

**From Autobiography of a Yogi**  
by Paramahansa Yogananda  
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**CHAPTER 16**

***Outwitting the Stars***

"Mukunda, why don't you get an astrological armlet?"

"Should I, Master? I don't believe in astrology."

"It is never a question of belief; the only scientific attitude one can take on any subject is whether it is true. The law of gravitation worked as efficiently before Newton as after him. The cosmos would be fairly chaotic if its laws could not operate without the sanction of human belief.

"Charlatans have brought the stellar science to its present state of disrepute. Astrology is too vast, both mathematically<sup>1</sup> and philosophically, to be rightly grasped except by men of profound understanding. If ignoramuses misread the heavens, and see there a scrawl instead of a script, that is to be expected in this imperfect world. One should not dismiss the wisdom with the 'wise.'

"All parts of creation are linked together and interchange their influences. The balanced rhythm of the universe is rooted in reciprocity," my guru continued. "Man, in his human aspect, has to combat two sets of forces—first, the tumults within his being, caused by the admixture of earth, water, fire, air, and ethereal elements; second, the outer disintegrating powers of nature. So long as man struggles with his mortality, he is affected by the myriad mutations of heaven and earth.

"Astrology is the study of man's response to planetary stimuli. The stars have no conscious benevolence or animosity; they merely send forth positive and negative radiations. Of themselves, these do not help or harm humanity, but offer a lawful channel for the outward operation of cause-effect equilibriums which each man has set into motion in the past.

"A child is born on that day and at that hour when the celestial rays are in mathematical harmony with his individual karma. His horoscope is a challenging portrait, revealing his unalterable past and its probable future results. But the natal chart can be rightly interpreted only by men of intuitive wisdom: these are few.

"The message boldly blazoned across the heavens at the moment of birth is not meant to emphasize fate—the result of past good and evil—but to arouse man's will to escape from his universal thralldom. What he has done, he can undo. None other than himself was the instigator of the causes of whatever effects are now prevalent in his life. He can overcome any limitation, because he created it by his own actions in the first place, and because he has spiritual resources which are not subject to planetary pressure.

"Superstitious awe of astrology makes one an automaton, slavishly dependent on mechanical guidance. The wise man defeats his planets—which is to say, his past—by transferring his allegiance from the creation to the Creator. The more he realizes his unity with Spirit, the less he can be dominated by matter. The soul is ever-free; it is deathless because birthless. It cannot be regimented by stars.

"Man is a soul, and has a body. When he properly places his sense of identity, he leaves behind all compulsive patterns. So long as he remains confused in his ordinary state of spiritual amnesia, he will know the subtle fetters of environmental law.

"God is harmony; the devotee who attunes himself will never perform any action amiss. His activities will be correctly and naturally timed to accord with astrological law. After deep prayer and meditation he is in touch with his divine consciousness; there is no greater power than that inward protection."

"Then, dear Master, why do you want me to wear an astrological bangle?" I ventured this question after a long silence, during which I had tried to assimilate Sri Yukteswar's noble exposition.

"It is only when a traveler has reached his goal that he is justified in discarding his maps. During the journey, he takes advantage of any convenient short cut. The ancient rishis discovered many ways to curtail the period of man's exile in delusion. There are certain mechanical features in the law of karma, which can be skillfully adjusted by the fingers of wisdom.

"All human ills arise from some transgression of universal law. The scriptures point out that man must satisfy the laws of nature, while not discrediting the divine omnipotence. He should say: 'Lord, I trust in Thee, and know Thou canst help me, but I too will do my best to undo any wrong I have done.' By a number of means—by prayer, by will power, by yoga meditation, by consultation with saints, by use of astrological bangles—the adverse effects of past wrongs can be minimized or nullified.

"Just as a house can be fitted with a copper rod to absorb the shock of lightning, so the bodily temple can be benefited by various protective measures. Ages ago our yogis discovered that pure metals emit an astral light which is powerfully counteractive to negative pulls of the planets. Subtle electrical and magnetic radiations are constantly circulating in the universe; when a man's body is being aided, he does not know it; when it is being disintegrated, he is still in ignorance. Can he do anything about it?

"This problem received attention from our rishis; they found helpful not only a combination of metals, but also of plants and—most effective of all—faultless jewels of not less than two carats. The preventive uses of astrology have seldom been seriously studied outside of India. One little-known fact is that the proper jewels, metals, or plant preparations are valueless unless the required weight is secured, and unless these remedial agents are worn next to the skin."

"Sir, of course I shall take your advice and get a bangle. I am intrigued at the thought of outwitting a planet!"

"For general purposes I counsel the use of an armlet made of gold, silver, and copper. But for a specific purpose I want you to get one of silver and lead." Sri Yukteswar added careful directions.

"Guruji, what 'specific purpose' do you mean?"

"The stars are about to take an unfriendly interest in you, Mukunda. Fear not; you shall be protected. In about a month your liver will cause you much trouble. The illness is scheduled to last for six months, but your use of an astrological armlet will shorten the period to twenty-four days."

I sought out a jeweler the next day, and was soon wearing the bangle. My health was excellent; Master's prediction slipped from my mind. He left Serampore to visit Benares. Thirty days after our conversation, I felt a sudden pain in the region of my liver. The following weeks were a nightmare of excruciating pain. Reluctant to disturb my guru, I thought I would bravely endure my trial alone.

But twenty-three days of torture weakened my resolution; I entrained for Benares. There Sri Yukteswar greeted me with unusual warmth, but gave me no opportunity to tell him my woes in private. Many devotees visited Master that day, just for a [darshan](#).<sup>2</sup> Ill and neglected, I sat in a corner. It was not until after the evening meal that all guests had departed. My guru summoned me to the octagonal balcony of the house.

"You must have come about your liver disorder." Sri Yukteswar's gaze was averted; he walked to and fro, occasionally intercepting the moonlight. "Let me see; you have been ailing for twenty-four days, haven't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Please do the stomach exercise I have taught you."

"If you knew the extent of my suffering, Master, you would not ask me to exercise." Nevertheless I made a feeble attempt to obey him.

"You say you have pain; I say you have none. How can such contradictions exist?" My guru looked at me inquiringly.

I was dazed and then overcome with joyful relief. No longer could I feel the continuous torment that had kept me nearly sleepless for weeks; at Sri Yukteswar's words the agony vanished as though it had never been.

I started to kneel at his feet in gratitude, but he quickly prevented me.

"Don't be childish. Get up and enjoy the beauty of the moon over the Ganges." But Master's eyes were twinkling happily as I stood in silence beside him. I understood by his attitude that he wanted me to feel that not he, but God, had been the Healer.

I wear even now the heavy silver and lead bangle, a memento of that day—long-past, ever-cherished—when I found anew that I was living with a personage indeed superhuman. On later occasions, when I brought my friends to Sri Yukteswar for healing, he invariably recommended jewels or the bangle, extolling their use as an act of astrological wisdom.

I had been prejudiced against astrology from my childhood, partly because I observed that many people are sequaciously attached to it, and partly because of a prediction made by our family astrologer: "You will marry three times, being twice a widower." I brooded over the matter, feeling like a goat awaiting sacrifice before the temple of triple matrimony.

"You may as well be resigned to your fate," my brother Ananta had remarked. "Your written horoscope has correctly stated that you would fly from home toward the Himalayas during your early years, but would be forcibly returned. The forecast of your marriages is also bound to be true."

A clear intuition came to me one night that the prophecy was wholly false. I set fire to the horoscope scroll, placing the ashes in a paper bag on which I wrote: "Seeds of past karma cannot germinate if they are roasted in the divine fires of wisdom." I put the bag in a conspicuous spot; Ananta immediately read my defiant comment.

"You cannot destroy truth as easily as you have burnt this paper scroll." My brother laughed scornfully.

It is a fact that on three occasions before I reached manhood, my family tried to arrange my betrothal. Each time I refused to fall in with the [plans](#),<sup>3</sup> knowing that my love for God was more overwhelming than any astrological persuasion from the past.

"The deeper the self-realization of a man, the more he influences the whole universe by his subtle spiritual vibrations, and the less he himself is affected by the phenomenal flux." These words of Master's often returned inspiringly to my mind.

Occasionally I told astrologers to select my worst periods, according to planetary indications, and I would still accomplish whatever task I set myself. It is true that my success at such times has been accompanied by extraordinary difficulties. But my conviction has always been justified: faith in the divine protection, and the right use of man's God-given will, are forces formidable beyond any the "inverted bowl" can muster.

The starry inscription at one's birth, I came to understand, is not that man is a puppet of his past. Its message is rather a prod to pride; the very heavens seek to arouse man's determination to be free from every limitation. God created each man as a soul, dowered with individuality, hence essential to the universal structure, whether in the temporary role of pillar or parasite. His freedom is final and immediate, if he so wills; it depends not on outer but inner victories.

Sri Yukteswar discovered the mathematical application of a 24,000-year equinoctial cycle to our present [age](#).<sup>4</sup> The cycle is divided into an Ascending Arc and a Descending Arc, each of 12,000 years. Within each Arc fall four Yugas or Ages, called Kali, Dwapara, Treta, and Satya, corresponding to the Greek ideas of Iron, Bronze, Silver, and Golden Ages.

My guru determined by various calculations that the last Kali Yuga or Iron Age, of the Ascending Arc, started about A.D. 500. The Iron Age, 1200 years in duration, is a span of materialism; it ended about A.D. 1700. That year ushered in Dwapara Yuga, a 2400-year period of electrical and atomic-energy developments, the age of telegraph, radio, airplanes, and other space-annihilators.

The 3600-year period of Treta Yuga will start in A.D. 4100; its age will be marked by common knowledge of telepathic communications and other time-annihilators. During the 4800 years of Satya Yuga, final age in an ascending arc, the intelligence of a man will be completely developed; he will work in harmony with the divine plan.

A descending arc of 12,000 years, starting with a descending Golden Age of 4800 years, then [begins](#)<sup>5</sup> for the world; man gradually sinks into ignorance. These cycles are the eternal rounds of maya, the contrasts and relativities of the phenomenal [universe](#).<sup>6</sup> Man, one by one, escapes from creation's prison of duality as he awakens to consciousness of his inseparable divine unity with the Creator.

Master enlarged my understanding not only of astrology but of the world's scriptures. Placing the holy texts on the spotless table of his mind, he was able to dissect them with the scalpel of intuitive reasoning, and to separate errors and interpolations of scholars from the truths as originally expressed by the prophets.

"Fix one's vision on the end of the nose." This inaccurate interpretation of a Bhagavad Gita [stanza](#),<sup>7</sup> widely accepted by Eastern pundits and Western translators, used to arouse Master's droll criticism.

"The path of a yogi is singular enough as it is," he remarked. "Why counsel him that he must also make himself cross-eyed? The true meaning of nasikagram is 'origin of the nose, not 'end of the nose.' The nose begins at the point between the two eyebrows, the seat of spiritual [vision](#)."<sup>8</sup>

Because of one [Sankhya](#)<sup>9</sup> aphorism, "Iswar-ashidha,"—"A Lord of Creation cannot be deduced" or "God is not [proved](#)."<sup>10</sup>—many scholars call the whole philosophy atheistical.

"The verse is not nihilistic," Sri Yukteswar explained. "It merely signifies that to the unenlightened man, dependent on his senses for all final judgments, proof of God must remain unknown and therefore non-existent. True Sankhya followers, with unshakable insight born of meditation, understand that the Lord is both existent and knowable."

Master expounded the Christian Bible with a beautiful clarity. It was from my Hindu guru, unknown to the roll call of Christian membership, that I learned to perceive the deathless essence of the Bible, and to

understand the truth in Christ's assertion—surely the most thrillingly intransigent ever uttered: "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass [away.](#)"<sup>11</sup> \_

The great masters of India mold their lives by the same godly ideals which animated Jesus; these men are his proclaimed kin: "Whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and [mother.](#)"<sup>12</sup> "If ye continue in my word," Christ pointed out, "then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you [free.](#)"<sup>13</sup> Freemen all, lords of themselves, the Yogi-Christ of India are part of the immortal fraternity: those who have attained a liberating knowledge of the One Father.

"The Adam and Eve story is incomprehensible to me!" I observed with considerable heat one day in my early struggles with the allegory. "Why did God punish not only the guilty pair, but also the innocent unborn generations?"

Master was more amused by my vehemence than my ignorance. "Genesis is deeply symbolic, and cannot be grasped by a literal interpretation," he explained. "Its 'tree of life' is the human body. The spinal cord is like an upturned tree, with man's hair as its roots, and afferent and efferent nerves as branches. The tree of the nervous system bears many enjoyable fruits, or sensations of sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch. In these, man may rightfully indulge; but he was forbidden the experience of sex, the 'apple' at the center of the bodily [garden.](#)"<sup>14</sup> \_

"The 'serpent' represents the coiled-up spinal energy which stimulates the sex nerves. 'Adam' is reason, and 'Eve' is feeling. When the emotion or Eve-consciousness in any human being is overpowered by the sex impulse, his reason or Adam also [succumbs.](#)"<sup>15</sup>

"God created the human species by materializing the bodies of man and woman through the force of His will; He endowed the new species with the power to create children in a similar 'immaculate' or divine [manner.](#)"<sup>16</sup> Because His manifestation in the individualized soul had hitherto been limited to animals, instinct-bound and lacking the potentialities of full reason, God made the first human bodies, symbolically called Adam and Eve. To these, for advantageous upward evolution, He transferred the souls or divine essence of two [animals.](#)"<sup>17</sup> In Adam or man, reason predominated; in Eve or woman, feeling was ascendant. Thus was expressed the duality or polarity which underlies the phenomenal worlds. Reason and feeling remain in a heaven of cooperative joy so long as the human mind is not tricked by the serpentine energy of animal propensities.

"The human body was therefore not solely a result of evolution from beasts, but was produced by an act of special creation by God. The animal forms were too crude to express full divinity; the human being was uniquely given a tremendous mental capacity—the 'thousand-petaled lotus' of the brain—as well as acutely awakened occult centers in the spine.

"God, or the Divine Consciousness present within the first created pair, counseled them to enjoy all human sensibilities, but not to put their concentration on touch [sensations.](#)"<sup>18</sup> These were banned in order to avoid the development of the sex organs, which would enmesh humanity in the inferior animal method of propagation. The warning not to revive subconsciously-present bestial memories was not heeded. Resuming the way of brute procreation, Adam and Eve fell from the state of heavenly joy natural to the original perfect man.

"Knowledge of 'good and evil' refers to the cosmic dualistic compulsion. Falling under the sway of maya through misuse of his feeling and reason, or Eve—and Adam—consciousness, man relinquishes his right to enter the heavenly garden of divine [self-sufficiency.](#)"<sup>19</sup> The personal responsibility of every human being is to restore his 'parents' or dual nature to a unified harmony or Eden."

As Sri Yukteswar ended his discourse, I glanced with new respect at the pages of Genesis.

"Dear Master,' I said, "for the first time I feel a proper filial obligation toward Adam and Eve!"

1 From astronomical references in ancient Hindu scriptures, scholars have been able to correctly ascertain the dates of the authors. The scientific knowledge of the rishis was very great; in the Kaushitaki Brahmana we find precise astronomical passages which show that in 3100 B.C. the Hindus were far advanced in astronomy, which had a practical value in determining the auspicious times for astrological ceremonies. In an article in East-West, February, 1934, the following summary is given of the Jyotish or body of Vedic astronomical treatises: "It contains the scientific lore which kept India at the forefront of all ancient nations and made her the mecca of seekers after knowledge. The very ancient Brahmagupta, one of the Jyotish works, is an astronomical treatise dealing with such matters as the heliocentric motion of the planetary bodies in our solar system, the obliquity of the ecliptic, the earth's spherical form, the reflected light of the moon, the earth's daily axial revolution, the presence of fixed stars in the Milky Way, the law of gravitation, and other scientific facts which did not dawn in the Western world until the time of Copernicus and Newton."

It is now well-known that the so-called "Arabic numerals," without whose symbols advanced mathematics is difficult, came to Europe in the 9th century, via the Arabs, from India, where that system of notation had been anciently formulated. Further light on India's vast scientific heritage will be found in Dr. P. C. Ray's History of Hindu Chemistry, and in Dr. B. N. Seal's Positive Sciences of the Ancient Hindus. [Back to text](#)

2 The blessing which flows from the mere sight of a saint. [Back to text](#)

3 One of the girls whom my family selected as a possible bride for me, afterwards married my cousin, Prabhas Chandra Ghose. [Back to text](#)

4 A series of thirteen articles on the historical verification of Sri Yukteswar's Yuga theory appeared in the magazine East-West (Los Angeles) from September, 1932, to September, 1933. [Back to text](#)

5 In the year A.D. 12,500. [Back to text](#)

6 The Hindu scriptures place the present world-age as occurring within the Kali Yuga of a much longer universal cycle than the simple 24,000-year equinoctial cycle with which Sri Yukteswar was concerned. The universal cycle of the scriptures is 4,300,560,000 years in extent, and measures out a Day of Creation or the length of life assigned to our planetary system in its present form. This vast figure given by the rishis is based on a relationship between the length of the solar year and a multiple of Pi (3.1416, the ratio of the circumference to the diameter of a circle). [Back to text](#)

The life span for a whole universe, according to the ancient seers, is 314,159,000,000,000 solar years, or "One Age of Brahma."

Scientists estimate the present age of the earth to be about two billion years, basing their conclusions on a study of lead pockets left as a result of radioactivity in rocks. The Hindu scriptures declare that an earth such as ours is dissolved for one of two reasons: the inhabitants as a whole become either completely good or completely evil. The world-mind thus generates a power which releases the captive atoms held together as an earth.

Dire pronouncements are occasionally published regarding an imminent "end of the world." The latest prediction of doom was given by Rev. Chas. G. Long of Pasadena, who publicly set the "Day of Judgment" for Sept. 21, 1945. United Press reporters asked my opinion; I explained that world cycles follow an orderly progression according to a divine plan. No earthly dissolution is in sight; two billion years of ascending and descending equinoctial cycles are yet in store for our planet in its present form. The figures given by the rishis for the various world ages deserve careful study in the West; the magazine Time (Dec. 17, 1945, p. 6) called them "reassuring statistics." [Back to text](#)

7 Chapter VI:13. [Back to text](#)

8 "The light of the body is the eye: therefore when thine eye is single, thy whole body also is full of light; but when thine eye is evil, thy body also is full of darkness. Take heed therefore that the light which is in thee be not darkness."-Luke 11:34-35. [Back to text](#)

9 One of the six systems of Hindu philosophy. Sankhya teaches final emancipation through knowledge of twenty-five principles, starting with prakriti or nature and ending with purusha or soul. [Back to text](#)

10 Sankhya Aphorisms, I:92. [Back to text](#)

11 Matthew 24:35. [Back to text](#)

12 Matthew 12:50. [Back to text](#)

13 John 8:31-32. St. John testified: "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name (even to them who are established in the Christ Consciousness)."-John 1:12. [Back to text](#)

14 "We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die."-Genesis 3:2-3. [Back to text](#)

15 "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat. The woman said, The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat."-Gen. 3:12-13. [Back to text](#)

16 "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it."-Gen. 1:27-28. [Back to text](#)

17 "And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul."-Gen. 2:7. [Back to text](#)

18 "Now the serpent (sex force) was more subtle than any beast of the field" (any other sense of the body).-Gen. 3:1. [Back to text](#)

19 "And the Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed."-Gen. 2:8. "Therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken."-Gen. 3:23. The divine man first made by God had his consciousness centered in the omnipotent single eye in the forehead (eastward). The all-creative powers of his will, focused at that spot, were lost to man when he began to "till the ground" of his physical nature. [Back to text](#)