

When Worlds Collide:
Another Look at the Lunar Nodes

Kathy Allan

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You have got lost, and are trying to find your way back to your own true self.

- Lao Tzu

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Astrology is a language. If you understand this language, the sky speaks to you.

—Dane Rudhyar

Introduction

For accurate chart interpretation, the astrological symbols need to be defined correctly, and express the way they are defined. This has not been the case with the lunar nodes (hereafter referred to as the nodes). They have acquired a multitude of contradictory meanings, none of which seem empirically precise. Currently, the popular nodal paradigm is that the North Node is good and helpful, and the South Node is evil and difficult. Planets benefit through contact with the North Node and are harmed through contact with the South Node. House position is of paramount importance: the North Node house indicates the area of life to embrace, while the South Node house shows activities to avoid. In practice, this delineation does not work consistently. Some people perform well in the house tenanted by their South Node, while for others neither nodal house is dominant. In addition, a planet conjunct the North Node is not always helpful, and a planet conjunct the South Node is not always ruinous. These observations, coupled with a desire to learn how the nodes reliably functioned in a chart, were the impetus for this research.

I began with a literature review, studying where the nodal meaning originated, how it evolved, and how it worked in practice. In the science of astrology, the actions of the symbols are verified through observation. Over time, the nodes taught me their meaning. We have been interpreting them inappropriately. The current delineation rests

upon error, confusion, and omission. In the text, the misconceptions are outlined, solutions are offered, and a new method of delineation is proposed and tested in a multitude of charts. This is not a beginner's text, nor is it a cookbook, but rather a practical examination of how the nodes operate in the horoscope. It is a book primarily dedicated to natal delineation and *ex post facto* prediction, where the information given by the nodes is viewed in the context of the entire chart. International readers should be aware that the majority of charts pertain to U.S. public figures and U.S. news (writers must write what they know).

Some astrologers maintain that the nodes convey information regarding reincarnation and experiences in previous lives. With no way to prove or disprove this, I disregard it. I find that the whole chart is fated, with the nodes no more so than other points.

The text begins with a historical review of the nodes. In Chapter 1, I describe the Eastern (Jyotish) understanding of the lunar nodes, and the eclipse myth that explains the symbolism. Turning to the West where there is no traditional nodal myth, I trace the evolution of meaning over the past hundred years, with an emphasis on the contradictions and how they may be resolved.

Going back to basics, in Chapter 2, I outline the nodes, bendings, and eclipses astronomically. I look at the nodes in reference to both the lunar orbit and the seasons of the sun. I examine the differences in the energy fields of the 'North' and 'South.'

In Chapter 3, I offer a new method of natal delineation of the nodes and describe how to use the nodes in forecasting.

In Chapters 4–25, the method of delineation is applied to the charts of numerous personalities and mundane events (elections, natural disasters, and the stock market). The natal charts are delineated in depth, although the focus is on the expression of the nodal energy. I also examine prominent life events through the lens of the nodes and the most recent solar eclipse.

In Chapter 26, I summarize a Greek myth that does reflect the archetype of the nodes and illustrates the human predicament. When viewed from a perspective of the nodes, the cohesive theme of a chart becomes clear. The nodal energy animates a chart and describes a course of purposeful action that gives life meaning.

Introduction

Trained as a scientist, I initially sought to critically examine the observable action of the nodes and disregard what could not be objectively verified. My intent was to keep the study scientific—but the nodes don't roll that way! The nodal literature is permeated with a spiritual connotation I wanted to ignore, but which proved impossible. Immersed in the nodes, the enchanted otherworld quickly appeared. This is not the sole purview of the nodes, but of astrology, where planetary events mimic human experiences in a correspondence that inspires wonder and amazement, and conjures the mystery and magic of the universe.

[Astrology] represents the basic nature of the forces at work in any given situation. The true art ... is to translate these abstractions into concrete actualities.

— W.M. Davidson

Chapter 1

History

Initially in western astrology, the significance of the nodes was tied to eclipses, with which they are associated. At some point during the last hundred years, the nodes assumed meaning of their own. The North Node was compared to Jupiter and Venus, and said to bring benefits and success, while the South Node was compared to Mars and Saturn, bringing sorrow and harm. House position was important. Some astrologers thought the activities of the North Node house should be favored and the activities of the South Node house ignored, while others believed the opposite. Some made no distinction between the two nodes, and others thought we needed to work both. Some said the nodes were insignificant, while others thought they were the most important points in the chart.

Over time, the nodes became associated with fate and events over which we have no control. In horary, any point in the degree of the nodes was considered tragic or fatal, indicative of catastrophe or casualty. In the nativity, the nodes were seen as karmic indicators, providing information on previous lifetimes and serving as guideposts to spiritual evolution. They have been called an arrow, pointing the way to a

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productive future (North Node), away from the unhelpful clutches of a familiar, needy past (South Node).

Jyotish Considerations

The nodes have been used in Jyotish (Hindu) astrology for thousands of years. They are viewed as two parts of a beheaded beast or demon and behave accordingly. The North Node, known as Rahu, is the head of the dragon, while the South Node, known as Ketu, is the body or tail of the dragon. Both nodes are malefic and take the place of the three outer planets (Uranus, Neptune, and Pluto). They are considered the most powerful points in the Jyotish chart.

James Braha wrote in *Ancient Hindu Astrology* that the nodes were “animalistic and without intelligence,” concerned only with “achieving all pleasure.” Rahu represented insatiable worldly desire, but was also “capable of bringing power, fame, political success, money and beauty when beneficially placed.” It was analogous to Saturn. Rahu, possessing the head, brain, and mouth, wanted to consume everything, but since he was unable to digest what he ate, he was always hungry and never satisfied. He didn’t know when enough was enough. Ketu, who received the body without the brain, was like Mars. He was irrational, intense, compulsive, emotional, and capable of great rage and anger. Curiously, Ketu also carried the potential of spiritual understanding, enlightenment, and self-realization.

In practice, Braha noted, “... there is little discernible difference ... between the two. Both are responsible for all sorts of evils, such as incurable diseases, murder, theft, poison, snakes, fears, phobias, undiagnosable illnesses, imprisonment and on and on and on!” Jyotish astrologers believe the nodes “... are more like masses of energy than directed forces. Nor do they have the ability to cast aspects as other planets do. And although Rahu and Ketu are certainly malefics, it is often harder to know the exact injury they indicate in a horoscope.”

According to Braha, “the most detrimental effects of the nodes occur when either one is closely conjunct another planet.... That planet behaves in a weird, compulsive, and unconscious or uncontrollable way,” destroying both the planet and the house that it rules. Jyotish astrologers are undecided about the signs wherein the nodes have dignity, but since they are ‘without intelligence,’ they are better placed in Gemini and

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Virgo, the signs of Mercury, which bestow reason and critical thinking. The nodes are more powerful if they are stationing or moving direct, when they are considered 'highly positive and energizing.' They are the enemies of the Sun and Moon, and are presumed to operate poorly in the signs of the luminaries (Leo and Cancer respectively).

In India, the myth *The Churning of the Ocean* explains the origins of eclipses and gives insight into the Jyotish meaning of the nodes. According to the story, many years ago there was a great battle between the demons and the gods. The demons had won the favor of Shiva, The World-Destroyer, and were winning the war. The gods were losing, growing weak and becoming mortal. The gods went to Vishnu, the Creator-Preserver, and asked for help. Vishnu told the gods that in order to become strong once more, they had to work with the demons to churn the ocean and extract the nectar of immortality. The demons also wanted the nectar and were happy to assist. To churn the ocean, a mountain was used as a churning stick, and the king of serpents became the churning rope and wrapped himself around the mountain. With the gods at one end of the snake and the demons at the other, the churning began. After much time, thirteen forms of power sequentially emerged from the ocean. The last was the physician of the gods, holding a cup of ambrosia, the nectar of immortality. Immediately the gods and demons began fighting over the cup. Again, the gods appealed to Vishnu who transformed himself into a seductive dancing maiden. As he engaged the rapt attention of the demons, the gods secretly shared the nectar amongst themselves.

The demon Rahu was not fooled. He saw through the deceit, disguised himself as a god, positioned himself between the Sun and Moon, and sipped from the cup. The luminaries noticed his treachery and raised the alarm. Vishnu drew his sword and beheaded him. However, having tasted the nectar, Rahu had gained immortality and could not be killed. For now and forever, the dismembered demon chases after his adversaries, the Sun and Moon. At times, Rahu is successful and swallows one or the other, giving rise to an eclipse. Because the head is dismembered, the luminaries pass through his severed throat, slipping out of reach, and the pursuit begins anew.

What does the myth mean? In myth, a demon or beast symbolizes the animal instincts of the ego gone awry. The gods represent the soul. The ocean is a symbol of the unconscious, and therein is found the elixir of immortality—the god within. As Pierre Teilhard de Chardin said, *We are not human beings having a spiritual experience.*

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We are spiritual beings having a human experience. According to spiritual teaching, we are two in one: an ego and a soul, a physical body and eternal spirit, a beast and a god. The ego is concerned with the physical world and all it entails, whereas the soul is concerned with the spiritual world of the divine. While the ego acts in its own interests, the soul acts in the interest of the greater good, in willing service to a higher order.

The myth illustrates the battle between ego (demons) and soul (gods). When the story began, the ego was out of control and gaining strength, while the soul was growing weak. There was an appeal to a higher power for help and the appeal was answered. To become strong, the soul had to work with the ego to mine the unconscious and unearth the god within, thereby finding immortality. The myth explains the spiritual connotation of the South Node, the compulsive, egotistical striving of the North Node, the polarization between them, and the eternal longing for their fusion. The myth also implies that the crises associated with eclipses are encounters with the divine.

Western Considerations

Western astrology did not adopt the Jyotish meaning of the nodes. In the 17th century, William Lilly wrote that the North Node was fortunate and had the nature of Jupiter and Venus. When conjunct other planets, the North Node was good with good planets, and evil with evil planets. Conversely, the South Node was evil when conjunct good planets, and good when conjunct evil planets. Lilly wrote that while this was the long standing opinion of the ancients, it was not what he found in practice: the good North Node conjunct evil planets lessened the malevolence of the planets, and the South Node conjunct evil planets ‘doubled or trebled’ the malevolence. If a significator was conjunct the South Node and a horary question indicated a good outcome, there would be many problems, and many times the ‘whole matter came to nothing.’

Zadkiel, his early publisher, added a footnote to an early publication of *Christian Astrology*: “These points are of no consequence in nativities, except as regards the Moon, who brings benefits when she reaches the Head in the zodiac by directional motion, and evil when she reaches the Tail.”

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In 1925, Charles Carter wrote that the North Node had the nature of Jupiter and gave ‘honor and success,’ while the South Node had the nature of Saturn and brought ‘downfall and ruin.’ He added that while “some deny or question their value, others attach much importance to them.” He advised the beginning astrologer to ignore them.

Three years later, in *The Moon’s Nodes* (1928), George White wrote the nodes were a “‘disturber of the cause of the things’ ... sometimes working with and often working against the tendencies otherwise shown in the horoscope.” He found “the nodes in the main seem aligned toward material matters and mental processes, and the order or tendency of things toward what might be termed ‘luck’ ... the Head blessing our endeavors, and the Tail causing difficulties or miscarriages and frequently disgrace.” He looked at the effect of the nodes when conjunct various planets, and found that planets were ‘strengthened and improved’ with the North Node, and lost virtue when with the South Node.

To determine the action of the nodes, he looked at their influence when placed near the Ascendant and Midheaven, or in aspect to these angles. At the Midheaven, the North Node brought all forms of success, while the ‘evil influence’ of the South Node there brought ‘failure, dishonor, ignominy, and remorse.’ He found people with the South Node in the 9th, 10th, or 11th house were advocates of ‘unpopular sciences,’ although ‘such people do much service to the race, often largely reaping contumely [scorn] in return.’ He wrote the North Node on the Ascendant gave height, and the South Node on the Ascendant took it away (common with dwarfs). The South Node on the Ascendant was also associated with gross deformities (such as missing vital organs, possibly the brain). While he was writing his book, a royal princess was born and he was horrified to see the South Node within one degree of her Ascendant. Expecting the worst, he refused to pass judgment on the chart. (We’ll look at it later).

The founder of Uranian astrology, Alfred Witte, working up until 1941, made no distinction between the nodes. He considered the North and South Node to have the same meaning. Together they comprise one of six important points that unite the individual with the world, and symbolize ‘connections’ and interactions with others. Uranian astrologers consider aspects to the nodes to be significant, including the semisquare (45°), sesquisquare (135°) and semioctile (22.5°).

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Carl Payne Tobey reported in his book, *Astrology of Inner Space*, that there was no difference between the North and South Node. He wrote, "... I have investigated the Hindu use of the nodes as beneficial for the ascending node and malefic for the descending node and found absolutely no evidence of the validity of the claim, and in twenty-five years of empirical testing I should have had some verification. I find that the ascending and descending nodes function exactly the same, but I also find the points ninety degrees away from the nodes have the same characteristics."

In the *Encyclopedia of Astrology*, Nicholas Devore wrote that the natal nodes point to the location of the prenatal eclipse. He thought a planet conjunct the North Node 'would bring honors and riches,' and a planet conjunct the South Node 'would bring poverty and afflictions.' He also wrote, "The nodes of themselves merely point to places where something may happen at such and such a time—which of itself is no small matter."

Dane Rudhyar was the first astrologer to equate the nodes with spiritual growth. In *The Astrology of Personality* (1936), he wrote, "**At the Moon's North Node we see Destiny at work; at the South Node human will** (emphasis mine)... What is seen therefore through the Moon's nodes is the relationship between the 'human' will and the 'divine' will ... The former [South Node] is largely the result of the individual's conditioning by heredity and environment; the latter is the true factor of Destiny [North Node]."

He found the nodal house placement more significant than the sign and suggested this was because the nodes, like the houses, form an axis. As an opposition, the axis divided the circle into a northern half and a southern half, whereby the north referred "to spiritual power while south represented intensity of biological experiences and emotional behavior. At least this is what these directions have meant for millennia in the northern hemisphere of the globe." He considered the nodal axis as "a line of destiny' between the past and the future (the karma and dharma) of an individual."

According to Rudhyar, "The lines of nodes show us the direction of Destiny, the purpose of Destiny—and what is back of this purpose, in the past. More than anything else it tells the 'why' of individual life. Why the particular ego was projected out of the ocean of universal life—why we are born and what for At one end of this line we see the past (South Node), at the other, the future; what the personality emerged from,

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what it is meant to accomplish.... At the North Node, life is being absorbed, the substance of experience is being ingested ... and at the South Node we assimilate the contents of life, automatically, effortlessly, and eliminate the refuse.”

Rudhyar also thought, “The South Node represents the work that has been done, the well-known accomplishment, the routine performance already gone through many times, perhaps—the easy way out. The South Node has been called the point of ‘self undoing’ because we have so often a way of following the line of least resistance.” He believed the “North Node is the point of reception of spiritual power.”

Ronald C. Davison was clearly influenced by Rudhyar, and in his 1964 book *Astrology*, tied the nodes to reincarnation. He called the North Node ‘positive’ and showed the ‘native’s special task,’ while the South Node was ‘negative’ and showed ‘previous tendencies.’ Planets that were conjunct the North Node indicated qualities to be consciously developed during life, while planets conjunct the South Node showed those qualities that were “developed in past lives that were now habitual and therefore required little effort to bring into play.” He was the first to look at the dispositors, which he thought showed the area of life (house of dispositor) where the qualities of the nodal sign were to be developed or expressed.

In the 1970s, three major books were published on the nodes. In *Karmic Astrology: The Moon’s Nodes and Reincarnation*, Martin Schulman expanded Rudhyar and Davison’s view. Schulman wrote the South Node was related to the sum of past lives and experiences and pointed to behavioral patterns that could trip up the personality. It was the weakest point in the horoscope, the ‘Achilles heel’ that could trap the ego in the past. However, if the personality had a solid base, the South Node could indicate the ‘fruition of achievement.’ He believed the North Node pointed the way to the future, but only after the allure and familiarity of the South Node were released. He thought there was spiritual aid at the North Node and experiences there were related to the growth and evolution of the soul.

In *The Node Book* (1973), Zipporah Pottenger Dobyns examined the planetary nodes, as well as the nodes of the Moon. She wrote, “Tradition states that the North Node symbolizes an area of intake, where matters flow with relative ease. The South Node, in contrast, is a point of release or outflow often with an accompanying sense of stress or tension or pressure.” She believed the North Node was where we functioned

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with minimal strain and represented matters already learned. At the South Node we had to put forth effort to learn a lesson ‘and then give to the world the fruits of our learning.’ This view that the North Node represented familiarity and the South Node effort, was exactly opposite the view of Rudhyar, Davison, and Schulman, who said that effort was required at the North Node to shape the future, and that the South Node was familiar and effortless.

The source of the discrepancy was Rudhyar. After working with the nodes for forty years, he realized he had made a mistake. In *Person Centered Astrology* published in 1976, he offered a revised understanding of the nodes. Now he wrote, **“The North Node refers to whatever builds the personality ... and ‘destiny’ may be accomplished symbolically where the South Node is placed in one’s birth chart. Something greater than the self may be fulfilled there or one’s basic function in society or in the universe (emphasis mine).”**

His explanation for reversing the delineation was that, “In the past I accepted the statement the North Node hemisphere was constituted by the 180 degrees of the zodiac after the North Node following the natural order of the zodiac. However it occurred to me recently that this was not logical, for the nodes motion is retrograde.” He went on to say that his previous delineation of the nodal axis (specifically in regards to the horoscope of Mussolini given in *The Astrology of Personality*) should be ‘interpreted in a reverse manner.’ Now, in a position identical to Zipporah Dobyns, he wrote, “the North Node, I repeat, is the point of *intake*; the South Node, the point of *release* or *evacuation*.” The South Node also refers to sacrifice and what the personality no longer needs, “is in a decaying or poisonous condition, or that is the positive and creative expression of the body-mind organism.” He specifically indicated the South Node was not entirely negative and evil, though he warned of “the danger of using the negative traits of the sign.”

Thus, Rudhyar initially said the North Node pertained to the soul and destiny, and the South Node to the ego or personality. He later reversed the meaning and said the North Node was related to building the personality. The North Node house showed where “the ‘will’ should find its field of most constructive action.” The South Node possessed ‘spiritual power’ and the South Node house was related to ‘destiny’ but also loss (release or evacuation of what is no longer needed or necessary), sacrifice (sur-

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render of ego-will to God or mankind) and fated action (fulfilling one's basic function in society or in the universe). He considered 'individuality' (North Node) and 'destiny' (South Node) to be "polar opposites, if by destiny is meant one's essential relation to what is greater than your personal self."

This mix-up of meaning has compromised nodal delineation for decades. It has had significant repercussions as to which node means what, which one should be given precedence, and for what purpose. Thirty-six years after Rudhyar's amendment, the original and inaccurate interpretation is still the prevalent delineation in the mainstream literature. However, his revised understanding, which appears to be correct, is gaining ground and appears in some modern texts.

In *Eclipses* (2006), Celeste Teal wrote that the North Node is a point of intake or gain, where benefits arrive more easily and without conscious effort, whereas the South Node is a point of loss or vulnerability, or where sacrifice is required. In *Lunar Nodes: Discover Your Soul's Karmic Mission*, she wrote, "the North Node is like a cup running over. Gifts from the higher powers are coming to us and good karma is rewarded. The South Node is an empty cup; we are expected to fill it up. We can provide a service that will contribute to another soul or to the growth and evolution of the planet."

In *The Lunar Nodes: Your Key to Excellent Chart Interpretation* (2009), Judith Hill described the nodes as "two ends of a great celestial pump, where energies favorably enter at the Head and exit or drain at the Tail." She sees the nodes akin to the tides; the tide comes in at the North Node and goes out at the South Node. She found planets conjunct the North Node to be lucky, and planets conjunct the South Node to be difficult and associated with hardship. She explains that the different perspectives of the nodes in the East and the West arise from cultural differences. In the East, the purpose of life is to gain spiritual enlightenment and toward this end, sacrifice, meditation, withdrawal, and submission are favored, and associated with the South Node. In the West, these activities have little value, and the ideal is to exert the ego in competition and acquire resources and money for power and domination, the arena of the North Node.