



A Primer to Understanding Your Birth Chart

The LUMINARIES and the INNER PLANETS

by Frank C. Clifford

Author's Note: This introductory article on the inner planets has been written as a warm, second-issue welcome to our Dell subscribers and as a primer for regular readers and students of astrology.

In the last issue, I looked at the twelve signs of the zodiac as descriptive of twelve specific journeys or “callings” in life. In this follow-up, I shall introduce the luminaries — the Sun and Moon (often referred to as planets) — as well as Mercury, Venus, and Mars. These five celestial bodies are the closest neighbours to us on Earth and move through the zodiac faster than the other planets. Accordingly, their sign placements are considered more personally descriptive of our nature, skills, desires, and needs.

In this primer, I'll be looking at what these five planetary bodies represent in the birth chart, along with some keywords and what to expect if that planet — or the sign(s) it rules — dominates your chart.

Being born on the cusp

There are many chart calculation services online to help you discover in which signs your five planets fall. The one I use for my school can be found here: <https://www.londonschoolofastrology.com/pages/freebies>. You'll need your date, place, and time of birth (an estimate of the time will usually suffice). If you have no idea of your birth time, enter 12:00 p.m. but be aware that the Moon changes sign every two and a half days and may have changed during the day of your birth.

For those of you born on the cusp (i.e., a day that the Sun changes from one zodiac sign to another), you'll need to know your birth time (or an approximation) to know the sign in which the Sun is placed. Being “on the cusp” doesn't mean you're a mix of two signs, but your horoscope may contain planets in both signs.

Before I introduce the five planets, it's important to know that the sign in which a planet falls will say much about how you specifically express the various meanings of that planet. Imagine the planets are the actors in your personal drama (the nouns, the *energies*). The signs are the clothes these actors wear (the adjectives, the *archetypal energies*, and how the planets act through them).

Have another read of “Part I” in the April/May issue of *The Mountain Astrologer* for a reminder of the qualities of the twelve signs.

Let's begin with the star of the show, the Sun:

☉ Your Sun sign spotlights:

- Your mission, purpose in life, and vocation
- Your identity, essence, and character — who you were born to become
- Your set of core principles
- The route to achieving something significant and meaningful in your life
- The self-expressive activities that make you feel alive
- The image you have of what makes a hero

Sun keywords: *journey, vocation, purpose, courage, hero/heroine, leader, authority.*

If the Sun is prominent in your horoscope (e.g., heavily aspected by other planets, or conjunct one of the horoscope's four angles) or you have numerous placements in Leo, it's indicative of a creative personality and a life path in which forming an identity and cultivating self-expression are key themes. Life can be a self-involved quest to discover who you are (solar journeys in pop culture include those of comic book superheroes like Superman and Wonder Woman, and characters like Harry Potter, Simba the Lion King, and Luke Skywalker). Ideally, once this discovery has been made, you can mentor others to “find” themselves, too.

Being a solar type, you “display” well and may attain positions of authority because you exude a measure of confidence, charisma, and dignity that others gravitate towards. Less attractive qualities can be a sense of narcissistic self-entitlement — believing the world owes you before you've earned it — as well as vanity and an unwillingness to share the spotlight or begrudging others their time in the sun. And sometimes there's a squandering of early promise or a parent that dominates the childhood landscape — both of which require courage so that you can get back on track and assume personal control over your destiny.

☾ Your Moon sign reflects your:

- Primary emotional needs in order to feel safe and secure
- Fundamental relationship behaviours, drives, and expectations
- Instinctive reactions; your earliest memories and deepest feelings
- Daily and domestic habits (what you're like to live with)
- Most vulnerable, childlike/immature, and sensitive sides
- Most personal, private side (what you're like behind closed doors)
- Hidden relationship agenda (what you reveal only once you trust others)
- Style of nurturing or loving and caring (and how you've been loved and cared for)
- Ideal working environment and rhythm

Moon keywords: *emotions, responses, feelings, rituals, habits, nurturing, home, security.*

If the Moon is prominent in your horoscope (e.g., heavily aspected by other planets, or conjunct one of the horoscope's four angles) or you have numerous placements in Cancer, it's likely that your inner and outer worlds are shaped by your deep emotional responses and ties. As a lunar type, you're intuitive, instinctive, and impressionable with ever-fluctuating moods that reflect (and are shaped by) the people and circumstances you encounter daily. Your sensitive antennae pick up atmosphere and nuance — understanding the true feelings beneath the actions and reactions of those around you. You're naturally and shrewdly attuned to the rhythms of life and have your finger on the public pulse. As such, there may be a strong interest in fashions, history, or the cycles of nature.

Often, Lunar types find a way of expressing themselves in a fluid, subjective way through music, painting, poetry, or journaling. Less palatable sides of your nature may include burying your past and disconnecting from family and the emotional realm out of fear of repeating painful experiences. Creating a hard, prickly, and protective shell of armour may protect your tender side from unpleasantness, but it's important to search for a tribe that resonates with your soul and aligns with your emotional centre.

☿ Your Mercury sign tells you about your:

- Type of mind; your intellectual interests and talents
- Particular way of reasoning and “joining the dots”
- Type of opinions and ideas
- Process and analyses of information; how you get your message across
- Method of communicating in a relationship
- Process of hearing and then translating what others say

Mercury keywords: *thought processes, communication, writing, expression, opinion, the rational.*

If Mercury is prominent in your horoscope (e.g., heavily aspected by other planets, or conjunct one of the horoscope's

four angles) or you have numerous placements in Gemini and/or Virgo, you have many stories to share and were born to play communicator — be that as salesperson, messenger, storyteller, agent, or deal-maker. You wish to accumulate a series of eclectic experiences that keep you both interested in life and interesting to know. Yours is an inquisitive and analytical nature that enjoys finding patterns, searching for the pieces of the puzzle, playing detective, and exchanging your observations with others. Keen to ask questions and evaluate different viewpoints, you may be less concerned with the complete picture of the puzzle or the results of your investigations — knowing that the journey is more important than the arrival. Exploring a variety of approaches and analysing data is infinitely more interesting than uncovering One Truth.

The eternal student, you may live in your head rather than connect to the emotional realms of the heart. And by being perpetually “in process” and easily bored with ideas and people, you may stay noncommittal and prefer to observe from an impersonal standpoint (critiquing, dissecting, and interviewing) instead of jumping in and getting involved with life directly. The concern for data and detail can replace the desire for actual experience.

♀ Your Venus sign shows:

- What you find attractive and beautiful
- What you seek in others to find common ground and form relationships
- How you attract or seduce others
- How you go about attaining pleasure
- What helps develop your self-esteem
- The principles and traits you hold in high regard
- What you value aesthetically — your taste — and what you spend money on
- What you seek out in women and how you use the feminine parts of yourself

Venus keywords: *relationship, popularity, pleasure, self-worth, values, tastes, harmony, peace.*

If Venus is prominent in your horoscope (e.g., heavily aspected by other planets, or conjunct one of the horoscope's four angles) or there are numerous placements in Taurus and/or Libra, it's likely that the pursuit of the finer things in life and the indulgence in sensuous delights are your chief objectives. The Venusian can be entertaining, charming, sociable, and superficial (the Libran side of Venus), or a more steady, salt-of-the-Earth type that's honest, reliable, and “real” (the Taurean side). Laziness or finding someone else to look after you can be less attractive traits.

It is said that diplomacy is the art of letting someone else have *your* way, and Venusian types are experts in persuasion and negotiation, restoring harmony to areas of conflict, and helping others reach fair-minded solutions and compromises. Reaching decisions in your own personal life may pose more of a challenge because you're inclined to second-guess every move you make.

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Often there's a strong need to be liked and to have your opinions and tastes validated by others. This can lead to people-pleasing, being in imbalanced partnerships, or subjugating your needs to keep the peace. Yet, an equal exchange in partnership — and engaging with someone who can be your equal — are essential keys to your personal happiness.

♂ Your Mars sign identifies you:

- Type and level of passion, aggression, and assertiveness
- Brand of sexual, physical, and creative energy
- Physicality, driving force, and personal power
- Way of getting/competing for what you want
- Temper and what triggers it
- Masculinity and how you use it, and what you seek out in men

Mars keywords: *desires, energy, actions, assertiveness, will, anger, independence, conflict.*

If Mars is prominent in your horoscope (e.g., heavily aspected by other planets, or conjunct one of the horoscope's four angles) or there are numerous placements in Aries and/or Scorpio, it's likely that you have a dynamic, powerful, and spirited approach to life and relationships. Mars types are

usually self-motivated, energetic, driven, intensely focused, and independent. Caution, attention to detail, and preparation are not usually strong points — the instinct may be to shoot first and ask questions later. There's an entrepreneurial spirit and, as such, you're naturally autonomous, preferring to go it alone than follow someone else's rules or decisions.

Yours is a competitive, ambitious energy, and often there's a workaholic nature and perfectionism — a need to achieve excellence or a personal best. The Mars type is always on the lookout for contests to win and a chance to prove itself. You're challenged to meet life with passion and daring, and you may see your journey as a clearly defined series of battles between good and evil — even if some of the demons you fight against are the self-saboteurs within yourself. The not-so-attractive side of the Mars type can be quarrelsome, impatient, and pugnacious, always on the lookout for a fight, and often intolerant of weakness, indecision, and other human frailties.

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Frank Clifford is the author of the textbooks *Getting to the Heart of Your Chart*, *The Solar Arc Handbook* and *Palmistry 4 Today*. In 2012, he was honoured with a lifetime achievement award for his contribution to astrology. A writing award from ISAR and a Regulus nomination followed. Frank's website can be found at <http://www.frankclifford.co.uk>, and his London courses are at <http://www.londonschoolofastrology.co.uk>. His new online school (teaching both astrology and palmistry) can be found at <http://www.londonschoolofastrology.com>



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