a warning gesture, "When people talk about Saturn you will hear everything and the opposite of everything." Nonetheless he chose to launch on a quick ride through history: "The ancient Greeks called Saturn Cronus or Kronos, and considered him related with agriculture, especially the harvest, and also with the passage of time. But he was a different person than Chronos – with the 'h' – the personification of time in ancient Greece. There are so many stories and descriptions... Even regarding the origin of the English name 'Saturn' there is no agreement. Some say that the Latin Saturnus came from the Etruscan Satre; others think that Satre was simply a translation of Saturnus. Anyway; the ancient Romans believed that Saturn had established the Golden Age, a time of peace and harmony. In Italy, near Rome, there are five cities – with huge stone walls – said to have been founded by Saturn himself."

“And,” Sara asked, with a surprised and expectant expression, “is it true?”

Goswami shrugged in a non-committal way, “Who knows? Anything is possible. Certainly Saturn, Shani-deva, doesn’t need a visa for Italy, like our contemporary Indians! The fact is that no modern historian knows with certainty about the origin of those cities, who built them and why in such a solid fashion. One thing is sure: The Romans didn’t build those cities, Alatri, Anagni, etcetera. Actually the Romans at times built over those walls; so thick and firm. Imagine: The weight of the largest stone of one of those walls has been calculated to be twenty-seven tons! Of course resilience and resistance are attributes of Saturn, so there you have at least some resonance. At any rate, the Romans, in memory of that Golden Age, started celebrating the festival of Saturnalia every year, a week of total abandon and merry making that culminated with the winter solstice. When the Saturnalia ended, the tax collectors appeared and all money owed to the government or to the landlords was to be paid; which is another side to Saturn, the settling of debts and accounts. The Christians later adopted the Saturnalia festival and renamed it Christmas.”

Sara was enthralled by all this information; it was as if Vishwa Goswami had a ringside view of the whole of human experience. In awe she asked, “How do you know all this?”

Goswami’s reply was dismissive, “I read; I learned from those who studied and researched these things.” he said matter-of-factly, not taking any personal credit, “I studied what they wrote; listened to what they had to say.”

Sara found his lack of pretentiousness even more attractive than his erudition. She was eager for more, perhaps because somehow the overview of thousands of years of human ideas seemed to minimize, to scale back her sense of fear for the future. Her worrying about all

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the upcoming nineteen years of Saturn appeared puny in comparison with thousands of years of experience. “And after the Romans,” she asked, “after the Christians... I mean, later on, what did people think of Saturn?”

Goswami made a sour face, as if to introduce a less palatable part of the discussion. “Later on,” he said, “people generally developed negative views of Saturn, or at least mixed feelings. Medieval and Renaissance scholars associated Saturn with melancholy, one of the four humors of their system of medicine. Saturn somehow started getting blamed for all the things sad, unfortunate, and terrible. I will show you a picture.” Goswami picked up another book, found an illustration and showed it to Sara. “Here,” he said, “this is a drawing from the end of the sixteenth century; an elderly-looking Saturn holds a scythe while he rides on a chariot – drawn by dragons – above a hellish landscape. See, some people toil and sweat at a mine; some are getting chopped to pieces or roasted over a fire. On this side three witches fly up around a swirling smoke... a totally ghastly scene.”

Sara didn't say anything, but her expression showed a bit of perplexity.

“Here is another one,” Goswami said, “more or less from the same time – this one is dated 1581 – but this woodcut is not so heavy: Saturn is sitting on a cloud, again holding his scythe, overlooking a less gruesome scene. There is a figure of a lady labeled ‘Conscientia’ – Latin for conscience or knowledge – she holds a book and points upward, apparently indicating that Saturn can bring wisdom. At a distance we see a church, in front of which people give charity to beggars and offer consolation to an invalid – compassionate activities, certainly dear to Saturn. So, all in all people were frightened by Saturn's role but recognized that he can give higher awareness and that he appreciates acts of kindness to the poor and underprivileged.”

Mysterious Saturn

Sara felt a little relieved and smiled mildly.

“A notable point,” Goswami continued, “is that many cultures and individuals have been constructing or perpetuating all sorts of mysterious, esoteric conceptions, correlations and even conspiracies centered on Saturn. The black star; the black cube; Nibiru and Saturn; Satan and Saturn; Saturn and the Sabbath... and of course with the advent of the Internet the various theories have found the perfect outlet for amplification and cross-pollination... Have you heard about the magic square of Saturn?”

She had not and shook her head.

“Well,” he said, “it’s a square formed by a total of nine squares, with a number in each. The numbers go from one to nine and when you add each row of three squares, each column of three squares and each diagonal of three squares, it always adds up to fifteen. Of course there are magic squares for at least seven planets.”

Sara made a mental note to research these mathematical patterns later.

“Anyway,” Goswami said, “my point is that Saturn has been baffling humanity’s attempts at understanding him for thousands of years. Even in terms of astronomy, the knowledge about the planet Saturn has many puzzling elements. For instance, it wasn’t until 1610 that Galileo Galilei first pointed his crude telescope and learned that Saturn actually had rings. At that time Galileo didn’t actually realize what he was looking at; he first he thought that Saturn had two huge satellites orbiting very close to the planet. It wasn’t until forty-five years later that Christiaan Huygens, a Dutch with a much more powerful telescope, could distinguish the rings of Saturn. What’s enigmatic is that apparently, for thousands of years, people in different places seemed to know about the rings. From the Maoris of New Zealand to the ancient Mexicans, from the Persians to the Greeks and the Romans...

all had some description and depiction of Saturn's rings. The question is: How did they know about the rings if the rings were observed only in the late seventeenth century?"

Sara didn't have an answer; and Vishwa Goswami didn't expect one. He continued, "Besides what people knew before or after telescopic observations, the rings of Saturn have many puzzling features even for the modern astronomers. For instance, American physicist William R. Corliss wrote something very interesting..."

Goswami looked for another volume on his desk, which he quickly found. He opened the book entitled *Vedic Cosmography and Astronomy*, and soon was on the right page. "Here; Corliss wrote 'Ominously for celestial mechanics, the complex, dynamic nature of the rings seems beyond the power of Newtonian dynamics to explain and may require a whole new theoretical structure.'"

Goswami chuckled, "A whole new theoretical structure! Billions of dollars invested in research; hundreds of thousands of photos taken by the Voyager and Cassini-Huygens missions, but they can't still figure out how the rings of Saturn work."

Sara had heard about the Cassini-Huygens mission as the aerospace company she worked for had been involved in that project. In fact, they were proud of having been a part of that multinational effort.

"But," she mildly protested, "that exploration enabled the best description of the rings so far."

Goswami remained unfazed, "Description is different than explanation." He said, "Knowing how things look is different than knowing why they look like that, or why and how they came into being. But let me give you an example." He turned to his computer, accessed the internet, and went to Wikipedia, to the article 'Rings of Saturn.' He turned the screen towards Sara and brought her attention to the section 'Formation of main rings.'

“Notice the language;” he said, “notice how tentative, provisional and unsure the words are.” He started reading aloud, stressing the words showing uncertainty, “‘Saturn’s rings may be very old’ . . . ‘There are two main theories’ . . . ‘the rings could represent part of the remains of the icy mantle’ . . . ‘This would explain’ . . . ‘might then have caused’ . . . ‘the newly formed moons could have continued to evolve’ . . . ‘This process may explain’ . . . ‘This would explain’ . . .”

Sara had to admit to herself that the language wasn’t exactly sounding like the conclusive affirmations one would expect from a hard science, but Goswami interrupted her reflection, “Would, could, may, might... it all means one thing: They don’t know.”

Sara’s expression told him that she wasn’t going to argue, and so he added one more example, “Have you heard about the hexagon on Saturn?”

“Yes,” Sara said while nodding her head. Goswami googled ‘Saturn hexagon’; clicked on one of the first results, a science site, and read, “‘An unusual structure with a hexagonal shape surrounding Saturn’s north pole was spotted on the planet for the first time thirty years ago. Nothing similar with such a regular geometry had ever been seen on any planet in the solar system . . .”

“Saturn is the only planet in the solar system whose rotation time remains unknown.” He looked at Sara with a slight shaking of his head and added, “I am only saying that there are still many questions to be answered. It looks like the more they explore, the more enigmas appear.”

His mood wasn’t belligerent, only educative. She had to admit to herself, based on her professional closeness to cutting-edge work in the aerospace field, that scientific research still battled with some fundamental enigmas while presenting to the layman a facade of assurance and confidence.

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“Anyway,” Goswami said, removing his spectacles, “this is astronomy, and you came here to talk about astrology, which, by the way, is much subtler. You can’t understand the personality of Saturn and his lessons by studying the physical planet; just like you can’t understand the personal character or the economic policies of the President of the United States of America by studying the bricks of the White House.”

SARA'S DESTINY, SARA'S CHOICES

At this point Vishwa Goswami focused on her chart; after all she had come for an astrological reading. He quickly calculated how this and that planet in this or that house meant specific experiences and attitudes. Esoteric and mysterious to the uninitiated, all those graphic symbols were familiar signposts for him, clear indicators of circumstances and moods the person would go through.

Sara felt x-rayed; the workings of her mind left open to his scrutiny. She sensed that Goswami could see, through her chart, a lot of what was unknown even to her closest friends, or even to herself.

“Hmm...” Goswami said pensively, “You have a beneficial Saturn. Exalted and retrograde; and in the Fifth House.”

“Retrograde?” Sara interjected; “Isn't this bad? I heard that retrograde planets are bad...”

Goswami turned his glance from his computer screen and at her with a patient but slightly challenging look, “Bad for what? Do you know?”

She didn't. “I don't know,” she said, “but I heard that retrograde is not good. Everyone says that any planet that is retrograde is bad for us. It makes us slower and less successful in life... Is it true?” She finally asked, turning her statement into a question.

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Goswami made an expression and a circular hand gesture to show that those ideas were approximate, undeveloped notions. “Retrograde planets appear to move backwards,” he explained, “as if indicating a review, a revision of our activities. A retrograde planet makes you naturally revise your thoughts and feelings. A retrograde Mercury, for instance, makes people more introspective, more inclined to ponder about life’s inner meaning. When they read a book, they often take longer to analyze the contents because they contemplate its various meanings. People with retrograde Jupiter may think long and hard about the implications of their material achievements; and they won’t easily become ambitious – although they may be capable of various external accomplishments. They will search for the progress of the higher self. They might not be as mindlessly passionate in pursuing their careers and other mundane goals. Plus, sixty percent of people have Saturn retrograde anyway.”

Sara internally wondered, “Everything I know – or I thought I knew – seems to be inaccurate or incomplete...” She wasn’t accustomed to be corrected, but she enjoyed the opportunity to realign her views, upgrade her knowledge, and move to a higher awareness. She enjoyed becoming privy to esoteric, exclusive information.

“Saturn in retrograde position,” Goswami said, “gives an idealistic vision. People with Saturn retrograde are very interesting – they are generally committed and reliable; they keep their word. It’s very hard for them to say ‘no’ to others. They are people-pleasers. It’s hard for them to draw boundaries or be bound by apparent limitations. They are natural out-of-the-box thinkers. It’s a great combination for spiritual contemplation. They become easily bored with material enjoyment and they cannot continue working for material gain alone. Therefore, yes, retrograde is ‘bad’ for material enjoyment; not good for rampant materialism or selfishness. It’s bad if you want to stay in

illusion. Retrograde planets make you naturally introspective, and so you will be checked from doing things egoistically. You will tend to consider the consequences of your decisions on other peoples' lives. It becomes hard to exploit or 'use' others."

Sara recognized herself in this description, "Hmm... True; I am like that. But that makes me look... slow. My friends always tell me that I worry too much and take too much time to take a decision. But I like your explanation because it gives me hope."

"Yes, slow... It's important for you to be slow." Goswami said, nodding, "You are sometimes too fast, and that's when you take wrong decisions. Worrying, yes, that's the negative side. If you are not clear about your motivations, worrying will be inevitable. Being slow – meaning deliberate, cautious and thoughtful – is not a problem; but worrying doesn't help."

"I worry because I want to do the right thing and I get frustrated when things slow down."

"You learn quickly if it's something you like; but you lose interest quickly in something you don't like – and can take forever to finish, to complete the thing. Some things come naturally to you... Like languages. How many languages can you speak?"

"Six," Sara confirmed, "I speak about six languages."

"Hmm... you will learn more, it seems." Goswami forecasted.

Still, Sara wasn't too happy about the retrograde thing. "Still, I wish I didn't have a retrograde Saturn..." She said with a slight frown, "I feel it's a waste of time. I have a friend who thinks fast, takes quick decisions and doesn't worry too much. I am sure she doesn't have a retrograde Saturn."

"You must be very careful in comparing yourself to others." Goswami said while lifting a finger in caution and removing his glasses.

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“First of all, it’s not only about Saturn; there are many other planetary considerations. Second, do your friends’ quick decisions always give her beneficial results? Is she wise enough to consider the long-term consequences?”

“Not really...” Sara admitted after a moment of thought, “She is quite impulsive... And now that I am thinking of it, she sometimes hurts other peoples’ feelings.”

“So? Would you also like to be impulsive and hurt others?”

“No, of course not.”

Viswa Goswami was dismissing her bias against retrograde as a child’s caprice; “Each of us is different. God, through the cosmos, provides us with the planetary positions that support our tendencies, manifest our natures and express our karma.”

Sara was pacified, but not fully; “Does retrograde Saturn cause problems for my career? Will I be successful in my work?”

“We need to define what do you mean by successful? Is it just about money?”

“No.” Sara was clear about that.

“Is it about fame, prestige, social status?”

“No, not really. No.”

“Then what is it? What’s your definition of success?”

“Well, I would like to do something I like but that is also useful... something that ultimately helps others.”

Goswami sat back in his chair, “See, that’s very different then. What I see in your chart is that you will be successful, but at the same time not in the way and through the means you may expect, or the way it’s happening now. Your present job in the aerospace industry...” he paused, “That may not hold up to your values for too long. You might have to work out a different long-term plan for yourself.”

Sara was taken aback. “Are you saying that I should not work for this company? Or that they will fire me? You see that it will end badly?”

Goswami shook his head, “It’s not about the ending; it’s about how you’ll deal with the ending; your reaction. It can be good or bad; it depends on how you relate to it. Will you see it as a failure or as the benevolent plan of the Lord? I am only saying that, in accord with your chart, your present occupation doesn’t appear as the final station of your plans and dreams – it doesn’t seem to be able to fulfill your aims and destiny. You can learn a lot in this company but be prepared to move on.”

Sara wasn’t too happy to hear that. “This job,” she said with a shade of sadness, “was like a dream come true for me...”

Goswami smiled grandfatherly, “Dreams are made to be vanquished once we wake up. Look...” he added to reassure her, “I don’t see anything bad in your career; but by the placement of your Saturn, it’s clear that your idealistic mind may not allow you to remain working on something that’s not in line with your values, with your higher instincts and aspirations. The chart indicates that you’ll feel dissatisfied at some point – and if not processed properly that might lead to a health crisis. So just be careful in how much energy you give to this company, how much you identify with it. Just consider what they are trying to achieve as a company and what you truly wish to accomplish in life. Just meditate on how you want to contribute to society.”

Sara listened carefully, taking notes. She sensed that some of the things he was saying would start fully making sense only later, but she was eager to capture the main points.

“People with shallow knowledge may say that Saturn is ‘bad’,” Goswami continued, “but it’s important to understand his purpose; then things become clear. He wants to increase our faith in spirit rather than matter. He challenges our dependence on matter. He reveals the

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insubstantial nature of material shelters – our body, our money, our position and so on and so forth – he gets us to question material ‘security’ to reawaken our dependence on the Divine. The Saturn period is a calling to develop stronger roots rather than focusing on the leaves and the flowers. But after the Saturn period the branches of the tree – and the leaves and the flower – become naturally healthier.”

Sara was simultaneously challenged and fascinated. She felt apprehensive but also attracted to the idea of a new future, one of greater and deeper growth. She was getting the gist of it: Saturn is a great but stern teacher; her lessons in front of her might not always be pleasant or comfortable, but they will be worthy and valuable.

“Things might not change so much externally,” Goswami said, “but internally your vision, perspective and priorities will be reshaped. What motivated you earlier, such as reputation, fame, money, influential friends... those things will become irrelevant; Working hard many hours a day for satisfying unenlightened bosses will become meaningless.”

“Hmm... unenlightened bosses...” Sara stopped to consider the idea; she had never thought of her superiors at work as unenlightened bosses, but she had to admit to herself that, yes, in fact, they were indeed unenlightened bosses. The prospect of changing her line of work was daunting and full of uncertainties; but Sara had developed enough trust in Vishwa Goswami that she wasn’t going to argue. She changed the subject.

“What about health?” Sara asked.

“Health-wise you might feel more... vulnerable – again a form of awakening to your embodied situation. You might feel more tired than usual, more sensitive about the food... Right now you feel you can digest a stone,” Goswami chuckled and Sara sensed that he could almost see her running around living on fast-food for days, “but later

you will have to take better care. Also for sleep; you won't be able to just go on with sleepless nights, trying to meet some deadline at the office. Saturn won't make you weak, but will expose your weaknesses; your limits. Saturn will gift you with mindfulness – whether mindful eating, regulated sleeping or whatever – he will show you that you don't have a stainless-steel body with unlimited stamina. Saturn curbs impulsiveness and inspires thoughtfulness.”

“What about relations?” Sara asked.

“You might tend to distance yourself from people. Although your nature is sociable, you might start feeling the superficiality of most interactions and withdraw from them, looking for inner growth. Although now people consider you as thriving and your circumstances as glamorous, you'll feel that these are all superficial pursuits, empty glitter. Your eagerness for depth and sincerity, your interest for working on your inner demons, may jeopardize and sidestep some so-called friendships. But you will distinguish between mere acquaintances and real friends. The purpose of the relationship will become more important than the quantity of relationships. You won't mind having less friends on Facebook.”

Sara smiled and asked, “What about marriage?” She was acutely aware that, in normal circumstances, she would get married in her Saturn years. Waiting nineteen years for Saturn to pass wasn't a practical or attractive choice; it would just become too late for her.

“In choosing your husband don't go for external consideration – like looks, skin color, eye color or wealth. These are not important. Someone rich can become poor and someone poor may become rich. You have Jupiter ruling your seventh house, which doesn't only indicate the nature of your husband, it also suggests your *karma* in dealing with him and with relationships in general. So, the potential for a wise, beneficial husband is there; but be careful to be yourself mature

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in your attitude and behavior. You need to be mature to take the benefit, to see the advantages of being married to someone with a pious disposition and an evolved personality. But it's clear that you can indeed have a good, stable marriage – if you choose a compatible person. There will be different options, but you need to make the effort to find a compatible partner; not thinking that it will just happen by itself.”

“But how to find out who is the right person?” Sara asked.

“I recommend three steps. First you need to have some basic filter; you need to clarify your expectations for the partner you want to marry. You need to identify the deal-makers and the deal-breakers – the fundamental characteristics that must be there in the person; and the characteristics that must not be there.”

Sara increased the speed of her note-taking.

“Step two,” Goswami continued, raising a second finger, “You need to get to know each other in person only when you are sure that your fundamental priorities match and your horoscopes match as well. Astrological compatibility helps in finding out things about people that you cannot know by just talking to them for a few weeks or a few months. Astrology – when done properly – helps to discover some deep, inner workings of people's psyche and *karma*, how they react to events, etcetera. Although it's impossible to find the perfect match in this world, we need to look at the indicators of how those two minds will relate with each other. And I must stress that matching charts doesn't mean only coming up with a number, a percentage.”

Sara thought that, when the time came, she'd only come to him, Vishwa Goswami, to check the match; but she felt shy to tell him that.

“In compatibility,” he continued, “there are many important factors. In traditional Indian, Vedic society evaluating the match of the

potential spouses was one of the most important uses of astrology. Nowadays there is a lot of confusion on this subject. Some astrologers mainly look at the Kutas' agreement, which is based on how the two lunar mansions – the *nakshatras* – fit with each other.

“What are these Kutas?” Sara asked.

“Kuta means division, category... these are areas of compatibility. Nadi Kuta is about the physical constitution of the two people; the three *doshas* described in Ayurveda – *vata*, *pitta* and *kapha*. Bha Kuta is about the overall welfare.”

Goswami described them briefly, just to give Sara an idea; but it was obvious to her that he could have given lectures on each of them.

“Gana Kuta, it's about their temperament. Graha Maitram, about the potential for friendship of the couple; Yoni Kuta – describes intimacy and sexual compatibility. Tara, or good fortune we could say; Vasyu; magnetism or reciprocal attraction, and, finally, Varna – individual inclination towards life and work. Each of these Kuta is given a score according to the degree of harmony – four points, eight points, six, one, two and so on.

“However just looking at these Kutas' and coming up with a number is quite limited and potentially misleading. The Kutas analysis consists of twelve factors and only some factors are expressed with points. At the end, all the points are added up. To have a good relationship a minimum of points is required. The maximum score is thirty-six. If a couple has eighteen matching points, for instance, it would be said that they have a 50 percent match; if they have, say, twenty-seven matching points, it would be said that they have a 75 percent match. But it's an oversimplification, because not all points, not all aspects of the match have the same weight in the relation. So, whenever you hear an astrologer concluding by just saying a number, a percentage

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about a match – 28 percent, 45 percent, 82 percent or whatever – you should conclude that he doesn't know much about compatibility. He most likely neglected to calculate the most important elements, so fundamental that they are not given points. We need to check the *karma* and the natures of the individual charts; the synastry."

"Synastry?" Sara wasn't familiar with the term.

"Comparing the full horoscopes of the two persons." Goswami explained. "That's essential, even before determining the match."

"The numbers, the percentage is not enough?" Sara asked.

"No," Goswami firmly shook his head, "the Kutas' numerical calculation is not sufficient to proceed to marriage – but it certainly helps to get an idea. See, the Kuta system is based on the Moon's position; the Moon represents the mind and if the minds of two people are in sync, there is a likelihood of understanding and loving each other. But marriages can fail miserably even with a great Kuta match, with a very high number such as 90 percent, 95 percent, or even 100 percent! It's because the numbers don't tell you about other essential aspects. These other aspects are like the foundations of the house; without them no marriage can be considered solid. They are Vedha, affliction – extremely important! Rajju; which is about the duration of married life; essential! Stri Dirgha; the mutual satisfaction; and then Rashi, which deals with the position of the Moon in the zodiac signs – basically dealing with the psychology of the individuals. Unless an astrologer carefully checks these four aspects, a compatibility analysis is not complete or reliable. It would be like thinking of building a house without the foundation.

"Remember," Goswami lifted a finger and intensely glanced from above the frame of his glasses, "If an astrologer comes up only with a number, it means that he doesn't know much about compatibility."

Sara made both a written and a mental note of this idea; and Goswami was ready to move on to another topic: “Once the first two steps are done – when there is clarity and agreement on the priorities of the couple, and when there is a good astrological compatibility – you can move to the third step: get some premarital training and counseling, which involves considering how you yourself are prepared for married life on many levels: emotional, financial, intellectual, health-wise, etcetera. This training includes learning what questions to ask to each other before committing to the relation, before tying the knot. For some online course – but only if you wish a truly spiritual marriage – you can visit www.bhaktimarriages.com.”

Sara took note of that too. She felt the urge to immediately check the site on her smart-phone; but that would have been an inappropriate thing to do, while Goswami was speaking.

“Right now you consider yourself a ‘spiritual’ person.” Goswami looked straight at her and she felt exposed, “But Saturn will help you in clarifying and purifying your motivations, and go for the quality instead of the trendy. It’s like clearing the backyard. In renovating it, there will be inconvenience; you might not be able to use it for some time. The children can’t go outside to play and will be forced inside the house while the work is going on. For some time, you’ll have to keep the stuff that was outside in the living room. The house will feel more chaotic, but if you are clear about the goal you won’t suffer in the waiting period, but will feel grateful for the opportunity to improve and update that part of the house.

“Similarly, Saturn renovates our consciousness and helps to upgrade it. The reward is guaranteed, if we cooperate and patiently accept the inconveniences. If we resist, we experience agony twice: once when the backyard is under construction, and second when it’s done in a hurry and ends up half-done. If we resist change, the inner work

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will be half-done. But you have a good chart, with Saturn in a good position, and there is nothing to worry. But accept your limitations, be grateful of the opportunity to grow, even if it brings unexpected changes; be humble and cautious, and learn to be submissive to the will of God.”

HIGHER AND DEEPER DIMENSIONS

Sara felt greatly relieved that “her Saturn” was apparently well placed and that her life was not going to be too rough in the upcoming nineteen years. “I am glad that the chart is a good chart;” she said, alleviated, “I am glad that good times are coming and nothing particularly bad is in store.”

Goswami looked at her straight in the eyes. “What is ‘good’ and what is ‘bad’?” He said, as if pleading with her to take a deeper look. “People think that what brings immediate pleasure is good and what brings pain and frustration is bad, but sometimes it’s just the opposite. For instance, people look forward to their Venus period to have sensual fun, and some irresponsible astrologers encourage them, ‘Oh, Venus is coming up; very good, very good for you!’ but both don’t understand that some temporary, superficial sense pleasure doesn’t solve the problems of life. In fact, it bamboozles us, it makes us distracted and complacent – it’s just a waste of time, in the overall scheme of things.”

“What is this overall scheme, Panditji?” Sara used the traditional way to address a learned man, “And why good times are a waste of time?” Her tone wasn’t challenging. She was enthralled by this radical new look at things. In school and among her friends she had a reputation as somewhat of a deep thinker, someone who liked to drill down

deeper than others in searching for meaning, for a conclusion, and this encounter with Goswami had already rewarded her with some truly remarkable discoveries. And she was ready for more. Sara felt a bit like Alice in Wonderland, tumbling down the rabbit hole. Her curiosity was aroused and she wasn't going to retreat to the safety of the commonplace. "What can I do," she asked, "to go beyond the conventional understanding of astrology and... of reality at large?"

Goswami himself felt encouraged, "Finally" he thought, "here is someone who is willing to look behind the appearance of things." He hoped she would be willing to put her prejudices on hold long enough to learn something substantial.

He took a deep breath and chose to encapsulate the conclusion of decades of esoteric learning into a simple analogy, "We are like a fish out of water." he said and then paused. "The soul is incompatible with matter; any form of matter. The soul is something else, something of a different nature, and can never be satisfied in this world of matter. Just like the fish out of water, you can give him anything, but he will always be unfulfilled. You can put him in the best hotel, give him the best food and drink, the best entertainment, but he will always feel unhappy. The self is permanent by nature, and nothing temporary can even satisfy us. No configuration of matter, no arrangement of the nine planets can give us eternal happiness. We travel through this world, in myriads of bodies, looking for something that this universe cannot provide: Eternal life, eternal love and eternal bliss. We attach ourselves to so many temporary things but they all disappear in the course of time, like snow melting in the sun."

He picked up a book from the desk and, while searching for the passage, he said, "I was reading this morning from the Srimad-Bhagavatam... Have you heard about the Srimad-Bhagavatam? It's also known as the Bhagavata Maha-Purana, and was written five thousand

years ago.... Anyway, this is what I was reading: ‘The association of children, wife, relatives and friends is just like the brief meeting of travelers. With each change of body one is separated from all such associates, just as one loses the objects one possesses in a dream when the dream is over.’ When we get up in the morning, we realize that what we were dreaming was just a dream, just some mental images we experienced while asleep, images that have no substance in reality. As we wake up, these images may linger for some time and then disappear, forever forgotten. In the same way, where are all the fathers, the mothers, the husbands and the children we had in previous lives? They may linger in our subconscious as subtle impressions, as residual reverberations of unfulfilled emotions or recurring desires, but their bodies are gone, their names are forgotten, their material identities dissolved in the river of time.”

Goswami was on a roll; Sara could see that this was what he really liked to talk about, the inner truth of things, much more than he liked to speak about the temporary positions of temporary planets in the charts of temporary personas. He continued, “This verse was from the Eleventh Canto of Srimad-Bhagavatam. In the Fourth Canto a great sage, Narada Muni said something similar, something of fundamental importance... have you heard of Narada Muni?”

“Yes,” Sara said, “I heard about him; I saw him in some movies...”

“Yes, but be careful; be very careful,” he warned by raising his eyebrows and a finger, “sometimes in the movies they represent him in a very disrespectful way; sometimes the rascal directors show him as a farcical character. So very inaccurate! Narada is one of the most realized sages in the universe... he instructed kings and emperors. He is even the *guru* of the great Vyasadeva, the compiler of the four Vedas! Actually, the Bhavisya Purana describes the sage Narada as being even the teacher of Shanideva, Saturn.” Sara didn’t see that coming.

“Anyway,” Goswami continued, “in the Fourth Canto of the Sri-mad-Bhagavatam Narada says, ‘Everything happening within time, which consists of past, present and future, is merely a dream. That is the secret conclusion of all knowledge.’ In other words, whatever identities we assume in this world – man, woman, rich, poor, American or Indian, this astrological chart or another one – will be all washed away in the course of time, like a dream dissolves when we wake up.”

“So, how does the dream end?” Sara asked, “Once we are fully ‘awake,’ what happens? Do we all shed our sense of self and merge into one big Oneness?”

Goswami burst into a loud laugh. “That’s another dream!” he said. “Who gave you this crazy idea?”

Sara was surprised. She was left a bit off-balance by his reaction. Wasn’t ‘merging into the totality of Being’ the ultimate goal of Indian philosophy? “Well... don’t the Upanishads say...” she was almost stammering, “I mean, isn’t it said, somewhere, that we need to transcend the ego... that beyond the veil of illusion we all become God...?”

“That’s another foolishness,” was Goswami’s curt reply, emphasized by a dismissing flick of the hand; “an even bigger foolishness. God’s post is already taken and the job is not open for new applicants. If illusion covered us it means we were never God; otherwise, what, illusion is greater than God?”

Sara didn’t want to argue, but she needed to get this thing straight. “But,” she said, “isn’t liberation something like a drop of water merging in the ocean?” Goswami shook his head with compassion and said, “A drop in the ocean remains a drop; it doesn’t become the ocean. We are small in this universe – in this life of birth and death – and we remain small when liberated.”

“But,” Sara respectfully but tenaciously continued, “don’t we become inactive when we transcend matter?” “How is that possible?” was Goswami’s amused retort, “The soul is so active in this conditioned existence, embedded within matter, how can the self become inactive when free from matter? Imagine one man with hands and feet tied, with his mouth taped shut; he still moves and makes sounds, ‘Hmf... hmf...’; how can you think that once he is free from his constraints he will become motionless and silent? It’s not logical. Philosophy has to explain reality; not invent reality.”

Sara was enjoying the exchange; although his remarks were razor-sharp, she felt that his words were clearing some dogmatic spider-webs accumulated in the attic of her mind; and she wanted more. “But,” she said, “Some people say that the self-realized remains silent, as he has no need to talk. They say it’s just like a water-pot: When it’s not filled with water it makes a sound; but when it’s filled it makes no sound.

Again Goswami burst into laughter, “Nonsense!” he exclaimed, thoroughly entertained. “Are we waterpots? How can we be compared to them?” He shook his head and then added, with professorial poise, raising a finger, “A good analogy utilizes as many similarities between two objects as possible. A water-pot is not an active living force, but we are. Ever-silent realization may be adequate for a water-pot, but not for us. Indeed, when the soul realizes the beauty of God and of His creation, twenty-four hours in a day are not sufficient for singing and praising. Please use your discrimination: Whoever spoke the analogy of the water-pot must have produced some sound; therefore, according to his own theory, he was not a realized being.” He chuckled; “If his theory was right he should have remained silent, isn’t it? Why he spoke? Was he an empty pot?” He shook his head and then added: “Most probably he was just a crackpot?” They both laughed.

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Sara was amused and enthralled; she was getting the knack of it, “In fact,” she volunteered, “now that I am thinking of it, all great teachers of India were always talking, teaching to their pupils. Buddha, Ramanujacarya, Madhvacharya... Sankaracharya – they spoke and wrote and even composed songs... Also other great world teachers, like Jesus and Mohammed... they weren’t silent.”

“Right,” he confirmed, “those who know the Truth, speak about the Truth.”

“But what about Oneness?” Sara insisted; she felt she was offered a great opportunity to learn something solid and she wasn’t going to let it by without trying to make the best out of it, “Isn’t oneness the ultimate destination?”

Goswami patiently shook his head and explained, “Oneness is there; Reality is one, that’s true; but Reality is not devoid of variety. For instance, India is one, but within India there are countless mountains, rivers, plants, animals, human beings, languages, cities, villages... Oneness doesn’t mean an impersonal, featureless blob of everything-ness; that’s an imagination.

“Liberation in Oneness means becoming fully cooperative with the rest of Reality; it means complete harmony of intent, oneness in purpose with the Absolute Truth, the Supreme Lord. Real liberation means falling so much in love with God that you can’t think of anything or rather, anyone else – that’s unity, connection... oneness.”

“What about ego?” Sara asked, “Aren’t we supposed to get completely rid of it?”

“Ego simply means ‘I’ in Latin; ego indicates the sense of identity, the ‘I-ness,’ the sense that ‘I exist as an individual.’ When we identify with the material body and with material mind that’s false ego, an illusory identity, as thinking of being our clothing – and that needs to

corrected. But when we correctly identify with the self – the real, non-material self, the eternal soul, that's the real ego, the real sense of self; and that remains forever. Do you know the Gita?"

She had certainly heard about the Gita, the Bhagavad-gita, the jewel of Indian mysticism, but, did she know it? Sara had heard a few passages here and there, and she remembered seeing her grandmother reading it for hours on end with a contented expression; but Sara had never studied it herself.

In the last few minutes Vishwa Goswami had been systematically dismantling some of her assumptions about Indian philosophy and she wasn't in the mood of presenting herself as an expert. She chose to reply with a tentative sideways nod, as if to say, "I heard about it."

"Well, in the Gita it is explained very clearly, right at the beginning," Goswami continued, "identity is eternal; the sense of being an individual sentient being, distinct from everyone else, has always been there in the past, it is there now, and it will continue forever in the future." He quoted the verse from memory: 'Never was there a time when I did not exist, nor you, nor all these kings; nor in the future shall any of us cease to be.'" Goswami paused, as if to see where Sara wanted to go next. He didn't have to wait long for her next question.

"Some people," Sara offered, "say that it's not the destination that's important; it's the journey; that we shouldn't have goals but simply experience the spiritual path. What do you think of that?"

Again Goswami shook his head. "If you travel there is no harm in appreciating the landscape and the panoramic view, but the journey is only the means to your goal, to your destination. Human life is not for sightseeing, it's for solving the problems of life – birth, death, old age and disease. Those who speak like this – 'it's not the destination, it's the journey' – don't know who they are or where they are going.

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Probably their journey is useless; they have neither a map nor a compass, and they are proudly preaching to others, 'Join us; adopt our aimlessness!' These people, who propagate vague, impersonal and insubstantial theories of life are among the worst enemies of humanity."

Vishwa Goswami shook his head with a sad expression, pained by seeing so many wishy-washy ideas passed for wisdom. "People should study the Gita for solid information about reality. They shouldn't listen to fashionable fools."

From his desk Goswami picked up his personal copy of the book Bhagavad-gita, obviously a well-consulted volume, consumed by years of repeated readings. By the way he lifted it and held it in his hands it was certainly a dearest object to him.

He read from it: "For the soul there is neither birth nor death at any time. He has not come into being, does not come into being, and will not come into being. He is unborn, eternal, ever-existing and primeval. He is not slain when the body is slain."

"So, if I understand you correctly," Sara said, "we forever continue to exist as individuals, right?"

"Right."

"And so when we die – in this body – we are reborn somewhere else, in another body, right?"

"Yes."

"But, if we are liberated – whatever that means – we don't take birth anymore into a material body, right?"

"Right."

"So, where do we go? I mean, where do the perfected souls go?"

"Ah!" He exclaimed, openly satisfied with her train of thought. "That's a very nice question!"

Meditatively, he closed his eyes and started reciting the original Sanskrit text with a full, melodious tone: “*urdhva-mulam adhab-sakham...*” This is the beginning of the Fifteen Chapter of the Gita; do you know Sanskrit?” Sara didn’t. “Anyway,” he continued, “in many modern Indian languages the words are almost the same; ‘*urdhva-mulam*’ – the roots are upwards – ‘*adhab-sakham*’ – and the branches go downwards – he translated. This is the reversed image of a tree, a tree whose roots are up and whose branches expand down; this is the image of the material world, of the cosmos of our experience.”

At this point Goswami turned to a full-page illustration in the book and showed it to Sara. There it was, a very colorful painting of a tree standing upside down, as in the reflection of a tree on the water of a pond. That tree represented the whole universe, with different beings, from celestial entities to reptiles, moving within an intricate network of path-like branches. The illustration had helpful writings on it, showing how one’s activities, one’s karma, determined one’s position within the tree. There was also another tree, this one standing in the regular way – roots down and branches up – and this tree was the origin of the reflection, the source of the inverted tree. Around that tree, the life forms appeared divinely delighted, free from the anxiety and the struggle evident in the reflected tree.

“This,” Goswami said pointing out the lower, inverted tree, “is the world of birth and death, where conditioned souls roam from life to life, from planet to planet, and from body to body – in other words the world of our experience. And this,” he said with a broad, luminous smile while pointing to the superior, original tree, “this is the kingdom of God, the destination of liberated souls.”

CONCLUSIVE TRUTHS, MISLEADING UNTRUTHS

“At the time of death,” Goswami continued, “based on one’s desires and credits, the self receives a new material body and forgets everything about his past existences; this is what ‘death’ actually is; that’s all. But now, in the new body, the soul will experience certain circumstances and attitudes created in previous lives – that’s his karma.”

“The person’s birth chart, the natal horoscope, is like a scorecard, a scoreboard of that *karma*. Like in basketball: What the scoreboard shows is how well we played so far. Our astrological chart shows how well we ‘played’ and performed before getting into this present body. But the number on the scoreboard doesn’t determine how you should be playing in this life.”

Goswami was thoughtful, as he looked outside the window and kept explaining: “Even though one might now be young, beautiful, healthy and rich, it will not last forever. One will die. One might have a well-placed Saturn in his chart in this life, but next life it might be completely different. We cannot escape Saturn or his lessons, our only decision is how we will deal with it.”

She was fascinated; she had never heard Astrology explained in this way. But it made sense; if there wasn’t a chance to improve it would be very unfair.

Goswami kept blasting away, his eyebrows raising and lowering like waves in the ocean of his knowledge.

“Seeing the results on the scoreboard can definitely influence us on a psychological level. One might think, ‘Oh, if I only had this planet in this house...’ and feel depressed; or ‘Oh, I won’t have a great marriage according to the stars...’ but we can determine how much we will let ourselves be limited and constrained by the score on the board. Also, over-analyzing the scoreboard does not improve your performance. Neither does it if you check the scoreboard every other minute. To improve your performance you need to work on yourself, train better and harder, build your muscles, improve your teamwork, refine your skills and play with full enthusiasm. An astrologer is like a coach.”

She felt inspired to say, “Yes, coach!” but it wouldn’t have been appropriate. But she did feel that his input went far beyond reading her scorecard. No, he was challenging her, cajoling her, nudging her forward.

“The human life is like an airport,” Goswami continued, “from there you can soar in the sky and go very, very far; but if you become distracted by the airport, start being absorbed in looking in the shops, focused on the merchandise they sell... you might miss your flight, and then it’s all a waste.”

Sara remembered that time in Mumbai, three years before, when they had cancelled her flight and she had remained stranded for hours. The airport had been recently rebuilt and looked stylish; still her experience had been a thoroughly frustrating one.

“So,” she offered, “human life is for working towards a higher destination, right? It’s not just to accumulate wealth, prestige or power, right? And so when astrologers encourage people to focus on paltry, temporary results they are actually misleading them; they perpetuate their... bondage, right?”

“Right!” he enthusiastically confirmed. “Ninety percent of all astrologers are worse than useless; they are actually dangerous!” Goswami said forcefully. He was dead serious but Sara couldn’t conceal a smile at his sudden outburst, “Because they cheat people,” he continued, “and I don’t mean cheating people only in the sense of giving false hopes by selling gemstones and other quacky remedies to them, I mean cheating because they perpetuate the hope of happiness in this world. That’s the worst cheating! They should teach people about their true self, about their real identity, instead they just tell people about ‘good periods’ and ‘bad periods’; nonsense!”

“But then,” she asked, “if right now we are sort of prisoners of our illusion, thinking that we die when our body dies and so on, the priority... the most urgent thing should be to go beyond this illusion, right?”

“Yes, of course.”

“So, what is the use of Astrology then, if everything in this world is temporary and distinct from the soul?” Sara felt somewhat awkward: She had come to see an astrologer, but in the course of the consultation she had come to see something higher, something that made her look at Astrology in a new, relative light. But she didn’t want to offend him, a practicing, professional astrologer...

Sara has spoken her question in the mood of trying to understand, and Goswami knew it and didn’t take her words as a challenge.

“See,” he said, “it’s like driving a car on the road. You certainly are not the car, but the car is an instrument for you to go places, to move around, and you need to know the traffic rules if you want to have a smooth journey, if you want to avoid accidents. You need to know the traffic signs; you need to know where to park and where not to park. We are not the body, but we travel the journey of life within the body, and the existence of the body is under the control of higher beings,

instrumental in dishing out our *karma*. Just like when you travel on an unpaved road full of potholes, you know you can't go at full speed, or when you drive in the city you need to pay close attention to all the other cars, the motorbikes, the bicycles, the pedestrians and all that happens around you, and when you travel at night you pay extra attention. Similarly, Astrology is the science of traveling through life knowing the limits of your car, the power of your engine, and what the road ahead likely holds for you, so that you can avoid disasters.

“Astrology, can tell you, for instance, ‘You are so infatuated with this boy and you want to marry him at any cost, but your psychophysical natures don't match. It would be very hard for you to live thirty years together.’

“Or Astrology can tell you, ‘Look, due to social pressure and an artificial sense of prestige you wish that your child would become a doctor, and you are thinking of pushing him to study Medicine, but that's not his nature! Don't torture him, and let him be what he was born to be: an artist.’

“Astrology can prevent a lot of pain in the journey of life by providing a very personalized road-map, almost as a GPS navigator. At the same time, the goal of life is to go beyond this world of birth and death.”

EPILOGUE

He fell silent and Sara felt that now was the time to go, despite the many questions, the curiosity and the inspiration brought about by this encounter. Sara, although comfortably seated, felt almost a sense of vertigo; she had come to “see an astrologer” but she had received so much knowledge that her head was spinning.

She had been given so much information that her worldview had expanded so much that she felt that she had never been so enlightened in her twenty-seven years. Now she started worrying about losing that sense of illumination, and feared going back to the mundane daily toil, to the daily, puny struggle for existence.

It was the time for her to offer some financial reciprocation for his time and teachings. She felt awkward as she tried to express herself, “How much... I mean... What’s the... what do I have to pay for this consultation?”

Saying the words she realized that she couldn’t really repay him with material money, rupees or dollars. In fact she felt that in that single afternoon she had learned more about life than in her whole twenty-seven years. How to repay him for opening up such shining vistas on the universe and its secrets?

Goswami sensed her embarrassment and smiled; “You can give a donation...” he nonchalantly said. “This information doesn’t belong to me,” he modestly added, “I am only a postman, delivering the mail...”

Epilogue

She was put into a quandary. How much to give? Postman or no postman, he had studied and practiced for decades and today he had applied his keen intellect and intuition to her situation. The service he rendered was priceless, but she had to put a price to it. The sense of relief and inspiration she now felt was priceless! She concluded that she would give the equivalent of a week's salary at her job. She wrote the cheque and handed it to him.

He didn't even look at what was written and gratefully said, "Thank you." and kept smiling. The visit was finished. "Can I contact you again in the future?" She asked respectfully. "Sure." he said simply, nodding his head and maintaining his smile. There was nothing else to say. They exchanged greetings and she left.

Sara stepped into the street and realized that night had fallen. She looked at her watch and gulped; she had been with Vishwa Goswami for five hours, but had felt that the whole thing lasted only a few minutes.

She smiled at her tiny but keen realization: Time – and everything in it – is relative; it's all a question of perspective, as Goswami had said again and again. It was chilly, and Sara had never liked cold weather; but this time the little shiver she felt appeared friendly, invigorating, tonic. She took it as a gentle nudge from the universe to remain awake, alert, aware of the environment and of the deeper truths beneath the surface of things. The weather was cool and clear; her mind was cool and clear. Sara smiled to herself. She was ready for Saturn.



APPENDIX

Śrī-Nṛsimha-Stuti

Prayers offered by Śanideva, Saturn, to Lord Nṛsimhadeva, the form of the Lord as half-man and half-lion. God is one, and in His unlimited potency He manifests in limitless forms. This exchange was narrated by Sri Krishna Himself, the original form of the Lord, in the Bhaviṣya Purāṇa.

Reciting these mantras with respect and devotion removes bad karma, provides strength to withstand the difficulties of life, builds the capacity to appreciate the challenges related to Saturn as chances for growth, raises one's consciousness to the spiritual platform, and transforms and normalizes the influence of Saturn.

On the opposite page the Deity of Nṛsimhadeva worshiped in Mayapur, West Bengal, India.



*sulabho bhakti-yuktānām durdarśo duṣṭa-cetasām |
ananya-gatikānām ca prabhur bhaktaika-vatsalah ||1||*

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*śanaiścaras tatra nṛsimha-deva-stutiṃ cakārāmala-citta-vṛttiḥ |
praṇamya sāṣṭāṅgam aśeṣa-loka-kirīṭa-nīrājita-pāda-padmam||2||*

Lord Nṛsimhadeva is easily accessible to the devotees and unapproachable to those who are evil-minded. He is the only affectionate Lord of those who have no other goal. After offering prostrated obeisances to His lotus feet illuminated by the crowns of innumerable demigods, Śani, whose heart is pure, offered there the hymn to Nṛsimhadeva.

*śrī śanir uvāca
yat-pāda-pankaja-rajah paramādareṇa
samsevitaṃ sakala-kalmaṣa-rāśi-nāśam |
kalyāṇa-kāraḥ aśeṣa-nijānugānām
sa tvaṃ nṛsimha mayi dhehi kṛpāvalokam ||3||*

Śrī Śani said: Lord Nṛsimha! Please bestow upon me your merciful glance! The dust of your lotus feet is served with very great care; it destroys all the heaps of impurities and produce auspiciousness for all your unlimited followers.

*sarvatra cañcalatayā sthitayāpi lakṣmyā
brahmādi-vandya-padayā sthirayānya-sevi |
pādāravinda-yugalaṃ paramādareṇa
sa tvaṃ nṛsimha mayi dhehi kṛpāvalokam ||4||*

Lord Nṛsimha! Please bestow upon me your merciful glance! Your two lotus feet are served with very great care by Lakṣmi [the goddess of fortune], whose feet are worshipped by Brahmā [the cosmic sub-creator] and others. She is certainly steady in her service although she is unpredictable everywhere else.

*śanaiścaraḥ tatra nṛsimha-deva-stutiṃ cakārāmala-citta-vṛttiḥ |
praṇamya sāṣṭāṅgam aśeṣa-loka-kirīṭa-nīrājita-pāda-padmam||2||*

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brahmādi-vandya-padayā sthirayānya-sevi |
pādāravinda-yugalaṁ paramādarena
sa tvaṁ nṛsimha mayi dhehi kṛpāvalokam ||4||*

Lord Nṛsimha! Please bestow upon me your merciful glance! Your two lotus feet are served with very great care by Lakṣmi [the goddess of fortune], whose feet are worshipped by Brahmā [the cosmic sub-creator] and others. She is certainly steady in her service although she is unpredictable everywhere else.

Are You Ready for Saturn?

*yad-rūpam āgama-śiraḥ-pratipādyam ādya
ādhyātmikādi-paritāpa-haraṁ vicintyam |
yogīśvarair apagatākhila-doṣa-saṅghaiḥ
sa tvaṁ nṛsimha mayi dhehi kṛpāvalokam ||5||*

Lord Nṛsimha! Please bestow upon me your merciful glance! O original principle, Your form, meditated upon by the best yogis whose flaws are all eradicated, is expounded in the Vedas extensively and liberates from the distresses like those coming from our own body and mind etc.

*prahlāda-bhakta-vacasā harir āvirāsa
stambhe hiraṇyakaśipuṁ ya udāra-bhāvaḥ |
ūrvo nidhāya udaram nakhārair dadāra
sa tvaṁ nṛsimha mayi dhehi kṛpāvalokam ||6||*

Lord Nṛsimha! Please bestow upon me your merciful glance! You are the merciful Lord Hari who, by the words of the devotee Prahlāda, appeared in a pillar and, having placed Hiranyakaśipu on His thighs, split open his stomach with His nails.

*yo naija-bhaktam analāmbudhi-bhūdharogra-
śṛṅga-prapāta-viṣa-danti-sarīśṛpebhyah |
sarvātmakaḥ parama-kāruṇiko rarakṣa
sa tvaṁ nṛsimha mayi dhehi kṛpāvalokam ||7||*

Lord Nṛsimha! Please bestow upon me your merciful glance! You are the extremely merciful omnipresent Soul and You protected Your own devotee Prahlāda from the fire, from the ocean, from the fall from frightening peaks of mountains, from poison, from elephants and from snakes.

*yan-nirvikāra-para-rūpa-vicintanena
yogīśvarā viṣaya-vīta-samasta-rāgāḥ |
viśrāntim āpur avināśavatīṃ parākhyāṃ
sa tvaṃ nṛsimha mayi dhehi kṛpāvalokam ||8||*

Lord Nṛsimha! Please bestow upon me your merciful glance!
By meditation on Your changeless supreme form, the chiefs
amongst yogis, whose attachments for sense enjoyment is van-
ished, obtained the indestructible supreme liberation.

*yad-rūpam ugra-parimardana-bhāva-śālī |
saṃcintanena sakalāgha-vināśa-kārī |
bhūta-jvara-graha-samudbhava-bhīti-nāśam |
sa tvaṃ nṛsimha mayi dhehi kṛpāvalokam ||9||*

Lord Nṛsimha! Please bestow upon me your merciful glance!
You are endowed with the attitude of complete destruction of an-
ger; You are the one who destroys all sins. By proper meditation
on Your form, there is the destruction of fear produced by ghosts,
fever and planets.

*yasyottamaṃ yaśa umāpati-padma-janma- |
śakrādi-daivata-sabhāsu samasta-gītam ||
śaktyaiva sarva-śamala-prāśamaika-dakṣam |
sa tvaṃ nṛsimha mayi dhehi kṛpāvalokam ||10||*

Lord Nṛsimha! Please bestow upon me your merciful glance!
Your transcendental fame, who is sung with strength by whole as-
semblies of demigods headed by Śiva, Brahmā and Indra, is com-
pletely capable of destroying all impurities.

Are You Ready for Saturn?

*ittham śrutvā stutiṁ devaḥ
śaninā kalpitām hariḥ |
uvāca brahma-vṛnda-sthaḥ
śaniṁ taṁ bhakta-vatsalaḥ ||11||*

Having thus heard the hymn composed by Śani, Lord Hari, who is fond of His devotees, said to that Śani, who was in Brahmā's assembly:

*śrī nṛsimha uvāca
prasannoham śane tubhyaṁ
varam varaya śobhanaṁ |
yaṁ vāñchasi tam eva tvaṁ
sarva-loka-hitāvaham ||12||*

Śrī Nṛsimha said: O Śani; I am pleased with you! Ask for the auspicious boon favourable for everybody that you desire.

*śrī śanir uvāca
nṛsimha tvam mayi kṛpām kuru deva dayā-nidhe |
mad-vāsaras tava prīti-kara syat devatā-pate ||13||*

Śrī Śani said: O Nṛsimha, O Lord, O Ocean of mercy! Be merciful toward me! May my day [Saturday] be very dear to You, o Lord of the devas!

*mat-kṛtam tvat-param stotraṁ śṛṇvanti ca paṭhanti ye |
sarvān kāman pūrayethās teṣām tvaṁ loka-bhāvana ||14||*

O Supreme Lord of the worlds! Fulfil all the desires of those who listen, recite or read this hymn composed by me about You

*śrī nṛsimha uvāca
tathaivāstu śane'ham vai rakṣo-bhuvana-saṁsthitaḥ |
bhakta-kāmān pūrayiṣye tvaṁ mamaikam vacaḥ śṛṇu ||15||*

Śrī Nṛsimha said: Let it be, so Śani. Certainly I, situated in Rakṣo-bhuvana [Brahma's assembly], will fulfil the desires of the devotees. Listen simply to my words.

*tvat-kṛtam mat-param stotram yaḥ paṭhec chr̥ṇuyāc ca yaḥ |
dvādaśāṣṭama-janmāsthāt tvad-bhayaṁ māstu tasya vai ||16||*

Let there not be any fear of you due to the twelfth and eighth positions from Lagna [Ascendant] for those who read, recite or listen to this hymn composed by you about Me.

*śanir narahariṁ devaṁ tatheti praty uvāca ha |
tataḥ parama-saṁtuṣṭāḥ jayeti munayo 'vadan ||17||*

Śani answered to Narahari that he would follow His instructions; then the sages present in the assembly were very satisfied and shouted "Victory!"

*śrī kṛṣṇa uvāca
ittham śanaiścasyātha nṛsimha-deva-
samvādam etat stavanam ca mānavāḥ |
śṛṇoti yaḥ śrāvayate ca bhaktyā
sarvāny ābhīṣṭāni ca vindate dhruvam ||18||*

Śrī Kṛṣṇa said: Thus, whoever listens to or expresses with devotion this talk and the hymn of Śanaiścara to Lord Nṛsimhadeva, certainly obtains all his desires.

*iti śrī-bhaviṣyottara-purāṇe rakṣobhuvana-māhātmye
śrī-śanaiścara-kṛta-śrī-nṛsimha-stuti-sampūrṇam.*

Thus the Śrī-Nṛsimha-Stuti, composed by Śrī Śanaiścara in the Rakṣo-bhuvana-māhātmya of Bhaviṣyottara-Purāṇa, is completed.



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