

Lunar Gaps Taking Advantage of the Lunar Cycle

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The phases of the moon have been observed for ages. The moon, from a Sanskrit term for measure, is the primary means by which the majority of the people in the world (even in this 20th century!) measure time and the events in their own lives. This article takes a look at what astrologers (and ordinary people) have come to understand about the lunation cycle -- the phases of the Moon. In particular, we will contrast methods of using the lunar cycle in the East and West.

Lunation Cycle in Western Astrology

Eastern and Western astrologies use the lunar cycle in the same and different ways. In the West, the lunar cycle is most often seen as a key to the personality and the birth chart. Although books like Rudhyar's *The Lunation Cycle* and many others describe the cycle as a dynamic process that unfolds each month, the practical result of their focus is not so much with this day-to-day process as with individual snapshots (the various lunar types) taken from the overall process. And then there are also books along the lines of William Butler Yeats's *A Vision*. This extremely involved intellectual study attempts to deal with concepts of anima and animus -- the endless process of psychological self-projection and its resolution. Although somewhat of a mental challenge analogous to a tongue-twister in speech, the practical benefit to this kind of writing is questionable. In this article we will not deal with these highly intellectual approaches to the Moon. Instead, let's take a quick look at the how the Moon has been considered in Western astrology. Here is a summary as any competent astrologer might present it to us:

The phases of the Moon are known to all. From the dark of the New Moon... the cycle builds through 1st Quarter and on to the brightness of the Full Moon (start of 3rd Quarter), after which the lunar light begins to diminish. After Full Moon, as the Moon's light starts to fail, comes the quarter moon phase, which rapidly darkens until the New Moon. The lunar cycle is perhaps the easiest to grasp of all astrological cycles. It is longer than the cycle of a day and shorter than the cycle of a year -- both which are hard to keep in mind.

As mentioned, the lunar cycle extends from the New Moon (Moon and Sun conjunct the same point in the zodiac) through the Full Moon (Moon and Sun on opposite sides of the Earth), and back to another New Moon. The New Moon point is considered a time of conception and beginning, the Full Moon a time of fruition and fullness. It is often stated in the astrological literature that a seed idea, impulse, or insight present at the New Moon is externalized through the first two quarters (waxing moon) and reaches completion or fullness at the Full Moon. After the Full Moon, the implications or "meaning" of what was achieved through the externalization process of the waxing

moon is seen, the lesson learned, and preparation takes place for a new and perhaps more perfect idea to form at the next New Moon.

Keep in mind that the cycle of the Moon resembles all cycles (the heartbeat, the breath, the day, the year, etc.); the cycle has a point of greatest inwardness or conception (New Moon, inhalation-point) and a point of greatest externalization or fullness (Full Moon, exhalation-point).

Projects begun at the New Moon are said to reach fulfillment at the Full Moon. The first two quarters (when the Moon is waxing and growing with light) represent a period during which to strive and build into reality a project that has been conceived, probably around the time of the New Moon. This is the time to project outward and to make real something we have visualized in our minds. We all have projects -- a new effort, a new lawn, a new start, a new anything.

In the Western tradition, from the New Moon through the 1st Quarter is good for making this push from an insight outward, making our dreams into reality. The New Moon point is a time for vision and a new seed impulse. The 2nd quarter (end of 1st) represents a crisis in action when we must carry our new impulse or idea beyond the planning stage and into the sphere of action, a time when the idea breaks into reality and is launched. The 1st Quarter is a time to get underway and to figure out how to make our dreams (ideas) come true. The end of the 1st Quarter and beginning of the 2nd Quarter marks that point in the lunar cycle when we are able to bring across some portion of an insight or idea into reality. The 2nd Quarter through the Full Moon (beginning 3rd Quarter) represents the time when we achieve outward realization or actualization of what we saw or felt at the New Moon impulse. It is a time for physical work and externalization. It is during the 2nd Quarter that we put into our project the energy and material that give it substance and form.

The Full Moon marks outward extension and completion of the project. For better or worse, this is it! If we have tuned into the insight available at the New Moon -- and if we have worked to that end -- the Full Moon can represent a time of fruition and completion. What we have dreamed or seen in the mind is now real and can be experienced in the flesh. If we have worked at cross purposes to the New Moon message, then the Full Moon might bring home that fact as well. We can reap the reward of our misguided effort. Above all, the Full Moon represents an experience -- a fullness, if you will.

The 3rd Quarter is a time during which we can appreciate, enjoy, and begin to reflect on the experience that peaked at the time of the Full Moon. This quarter is traditionally a time for learning and assimilation. The Full Moon impact and experience begins to pass, and we find ourselves having thoughts about that experience. If nothing more we sense that the experience is over, and is passing -- reflection occurs. We begin to grasp and

appreciate the Full Moon experience, for better or for worse. As the lunar light begins to diminish, we start drawing conclusions of one sort or another -- taking a lesson.

The start of the 4th Quarter marks a crisis in consciousness. The experience of the Full Moon is over, and we are left to draw whatever conclusions we can from it. It is during the 4th Quarter that we prune and weed out from our lives what we have seen to be of no value or use in this experience. It is a time for constructive elimination and release. It is often referred to as a 'seed time' and it is here we keep or take to heart the seed or kernel of the experience we had at the full of the moon. We are drawing to a close that experience and the entire cycle for that month. We are approaching another New Moon and the start of a new cycle and impulse.

Since we are dealing with a cycle or circle, there is no real beginning or end. All circles or cycles are endless or eternal (eternally repeating). The lunar cycle (phases of the Moon) is something that we can learn to use. After we read about and become aware of the different parts of this cycle we can begin to observe the cycle happening around us. The lunar cycle described above in theory is seldom experienced in such clarity in everyday life. Over time we recognize parts of the cycle and learn to use them. We might find it hard to push or begin projects during the 4th quarter -- in particular the three days or so just before a New Moon. But this time is good to finish up a project, or clean up loose odds and ends of business -- draw things to a close. We could find that get-togethers, parties, and social events seem to come off well around or just before the Full Moon. We learn to take advantage of the qualities and opportunities of each section of the moon cycle. And we don't have to wait to begin since we are already -- right now - - in that cycle. What we develop then is an awareness of the Moon cycle.

Seed Impulse: Themes

An important concept to grasp is that the lunar cycle is experienced by all. The seed insight or impulse available at the New Moon is open to each of us. It is a global experience belonging to the entire planet. Although we may take it personally and in our own way, it is, above all, a common experience. Each passing month or lunar cycle modifies this experience and presents a new or slightly altered theme or impulse at New Moon for us to consider. Endless variations on a theme, this seed-thought or impulse somehow sets the tone for succeeding lunar cycles. The moments of new and full moon are considered as special. This is particularly true at the time of an eclipse.

Eclipses

Eclipses are simply New or Full Moons with extraordinary alignment or focus. They have been considered for centuries to be astrological events of the first magnitude. If we consider New and Full Moons to be important, then eclipses represent the keys to the lunar cycle for any year.

We mentioned earlier about the New Moon containing an impulse or insight that grows to fruition at the Full Moon. Eclipses, then, provide moments when extraordinary insight or vision are available to us. It is possible for some of us, at least at certain times in our lives, to experience what has been called the vision of the eclipse, and to remember or keep that vision in mind. There appears to be a theme or principal insight connected with major eclipses. Let me make clear just what we mean here by the word vision. "Vision" does not mean the fairytale dream picture we might conjure up -- but it is related. A vision is a moment of extreme clarity or understanding when 'in a flash' we know or experience something in its entirety. We take it in. There are times in each of our lives when we have vision or see some intrinsic truth about our lives -- about life.

As mentioned above, there appears to be a common or communal vision that occurs around the time of major eclipses. While each of us interprets the insight or vision in a personal way, the theme or essence of the vision is a common experience. And it is possible to share that vision. Although we all experience it at once, only some of us are capable of remembering the experience in a conscious fashion. It seems that we are privileged to be consciously aware of the vision of an eclipse at special or crucial moments in our lifetimes -- times when we are particularly aware. The message or vision or any given eclipse will tend to dominate our deeper or subconscious minds for months surrounding that eclipse. It is a peculiarity of these eclipse moments that they can happen days or even weeks before or after the actual moment of an eclipse. That is: the eclipse theme pervades the time prior to and after the actual physical event. Sometimes eclipses happen in pairs, two weeks apart. These are particularly powerful, and the whole time between these events can be a kind of waking vision.

Learning to recognize a moment of vision and taking advantage of these enhanced moments of vision surrounding and eclipse can be important. If the point in the zodiac where an eclipse occurs is in high focus in your natal chart, then the particular eclipse may have special importance for you.

In general, eclipses of the Sun (New Moons) represent vision into the nature of our life (ideas about life), while eclipses of the Moon (Full Moons) represent a waking experience or sensational event -- living in our own dream. Now we can examine lunar astrology from an Eastern perspective.

The Lunation Cycle in Eastern Astrology

The East seldom mentions the individual birth chart. Their primary interest is in the dynamics of the lunation cycle itself which they divide and analyze in great detail in order to make use of the opportunities it offers for day-to-day decision-making. In other words, in the East the lunar cycle is used as a means to determine the kind of activity appropriate for each successive lunar day. This amounts to a form of electoral

astrology.

In the West, electional astrology is thought of as a means to pick an appropriate time in the future for a particular ceremony or happening. Eastern astrology too uses electional astrology in this manner, but more often it uses electional astrology as a guide to day-to-day personal living and practice. Rather than concern itself with what lunar type a given phase of the Moon might produce (birth chart), oriental astrology asks what is the current lunar phase good for. What kind of action is auspicious (or not) today. In India and Tibet, it is the lunation cycle rather than the yearly sun or solar cycle that is the primary indicator used for planning activities and for personal guidance. In other words, in the East they live by and follow the cycle of the Moon on a day-to-day basis.

A very clear illustration of this idea is the fact that, in most Eastern countries, birthdays are observed according to the particular day of the moon cycle (lunar phase angle) during which a person was born, rather according to the solar return as here in the West. If we celebrate your birthday in Nepal, we celebrate that phase of the moon (the lunar day) you were born in. Moreover, due to the fact that lunar months do not fit nicely within the solar year, a birthday in the East for any given individual can be up to a month away (during some years) from the solar return -- our Western-style birthday. This simple fact makes it clear how important the moon and the lunar cycle are in these countries. A study of the existing literature on the meaning and use of the moon in astrology (East and West) shows much similarity but also considerable difference.

There is general agreement (East and West) about the nature of the lunation cycle, in that it somehow proceeds from some sort of seed time at the new moon to a fruition at the full, and so on. Tradition has it that we get an impulse, insight, or idea at the New Moon. During the two-weeks between the New Moon and the Full Moon (the waxing moon), this impulse or insight develops into something objective; we build it into something concrete. In other words, this seed impulse grows into something real and reaches fruition at the Full of the Moon. After the Full Moon, whatever we have built or manifest proceeds to break-up or dissolve, and we gather whatever experience or rewards we can from it. It breaks up during the waning two-weeks of the lunar cycle, from Full Moon to the next New Moon. Thus, the endless lunation cycle (like our lungs breathing) goes from a collapsed seed point (New Moon) to a full manifestation (Full Moon), and back again. This is the archetype of the cycle.

The lunar cycle endlessly expands and contracts, bearing forth and taking back -- creating and destroying. Given this fact and the tradition that has built up around it, those who study the lunar cycle seek to take advantage of this regular cycle and its very regular opportunities. In the West, this very practical knowledge has either been lost or never really accumulated. It is hard to tell. My guess is that it has never been studied here in as much detail as in the East.

Although measuring time and life by the moon is ancient, it is more than just some primitive sort of clock. The very sophisticated concept of lunar gaps springs from centuries of painstaking psychological observation by the lamas of Tibet, and the Hindu sages. They practice it today with the same vigor and intensity as they did a thousand years ago. Unlike many other traditions, where the line of successors (lineage) has been broken due to various events, the dharma tradition of Tibet remains pure and unbroken to this day.

Although much of the Tibetan dharma tradition requires dedication and intense practice, learning to use the moon's phases and the concept of lunar gaps is easy to get into. The theory is simple.

It involves the ongoing relationship between the Sun, the Moon and the Earth -- the monthly cycle of the phases of the Moon. We already know about the moon cycle, and can even walk outside at night and see which lunar phase we are in.

This is not the place (and I am not the expert) to describe to you either the very complicated astronomical motions these three heavenly bodies produce, or the profound theories of what all of this motion means in a philosophical sense. What is quite accessible is the concept of lunar gaps.

As we know, the moon cycle goes through its phases from new moon to full moon, back to new moon in a cycle of about one month, some 30 days. This is seen as an ongoing cycle of activity -- endless in extent. It goes on forever.

However, although the moon cycle is unending, it does have distinct phases like the full moon, new moon, quarters, and so on. In Tibet and India, the monthly lunar cycle is divided into 30 parts called lunar days. There are thirty lunar days starting from the new moon (start of 1st day), counting through the waxing half of the moon cycle to the Full Moon (end of the 15th day) and on around through the waning cycle, back to the new moon again.

What is interesting about how the lamas (and most Hindus too) view this 30 day cycle is that the 30 lunar days are not considered of equal importance. The monthly cycle has very definite points in it of increased importance -- lunar gaps. It is at these lunar gaps or openings that it is possible to get special insight into different areas of our own life. In fact, the Tibetans take full advantage of these lunar gaps to perform very specific practices. That is, certain of the lunar days have proven themselves to be auspicious for particular kinds of activities.

In the East, they speak of mental obscurations that tend to cloud our minds, but that can sometimes clear up, just as the Sun comes out from behind the clouds. These moments of clarity are the gaps in the clouds. From a reading of the Eastern literature on this

subject, one gets the sense that (in general) life is perceived as being filled with the noise of our own problems (obscurations), making clear insight often difficult. These obscurations can be many and their accumulation amounts to the sum total of our ignorance -- that which we ignore.

Therefore, in Eastern countries, these articulation points or windows in time/space (lunar gaps) are very much valued. In fact, the Eastern approach is to analyze the lunar cycle, in minute detail, in order to isolate these moments (gaps in time/space) where insight into our larger situation can be gained. Much of day-to-day practice in Eastern religions amounts to a scheduling of precise times for personal practice or activity built around the natural series of gaps that can be found in the continuous lunar cycle. In its own way, this is a very scientific approach. In the East, they have been astute observers of the mind for many centuries.

Here in the West, we are no stranger to clear days in our mind. We have those too! The only difference, is that we tend to believe that these so-called clear days appear randomly -- every now and then. The more sophisticated (and ancient) psychological analysis of the East has found that these clear days are (for the most part) anything but random events. They have their own internal ordering, and oftentimes this ordering can be associated with the phases of the moon.

In summary, there are times each month when it is more auspicious or appropriate to perform or be involved in one kind (or another) of activity. There come gaps in the general obscuration or cloudiness of our mind when we can see through the clouds -- when penetrating insight is possible.

As noted, times when one can see without obscuration (see clearly) are very much valued in the Tibetan dharma tradition. These are viewed as real opportunities for insight and the subsequent development such insight generates. Knowing when and where to look for these insight gaps has been the subject of study and research in Tibet for centuries.

And this is not just academic research, reserved for the pundits. Everyone uses the lunar calendar on a regular basis. Lunar gaps are used to plan a wide variety of events in the Tibetan calendar, everything from finding a time to perform a simple healing ceremony to full scale empowerments.

Aside from knowing when these lunar gaps can be experienced, the other major thing to know about this subject is what to do when the gaps occur. As you might imagine, there are a wide range of practices, depending on the particular lunar gap (phase) and the personal needs of the practitioner.

However, in general, these lunar gap times are set aside for special observation.

Tibetans observe these days with great attention and care. In fact, in many Eastern countries, they don't have Saturday and Sunday off. Instead, new and full moon days are considered holy days (holidays), and normal routines are suspended at these times. These are days for observation.

This word "observation" is worth mentioning, for this is what takes place at these times. In the West, we might use the word meditation. In Tibet there are many words that come under the general concept of meditation. The word "observe" is a lot closer to what happens during these lunar gaps. Observe the nature of the day. Observe your mind at that time. Be alert, present and set that time aside for just examining yourself, your mind, the time -- what-have-you? It is while being present -- observing these seed times -- that the so-called lunar gap can present itself. Many great dharma teachers have pointed out the existence of gaps in our life, moments when clarity and real insight is possible.

And lest we get too far afield sitting there waiting for a gap in time or space to occur, let me restate: The gap that appears is a gap in our particular set of obscurations, our own cloudiness. When such a gap takes place, there can be an intense insight into some aspect of our situation, the effects of which stay with us for a long time. One moment of real insight or vision can take weeks or months to examine in retrospect. Each time we bring it to mind, it's richness is such that it continues to be a source of inspiration. This is what lunar gaps are all about.

At this point, it is hoped that you have some general idea of what lunar gaps are and how you might go about taking advantage of them.

These lunar opportunities are sometimes referred to as gaps or openings in the otherwise continuous stream of our lives -- windows. They conceive of these gaps as articulation points, much like an elbow is where the arm is articulated. They are natural joints or gaps in time/space upon which time and space turn and through which it is sometimes possible to gain access to information about the larger, dynamic life process that already encapsulates us. We have more detailed lists available, as well as lists customized to your particular location, including sunrise, etc.

The Lunation Cycle: East and West

The Moon receives more attention in Eastern astrology. And it is not just a matter of increased emphasis; there are major qualitative differences in approach. The emphasis is seldom on the type of individual that typifies a given lunar phase. Instead, it is on analyzing the entire lunar cycle in order to take advantage of its ongoing opportunities -- using the moon cycle for living. This Eastern approach is very practical.

What interests Eastern astrologers are the opportunities available to them in the

monthly lunar cycle. They use the lunar cycle as a way to gauge and measure their lives. They have learned how to take advantage of opportunities they have discovered within the lunation cycle. This is an important concept to grasp. These lunar opportunities are sometimes referred to as gaps or openings in the otherwise continuous stream of our lives -- windows. They conceive of these gaps as articulation points, much like an elbow is where the arm is articulated. They are natural joints or gaps in time/space upon which time and space turn and through which it is sometimes possible to gain access to information about the larger, dynamic life process that already encapsulates us.

From a reading of the Eastern literature on this subject, one gets the sense that life is perceived as (on the average) being filled with the noise of our problems (obscurations), making clear insight often difficult. These obscurations can be many and their accumulation amounts to the sum total of our ignorance -- that which we ignore.

Therefore, in Eastern astrology, these articulation points or windows in time/space are very much to be valued. In fact, Eastern astrologers analyze the lunar cycle, in minute detail, in order to isolate these moments (gaps in time/space) where insight into our larger situation can be gained. Much of so-called Eastern religion amounts to a scheduling of precise times for personal practice or activity built around the natural series of gaps that can be found in the continuous lunar cycle. In its own way, it is a very scientific approach. In the East, they have been astute observers for many centuries.

In India and Tibet, the 29.5-day lunar synodic cycle is divided into 30 parts, called tithis. A tithi or lunar day is the time it takes for the aspect between the sun and Moon (elongation, angular separation) to reach a multiple of 12 degrees. Thus each tithi is 12 degrees of solunar angular separation.

It might interest readers to know that each tithi is further subdivided into two parts, called karanas, and that this additional subdivision finds wide use in India, Tibet, and other Eastern countries. However, for the purposes of this article, the division of the lunar cycle into 30 parts or lunar days will suffice.

The way tithis are measured is as follows. The moment of the new moon (0° angular solunar separation) marks the end of the 30th lunar day and the start of the first. The first lunar day, or tithi ends at 12° of solunar separation, and the 2nd lunar day begins. And so it goes, on and around. The only part of this that might be confusing is that the 30th lunar day (348° to 360°) is considered the new moon day, and the 15th lunar day (168° to 180°) is considered the full moon day; however, these days are celebrated the following day.

It seems that, although East and West agree on the importance of new and full moons,

there is less congruence when it comes to the quarter moons. Here in the West, the lunar quarters are next in importance after the new and full moon times. However, in the East there are other days that are considered of greater importance, such as the 10th and 25th lunar days.

In both traditions, there is agreement that the 2 or 3 days preceding the moment of the new moon are difficult ones, which require special observation. In the West these days have been called the dark of the Moon, or devil's days, days when the darker forces have power. Both traditions affirm that we sort of survive these final days each month. Check it out for yourself. The three days before new moon can be a hard time. The East is in total agreement on this point, and the days prior to new moon are set aside for invoking the fierce dharma protectors, those energies that ward off harm and protect us during the worst of times.

In particular, the 29th day (the day before new moon) is called dharma protector day. It is a time given over to purification and preparation for the moment of new moon. Ritual fasting, confession of errors, and the like are common practices. In a similar vein, the days just prior to the full moon (the 13th and 14th) are also days of purification, days in which the various guardian and protector deities are again invoked, but in a somewhat more restrained way. For example, the 14th day is often given over to fire puja -- a ritual purification. In summary, during days prior to full and new moon, there is some attempt at purification, both physical and mental, in preparation for those auspicious events.

It is clear from the literature that the times of the new and full moon are considered of great importance. These days are set aside for special rituals and worship. As pointed out, full and new moon (full more than new) are times of collective worship and public confession. In many traditions, the monks and priests assemble for a day of special observance. In the East, the full moon celebration and the entire waxing lunar fortnight are oriented to the masculine element in consciousness, what are called the father-line deities. The new moon and the waning fortnight are given over to the mother-line deities and the feminine element. The full moon completes the masculine, or active, waxing phase of the cycle, and the new moon completes the feminine, waning phase of the month. To my knowledge, this kind of analysis does not exist in the West.

Aside from the new and full moon, the two most auspicious lunar days in the East are the 10th and the 25th. The 10th day (108ø to 120ø), called Daka Day, is considered auspicious for invoking the father-line deities -- the masculine. The 25th day (288ø to 300ø), called Dakini Day, is given over to the feminine principle and the mother line deities, in general. These two days, the 10th and the 25th, are formal feast days, days of observation when extra offerings are made and increased attention given to what is happening. There is some sense of celebration at these points in the month. In many respects, these two days even rival the new and full moon days in importance. The fact is that these four days (new, full, 10th, 25th) are the primary auspicious days as

practiced in many Eastern rituals.

There are many other days of lesser importance, which might also interest Western astrologers. Health and healing are important in Eastern ritual, and the 8th and 23rd days of the lunar month are auspicious for this purpose. It is these days that straddle the first and last lunar quarters. The 8th day (84ø to 96ø) is often called Medicine Buddha Day. Again this occurs in the male, or father-line, half of the month. The 23rd day (264ø to 276ø), occurring in the feminine half of the month, is dedicated to Tara practice. Tara is the female deity connected to health, long life, and healing in general.

Earlier we mentioned the days given over to purification, most prominently the 13th and the 29th. In addition, on a lesser scale, the 9th and the 19th days are also noted as days when the protector deities should be invoked and kept in mind. These, too, are days of purification. And there are more, still finer subdivisions that are made. In this brief article, these major observance days are enough to give us the idea of how Eastern astrologers approach the lunar cycle. It should be kept in mind that, in the East, astrology is practiced by the general public. So it is not just astrologers who are using the lunar days; everyone observes these days.

Next, we might ask ourselves how this Eastern approach to the lunation cycle might be of value in the West? As mentioned earlier, a major fact is that the lunar cycle is perceived as having a variety of gaps, joints, or points of articulation that can be used. They can be seen as chinks in the armor of our particular obscurations. Many Western mystery traditions also observe the times of the full (and sometimes the new) moon. Full moon meditations are common. The quarter moons are given less attention, and few Western rituals exist (to my knowledge) for these events.

It is an intuitive fact that moments of clarity and insight (gaps) do come in the course of living. We all benefit from this kind of insight. What Eastern astrology seems to suggest to us is that many of these gaps are not just random events that occur in our life, haphazardly. They are regular opportunities, joints in the nick of time, when insights are somehow more possible than at other times. Therefore, it is common practice to set aside some portion of these special days for observance, for meditation.

It is unfortunate that the concept of meditation entertained by the public here in the West amounts to some kind of relaxation therapy -- a quiet time. This is very far from the truth of what is considered meditation in India, Japan, Tibet, and other Eastern countries. In fact, meditation is a form of observation. It is observation of what is, and of what is happening in one's mind and environment. When the Eastern mind meditates on special lunar days, it sets aside a time to observe with great care the nature of that particular day. Meditation as taught in Tibet and Japan is a technique that increases our abilities to observe. The meditator is not lost in deep inner space; that is our Western take on the concept of meditation. In the East, the meditator is right here, now,

observing the mind and life. This is why it is said that these special days are days set aside for observation.

Here in the West, we are beginning to learn these techniques of observation. By setting aside a time on these special lunar days for observation, we can be open and aware to the possibilities of insight. This kind of awareness appears to be what is required to pick up on these natural events. If we have an insight at one of these time, we might be more willing to give it credence, knowing that it is happening on such-and-such a lunar day. And so on.

It is quite clear from the Eastern teachings that the moments of full and new moon are times when the various channels in the psychophysical body are somehow aligned. This is not to say the new or full moon days are days of peace and quiet. It is taught in the East that, although a new or full moon day may tend to be wild or hectic. Any patience or forbearance we can muster at that time will be much rewarded. In other words, there can be deep insights available to us at these times. According to these same teachings, an eclipse at the full or new moon is even more auspicious. In the teachings it is said that, during these very special events, both male and female energies (channels) are in simultaneous alignment -- the ultimate opportunity. The lunar cycle and its effects and opportunities have been analyzed in great detail in the Eastern teaching.

In summary, the major difference between Eastern and Western astrology as related to the lunation cycle is that in the East any lunar theory is put to the test. It exists as a guide to practice. In other words, they practice what they preach. Here in the West, it would appear that we are somewhat more theoretical. We read about and discuss ideas on the lunar cycle, but very few astrologers that I have met make use of the lunar-phase cycle as a guide to day-to-day practice. As a society, we don't even observe the full or new moon, much less the quarters or any of the other possible lunar days. It is true that most astrologers are aware of the zodiac sign the Moon is in, but here we are not examining that part of the tradition; we are looking at the cycle of the lunar phases. Or, here in the West we may know that it is new or full moon, but we do nothing out of the ordinary in response to that information. And, of course, the general public seldom even takes note of lunar events.

The Eastern approach to the lunar cycle is quite ancient and very detailed. East or West, I assume that both astrological traditions have been engaged in recording something rather than nothing all of these centuries. In other words, I assume that the existing lunar tradition, East and West, is a reflection of reality rather than something we have made up. After all, that is what astrology is all about and why we practice it.

Here we have concentrated on the synodic cycle of the sun, moon, and earth -- the lunation cycle. We have ignored the use by astrologers of the Moon in the signs and houses, something practiced both here and in the East.

On a personal note, my study of the lunation cycle has led me from Western to Eastern texts in an attempt to obtain more practical information for day-to-day living. When I ran out of new texts to study, I sought out some of the living Eastern meditators who observe the lunar cycle on a regular basis. For example, we have had a wide variety of Eastern astrologers living and working at our center in recent years. In addition, one individual skilled in Sanskrit and Tibetan astrology spent almost two years here, translating various Buddhist texts on the subject.

From my experience with these sources, the primary piece of information that stays with me is that reading about or listening to someone with experience in this area is, by definition, preliminary. Both text and teachers (however fine they may be) can but point beyond themselves to the lunar cycle itself. Through any differences that exist, all sources seem united in this one maxim: go and see for yourself. Check it out. The purpose of the teachings is the experience itself that waits to be known. They are telling us: Observe these days. Call it meditation or observation (whatever), but observe with care and attention if these insight gaps are there.

Observing Lunar Gaps: Mind Practice

The lunar cycle and its gaps are available to everyone, all the time. If we don't observe these special times, it is because we have set no time aside to observe, to check it out for ourselves. In the East, most people are introduced to basic observation techniques or mind practice from an early age. It is unfortunate that mind practice is not much known of here in the West. I mean how many people do you know who practice observing or using their mind anyway? Most of us assume that the mind is perfectly usable just as we find it, and doesn't require any practice.

In the Tibet mind practice is not only acceptable, it is pretty much obligatory. This is true for countries like Tibet, Nepal, much of India, and even parts of China and Japan. Over there, the mind is considered by nature to be unruly and hard to manage. No one would think of trying to do much with it without considerable practice. Mind practice or mind preparation or training, as it is sometimes called, is standard fare in the orient.

We might wonder why this style of mind practice has never caught on in North America. In part, this is due to our whole take on meditation and what we think that is. Meditation in the West has come to mean something almost like relaxation therapy, a way to relax and get away from it all -- to escape the worries of the world in the contemplation of some inner landscape. Somewhere, perhaps early in this century, the word meditation lost any semblance to its Eastern counterpart and became what most understand as meditation today -- a way to relax and get rid of tension.

Of course this is nothing like the Tibetan concept of mind practice or mind preparation,

which involves the intense use of the mind. It is unfortunate that this very active mind practice has also come under the general label of meditation here in the West.

Having pointed this out, it may be helpful to clarify and describe what it is that the Tibetan Buddhists (and other groups too) do when they sit down on their cushions. In general, if you ask them what they are doing on their cushions, the answer will not that they are "practicing", or they are "sitting". Indeed, that is what takes place. They sit and observe.

There are many Tibetan words for the different kinds of mind practice that are possible, while in the West we have just the one word: meditation. What then is mind practice?

The most important difference between sitting practice (mind practice) and meditation as it is understood in this country, is that mind practice is anything but relaxing or passive. It is very active.

The actual technique is quite simple, taking only a few minutes to learn. And it is worth getting this instruction from someone authorized to give it. Most Buddhist and some Hindu groups offer this type of mind practice. When looking for training in mind practice, be sure to ask for a technique that emphasizes concentration on the present moment -- being present, and not some of the more dreamy relaxation techniques. What you need in order to use lunar gaps is to become very alert and observant. The technique is called Shamata training in Tibetan Buddhism and Zazen in Zen Buddhism. I would be happy to send a list of well-respected centers to anyone who writes me at 315 Marion Avenue, Big Rapids, MI 49307. It is important that you receive instruction from someone trained in the technique, and get an authentic connection with a tradition.

Science and the Lunation Cycle

We have presented thoughts from both sides of the world on lunar astrology. Is there any scientific evidence to back this up?

Scientific research into the lunation cycle over the last 15-20 years is fascinating from an astrologer's perspective. It was not very many years ago that science gave little or no credence to the possibility of a lunar effect on life here on earth. Today it is no longer a question of "is there an effect?" but rather one of "let me count the ways." In fact, the research at this point is so extensive that in this brief article we can only mention some of the high points in the existing literature.

It should go without saying, but I will repeat it here, that science still has little or nothing to say about psychological or personal events connected with lunar activity. Instead, it has discussed how the moon relates to such things as rainfall, weather, and atmosphere. More important to astrologers, and a step closer to the psychological, is

the growing evidence for a hard connection between lunar activity and geomagnetic activity. It is this connection that we will detail here.

Geomagnetic activity coming from beyond the earth's aura or atmosphere has been linked to all kinds of mundane activities ranging from radio reception to the aurora borealis type displays and so on. The picture that emerges from modern research is one where each body (the earth, the sun, and perhaps even each of us) is surrounded by some sort of magnetic field. We radiate, and this radiation surrounds us and even keeps some things out -- our aura or mandala.

The earth's aura (or magnetosphere as it is called) keeps at bay enormous amounts of radiation coming from the sun and from the galaxy in which our solar system is a part. Very energetic particles can penetrate our magnetosphere and find their way through the atmosphere to the surface of the earth itself. For the most part, these particles funnel in from the north and south polar caps via field lines of high geomagnetic declination. During times of increased solar activity such as solar flares, or during the peak of the sunspot cycle (like this year), very much more solar radiation reaches the earth than at other times. The weaker cosmic radiation must wait for the years of sunspot minimum to reach their maximum penetration. Please examine the diagrams of the magnetosphere shown below as we examine some of the scientific evidence that relates to the lunation cycle -- lunar power.

Auroras -- Although we have long studied oceanic tides, we know now that there are atmospheric tides as well that move in response to the position of the Moon. For example, auroras are caused by the excitation of atmospheric molecules by energetic charged particles penetrating the atmosphere along geomagnetic field lines. Although the mechanism of this phenomenon is still being examined, it is generally understood that auroras are associated with the arrival of solar corpuscular radiation in the magnetosphere, 1 to 3 days after a solar flare. These particles (depending on their intrinsic energy and the current density of the atmosphere) penetrate the atmosphere.

It has now been shown that these auroral peaks and valleys are modulated by the position of the Moon. This lunar auroral tidal effect in the upper atmosphere can be correlated with flood and ebb tides on earth, thus linking its rise and fall to the position of the Moon in its monthly cycle.

Rainfall -- It has been well documented that rainfall is correlated with the Moon's position in its monthly cycle. According to many studies, rainfall maximizes midway through the 1st and 3rd quarters of the lunar synodic month. In other words, about a half week after new and full moon rainfall reaches a peak. Correspondingly, a low point in rainfall occurs during the 2nd and 4th quarters with the lowest point of all occurring some three days before new or full moon.

In addition, it was found that increased rainfall at these two peak times in the month was greater at solar minimum than at solar maximum. The lunar cycle accounts for 65% of the variance during years of solar minimum, but only 14% during the year surrounding solar maximum. It has been suggested that cosmic radiation may be a factor, since this form of radiation penetrates more deeply into the solar system during years of low solar activity. During the years of high solar activity, a more powerful solar wind helps to keep out cosmic radiation.

Thunderstorms and Cosmic Radiation. It has been shown that the maximum in thunderstorms coincides with the maximum in galactic cosmic radiation and vice versa, that minimum thunderstorm activity coincides with the minimum in galactic cosmic ray radiation. There have been many studies on the relationship of cosmic radiation to lunar activity. Cosmic radiation consists of energetic particles entering our solar system from beyond its aura, or magnetosphere. As mentioned, there is an inverse relationship between cosmic radiation and solar activity. In other words, the increased solar wind at sunspot maximum keeps cosmic radiation out of the solar system and away from the earth. During the years of sunspot minimum, cosmic radiation is strong enough to penetrate the solar aura and reach the earth's atmosphere.

Thunderstorms and the Moon -- It has been shown that the maximum in thunderstorms coincides with maximum geomagnetic activity. In addition, it has been shown that thunderstorm activity is modulated by lunar position. The greatest number of thunderstorms occur after either new or full moon. Thunderstorm frequency reaches a maximum two days after full moon and remains high for most of the third quarter.

The Moon and Geomagnetic Activity -- The Kp-geomagnetic index varies with the lunar phases. When the Moon is less than 3 1/2 degrees from the plane of the ecliptic, geomagnetic activity reaches a minimum during the 2nd lunar quarter and a maximum during 3rd lunar quarter. Lunar modulation while near the ecliptic suggests that the Moon is influencing the solar corpuscular flux which, guided by the solar magnetic field, approaches the earth generally from close to the plane of the ecliptic. Some of these particles become trapped in the magnetosphere.

There is a thin, neutral-sheet region close to the ecliptic plane in the tail of the earth's magnetosphere that the Moon might be modulating when it is traveling near the plane of the ecliptic. The high density of field lines near the ecliptic would make this region particularly sensitive to a magnetic perturbation, which could modulate the flux of particles reaching our atmosphere. In short, there is evidence that the moon has a magnetohydrodynamic wake with an enhanced magnetic field, which, when in the magnetospheric tail, causes magnetic disturbances on the earth.

Polar Cap Absorption (PCA) -- PCA happens when solar protons from solar flares enter the earth's upper atmosphere in high geomagnetic latitudes, often causing radio

blackouts and increased auroral activity. These periods of severe ionospheric disturbance are often marked by Forbush decreases, when the counting rate of background galactic cosmic radiation has a sudden anomalous decrease which might take hours to days to recover to normal levels.

In effect, it is as if there were a magnetic screening of galactic cosmic radiation by the enhanced solar plasma. It has been noted, but unexplained, that PCA events and Forbush decreases seem to be ordered with the lunar synodic period (29.5 days). When this research was begun, it was expected that a 27.3-day period would be found, indicating a link with solar rotation. It was a surprise to scientists when, instead, results fingered the lunar synodic period (29.5 days). Therefore, it is possible that the moon somehow controls solar corpuscular radiation streaming toward the earth. The mechanism is still undetermined at this time.

Solar Sectors -- Solar sectors and the geometry of the solar magnetic field represent important areas for research. The solar wind is a plasma of charged particles endlessly being ejected from the surface of the sun. These particles tend to concentrate in the plane of the ecliptic. All of the planets are within the aura or atmosphere of the sun, the solar wind. Each charged particle moves away from the sun in a straight line; however, since the sun itself is rotating, these particle streams get bent into a spiral of the type made famous by Archimedes. In addition, this plasma contains a frozen-in magnetic region constituting the sun's magnetic field that conforms to this spiral. This is the interplanetary magnetic field.

Because of this spiral effect, at the distance of the earth the magnetic field is oriented about 45 degrees west of the earth-sun line, on the morning side of the earth. Both the slow (4 days) and fast (10 minutes to several hours), charged, solar particles approach the earth guided by the solar magnetic field. They come in from the western side of the sun (morning side of earth) at about a 45-degree angle to the earth, although this angle fluctuates from moment to moment, based on the changes in the solar plasma. The fact is that each of us are exposed to this general direction around 9 AM each morning. We are most shielded from this direction around 9 P.M. each night.

The great rotating disk of the solar magnetic field itself is divided into four primary sectors, each with an alternating polarity. The magnetic field direction is either positive (away from the sun) or negative (toward the sun). These sectors are tied into definite regions on the surface of the sun, which are of corresponding magnetic signs. It has been suggested that this may be thought of as a rigid disk in the plane of the ecliptic with four quadrants connected to the sun and rotating with it in its 27-day rotation cycle - the co-rotating sector structure.

It has been found that geomagnetic and cosmic ray activity, as well as the velocity and number density of the solar wind flux, vary as a function of position within the solar

sectors; thus there is a weekly fluctuation in the Kp-geomagnetic index. Studies show a maximum in thunderstorm activity when the earth passes from a positive sector into a negative sector. These four great sectors like a great pinwheel rotate past the earth exposing our planet to alternating positive and negative solar phases.

A study of the lunar position in relation to the Kp-geomagnetic index, PCA, and Forbush decreases shows that PCA and Forbush decreases reach a minimum during the middle of the 4th lunar quarter when the moon is near the 45° axis and thus between the earth and the spot where the charged particles arrive from the sun. A maximum for these values is reached when the moon is in the 2nd quarter, unable to block the particle advance. It has been shown that the moon has an electrical charge of at least 100 V/m, which means that the moon has a positive electrical charge that can deflect solar protons.

There is also a minimum in the Kp-geomagnetic index during 2nd quarters when PCA and Forbush decreases are at a maximum. It has been suggested that at 2nd quarter the moon may least disturb the geomagnetic field, which is, at that time, most active.

There is a sharp rise in the Kp index just prior to full moon and continuing into third quarter. It has been suggested that this might be due to the magnetohydrodynamic wake of the moon interacting with the tail of the magnetosphere or modulating the flow of solar particles to the tail.

It is interesting to note that around that the 2nd quarter, 10th/11th day are the maximum for PCP activity. This is when the father-line deities are observed in Eastern astrology. The 25th/26th days are when the Moon somehow block or inhibits the solar magnetic field. This is when the mother-line deities are celebrated in that tradition. Thus the time of greatest activity (male) has some scientific backup, and the same for least activity and greatest calm (female).

Tidal and Electrical Influence

The western portion of the sun is strongly magnetically linked to the earth, while the eastern portion of the sun is not. This is due to the fact that solar corpuscular radiation approaches the earth from the west, guided by the solar magnetic field. As pointed out, these particles come in from the Western side of the sun at about a 45° angle to the morning side of earth. Statistical studies show that solar flares occurring on the eastern portion of the sun are much less frequently associated with geomagnetic storms than those occurring near the central or western portion.

Flares occur during periods of solar activity, which typically last a few days. These regions of activity (near sunspots) travel from east to west across the face of the sun, with a sunspot taking about seven days to travel from the central meridian to the

western limb. Thus active solar regions (generating particles capable of reaching the earth) move into and through the western section of the sun, which is magnetically linked to the earth. During this period, recurrent particle streams from an active sunspot region can reach the earth. Some periods when solar protons have bombarded the upper atmosphere have lasted over ten days.

This has been a very brief description of some of the geophysical research that has been performed in the last 20 years and that might be of interest to astrologers. It seems that all bodies have a field or aura around them. The earth and the sun radiate, and that radiation is swept along behind whatever trajectory the object travels. It is fascinating to see scientific evidence emerging that seems to conform with the astrological tradition.

As pointed out in the previous article on the lunation cycle, the 10th and 25th lunar days have been found (for ages) to be significant periods within the month, where some kind of change or transition takes place. It is interesting to note that, these points are more or less in line with the 45° vector along which solar corpuscular radiation reaches the earth.

The Moon in its monthly cycle appears to (somehow) modulate this stream of radiation when it reaches the area surrounding a solunar phase angle of some 315°. At this point the moon (perhaps due to its magnetic field) effectively blocks and cuts off some of the radiation stemming from the sun. At the opposite point in its orbit (around 135°), the Moon reaches a point of least blockage, where the most solar radiation can penetrate and reach the earth.

It is this point in the lunar 2nd quarter, during which the greatest amount of radiation is available to the earth, that the Eastern astrologers have set aside as a time for the masculine (active) element. The fourth quarter, where the Moon effectively blocks the solar radiation, is the point when the feminine energies are most observed.

It is interesting that, on the surface at any rate, ancient tradition and modern science appear to have some general agreement.

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Even the non-astrologer cannot help but notice the time of the Full Moon each month -- when the full disk of the Moon passes overhead around midnight. It is a fact that many have trouble sleeping when the Full Moon makes this overhead transit in the middle of the night. Often sleep will not come until the Moon finishes rising, transits overhead, and begins to set. This has been used by some as a way to determine whether a late-night party or a bout of TV watching will be a satisfying experience. In general, you can plan on building tension (and attention) while the Full Moon is rising and an easing of that state just after the Moon crests overhead. After the Moon crests and begins to set is a good time to bring activities to a close. Sleep often will come with ease at this point.

Learning to get in step with and to make use of the Moon cycle is part of astrological basic training. There has been general agreement among astrologers for thousands of years as to how the lunar cycle functions and the uses to which it can be put.