

The Role of Alan Leo and Sepharial in the Development of Esoteric Astrology (Part II)

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Abstract

The names of late 19th–early 20th century British Theosophists and astrologers Alan Leo and Sepharial are known to students of Alice Bailey for their frequent mention in Bailey’s *Esoteric Astrology*. This study explains why these two figures merit such references and demonstrates that of the two, Leo cultivated a much more intensively Theosophical focus and in so doing, may very well have paved the way for the eventual articulation of the esoteric astrological doctrine by the Tibetan Master Djwhal Khul. Specific elements of Alan Leo’s cosmology and his astrological system are compared and contrasted to that of Bailey, and Leo’s lasting mark on astrology as the infusion of Theosophical concepts and the notion of free will into astrological literature are explored. Part I of this article appeared in the Summer 2005 issue.

Specific Elements of Alan Leo’s Esoteric Astrological System

Since it is true that Alan Leo was a student of the Theosophical literature transmitted to Blavatsky by the Masters Koot Hoomi and Morya and the Tibetan himself, it is tempting simply to attribute the obvious similarities in the general philosophies of esoteric astrology found in the works of Leo and Bailey to the influence of *The Secret Doctrine* and leave it at that. However, less easily dismissed are the numerous likenesses in individual elements of the esoteric astrological system as proposed first by Leo and subsequently by Bailey. For in many cases, there was no corollary or antecedent material discussed in Blavatsky’s *Secret Doctrine* or related writings. Discussion now turns to these striking evidences that the esoteric astrological system ultimately revealed by

Alice Bailey was at least in portions earlier grasped by Alan Leo.

Following upon the important distinction made between soul and personality in both Leo and Bailey, an astrological symbolism reflective of this distinction was specified in both. Remarkably, the astrological symbolisms are very much the same. Leo posited the Sun as the symbol of the individuality (his word for soul), and the Moon for the personality.¹ The Tibetan via Alice Bailey posited the Sun for the causal body² or soul (or sometimes even the monad),³ though for the personality ray as well.⁴ The Moon he consistently connected with form and matter,⁵ with the type of body or bodies through which the soul is manifesting,⁶ and any of the personality vehicles (meaning the physical, astral, or mental bodies), which he said can be “veiled” or indicated by the Moon.⁷ Thus, a fair degree of agreement exists on this matter, though indeed the Tibetan did associate the Sun sign with the personality ray as well.⁸

The question thus raised as to the implications of Sun symbolism may very well be answered by an important triplicity, things given in threes tending to moderate conflict, just as taught by the Pythagorean doctrine and its later incarnation as the esoteric occultism of Alice Bailey and the Tibetan. The important and mitigating triplicity here is that of Moon, Sun,

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and Ascendant, a terse formula that all good students of Bailey's *Esoteric Astrology* will recognize as the Tibetan's formula for past, present, and future of the individual person: the Moon sign indicating the sum total of past life experience, the Sun sign the equipment chosen by the soul for the present work to be done, and the Ascendant or rising sign indicating the way to follow toward the future and the full unfoldment of soul expression.⁹ Here the Sun is firmly relegated to an indication of things relevant to the personality, for the new third element (the Ascendant or rising sign) steps in to symbolize the soul.

Uncannily, Alan Leo himself, apparently not entirely under the spell of his own previously tendered formula, also boldly proclaimed the Moon, Sun, and Ascendant as the three main factors to bear in mind for individual chart analysis.¹⁰ Though Leo may have been a little muddled and the Tibetan somewhat inconsistent on this point, a main theme emerged from both of their writings which has converged on the Moon, Sun, and Ascendant as the big three symbolizing past, present, and

future, with the Moon and the Sun more on the side of the personality, and the Ascendant firmly in the court of the soul. In addition, Leo did just as the Tibetan would imply should be done some years later¹¹ and emphasized the role played by the ruler of the Ascendant,¹² though of course the Tibetan would divulge the new esoteric and hierarchical rulers for the signs, while Leo had only the traditional or exoteric rulers with which to work.

All the same, Leo maintained that the Ascendant and its ruler were directly related to the "self,"¹³ and that the Ascendant and even the entire first house of the natal chart stand for "the spiritual individual self animating a physical body through its personal ray."¹⁴ Given Leo's use of the word "individuality" to mean the soul, this is extremely close to the Tibetan's later assertions that the Ascendant indicates the nature of the soul force attempting to come into expression¹⁵ and the very soul

purpose for the given incarnation.¹⁶ There can be little doubt that both Leo and Bailey (for the Tibetan) were sounding the same note on this element of the intended true esoteric astrological system. In short, both associated the Ascendant and its ruler with the soul. For the Tibetan, this implied the esoteric ruler of the Ascendant, but both nevertheless were pointing in pretty much the same direction. Further, just as the Tibetan would later speak of the soul ray and the fact that it stays the same through many incarnations, Leo asserted the existence of a "soul ray" as well, and held that it remained the same over many incarnations, though the personality ray might change from life to life.¹⁷

In breaking down the esoteric constitution of the human being and associating its parts with various astrological symbols, Leo prefigured additional points that the Tibetan would make through Bailey. As just discussed, Leo singled out the Sun and the Moon for the soul and the personality respectively, but he also linked the Moon particularly with what the Theosophical tradition labeled *kama-manas*, a combination

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of astral and lower mental plane functioning,¹⁸ which association is certainly in line with the Tibetan's later characterization of the Moon as symbol of the astral or emotional body itself.¹⁹ Leo also linked the Earth to the physical body,²⁰ which notion the Tibetan may have also implied is the case.²¹

In perhaps what is an even more striking example of likeness between the astrological correlations posited by Leo and by Bailey for the Tibetan, there is a linkage posited by Leo between the monad and the Pole Star,²² which star of course belongs to the class of fixed stars. It was a special claim of the Tibetan's version of esoteric astrology that monadic awareness is equivalent to awareness of the energies coming from the fixed stars and non-zodiacal constellations. Thus, although Leo had in mind just the Pole Star and not fixed stars or non-zodiacal constellations in general, he was certainly on the same track the Tibetan would ultimately take in regard to the linkage of monadic awareness with the influence of the fixed stars and non-zodiacal constellations.

The role of the "crosses" is yet another area in which Leo's concepts verged more or less in the same direction as would later be taken in Bailey, though the details of Leo's concepts in this regard differed substantively from those of the Tibetan as eventually articulated in Bailey. Leo was much taken with the function of the cross form in the chart. He identified the cross made by the lines uniting the Ascendant and Descendant on one hand, and the Midheaven and fourth house cusp on the other as "the most essential part of the horoscope,"²³ revealing zodiacal signs critical to the evolutionary development of the individual person. This was his idea of a "cross," or basic structure of tests and challenges to which the individual seeker was subject. The idea of the cross was central for the Tibetan, too, but he would later speak about the crosses made by the signs, such as the cardinal, fixed, and mutable crosses as stages upon the evolutionary path in a general sense.²⁴ So here the notions of which particular crosses were of import certainly diverge, but the attempt to bring the form of the cross into chart interpretation is nonetheless present in both.

As for the zodiacal signs themselves, Leo defined them in the tropical manner, which is to say, he recognized the thirty-degree segments of the ecliptic beginning with the zero-degree Aries equinox point.²⁵ The other, sidereal manner divides the ecliptic according to the placement of key stars. It appears that the Tibetan, like Leo, accepted the tropical mapping system. One piece of evidence to this effect may be mentioned here. This is the Tibetan's simple statement that when he used the word "signs," he meant the influences of the constellations as they are represented by the signs,²⁶ or the thirty-degree divisions of the ecliptic based on the equinox and solstice points. Thus, the tropical method of defining the signs was accepted in both Leo and Bailey.

Differences Between the Leo and Bailey Presentations

It should also be said that certain features of Leo's astrological imagination on certain points would not match readily with the perspective presented in the Bailey teachings. For example, Leo wrote that the zodiac is the "aura" of the earth,²⁷ and "...the boundary line of the earth's sphere of influence...,"²⁸ a notion which certainly flies in the face of the Tibetan's later concern that astrology abandon its exclusively geocentric outlook.²⁹ In fact, contrary to Leo's picturesque assertion, the zodiac is in no way an aura or radiation from Earth; it is a collection of distant star lives of far greater influence and radiation than that given off on any level by our planet.

Portions of Leo's astrological methodology would also clash with the Tibetan's later instructions. There are several areas in which this is the case. An important one is Leo's emphasis upon the individual degrees of the zodiac. Since the zodiac is a circle, there are 360 such degrees. The entire circle can be divided in numerous ways, beyond the twelve sections of thirty degrees each constituting a sign. Leo became enamored of the many ways of dividing the circle advocated by the classical astrology of India,³⁰ and it was this method of dividing the zodiac into miniscule degree increments that Leo took to be synonymous with the astrology of the future.³¹ He even

held that the isolation of specific degrees of the zodiac was the proper method for studying fixed-star influence.³² On both counts his approach was clearly different from that proposed in Bailey's *Esoteric Astrology*.

The same could be said of Leo's orientation to the houses of the astrological birth chart. Leo banked on a very psychological reading of the houses³³ and placed great store on the planetary rulers of the signs found on the cusps (or beginning lines) of each of the houses.³⁴ These features are distinctly absent from the Tibetan's later instructions, which in fact play down the importance of the houses altogether.³⁵

Beyond these important divergences, there are a number of details and correspondences which, as given in Leo, are either wholly or partly different from what the Tibetan would give in the Bailey writings. For example, Leo articulated three levels of influence to which persons respond, the lowest being the houses of the chart, the next being the signs, with only the energies of the planets evoking response from the most evolved persons.³⁶ Of course, this stands on its head what the Tibetan would later say on the same subject via Bailey, for in that later presentation, the lowest level of astrological influence is that of the planets, which engages the personality, while the twelve zodiacal constellations and representative signs speak to the soul, and the fixed stars to the monad.³⁷

Other details also conflict. At one point, Leo let the Ascendant stand for either the soul or the personality,³⁸ and elsewhere enumerated the planets of the solar system as the physical globes of all their respective chains, except for

Mercury and Mars, which two he held were astral level planets in the same chain as our globe,³⁹ all of which assertions are likely contradicted by the information on the chain and globe positions of the planets found in the back pages of Bailey's *Esoteric Astrology*.⁴⁰

Alan Leo's Lasting Contribution

Thus, even though there are some minor and a few major divergences between the

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systems presented in Leo and Bailey, Alan Leo might be said to have made a mark, albeit a small one, on behalf of an Hierarchically-inspired esoteric astrology even before the same was done by Alice Bailey.

Leo's life and contribution to the field of astrology were treated extensively by historian of exoteric astrology Patrick Curry in his book entitled *A Confusion of Prophets*. In Curry's assessment, Leo was just another astrologer in a crowded world of occultists and metaphysicians, but

one with a particular "ambition." Yet if Leo is understood as an Hierarchical associate, it might be said that he was an astrologer with a mission rather than an ambition. Curry, however, applied the standards of the outer world to Leo, and from that perspective, perceived Leo as pursuing a personal agenda.

That agenda, according to Curry, was declared early in Leo's career as an astrologer, when Leo became clear that his intent was "to modernise the ancient system of astrology."⁴¹ That

“modernization,” as has been shown, centered around the fusion of astrology with the doctrine of the soul and its existence, and therefore with the twin doctrines of reincarnation and karma. In Leo’s mind, that modernization also was to include an emphasis upon the degree divisions of the zodiac, as drawn from classical Hindu astrology. Given that the existence of the soul as well as the doctrines of reincarnation and karma are very ancient notions, as are the degree divisions in *Jyotish*, or Vedic astrology, Leo’s “modernization” turned out to be a return ancient doctrine more than a newly revealed system.

However, it was just in this way that Leo was estimated a great success by Curry, who judged that Leo had attained his goal to “modernize” astrology by, as Curry wrote, “integrating popular astrology with esoteric occultism.”⁴² Specifically, Curry concluded that Leo’s abiding mark on the astrological world was that Leo “...wed the new middle-class astrology to esoteric magic in the form of Theosophy.”⁴³ Though readers who are familiar with Theosophical teachings and Leo’s writings on astrology in particular will puzzle over inclusion of the word “magic” in that pronouncement, it is nevertheless obvious that Leo succeeded in creating a hybrid of Theosophical teachings and astrological techniques.

The new middle-class astrology to which Curry referred was of course nothing other than popular astrology as it had become by the early twentieth century, no longer the special province of royalty and the aristocracy, with their privately patronized astrological consultants. In contrast to prior centuries, the early twentieth century saw a great increase of widely available and affordable astrological literature and services. It was this unfoldment within which Leo worked and labored for what he understood as a more inspired version of the astrological science, which was an astrological science more infused with the Hierarchical teaching as it had been revealed in his day.

That more inspired vision of astrology Leo did indeed bequeath to his world, releasing his *Esoteric Astrology* to the world chock full of Theosophical concepts and terms, serving notice that the Solar Logos and the Seven Rays

were now relevant inclusions in the astrological pantheon. Over and above this, Leo also worked a bit of that “Theosophical magic” on behalf of everyone in regard to the whole tone and philosophy of astrology, in the following way.

Up until his time, astrology had leaned rather precipitously toward defining itself as a science of fate. As Curry’s recounting of Alan Leo’s life story reveals, Leo’s own life and experience with astrological indications provided him with a crucible in which to examine this orientation, and he ultimately opted for the power of free will working in concert with wise recognition of astrological influences, rather than that of fate alone. Leo made a particular effort in his own thinking and then in his writing to distinguish between what he called on one hand fatalistic astrology, and on the other, esoteric astrology. Esoteric astrology as Leo defined it in this context was one based on the premise that character is destiny, an important shift of emphasis in his day and time. Leo thus took the position that prediction, no matter how breathtakingly accurate, was not as great a help to the individual as is the knowledge that each person has the power to create his or her own destiny through proper use of the astrological energies.⁴⁴ In sum total, then, Leo’s philosophy and the system of what he called esoteric astrology ultimately came to rest on the recognition of the soul and its life cycles, the reality of the Law of Karma, certain techniques drawn from *Jyotish* (though not its sidereal framework) added to then standard astrology, and finally, the ability of the individual to respond meaningfully to all astrological energies.

It is only a small leap from there to what the Tibetan would later say through Alice Bailey, when he explained of his esoteric astrology, “I am confining myself entirely to the theme of the unfoldment of consciousness, of meaning and of significances and of the response of [the] entity to the many influences and vibratory impacts to which it is subjected on account of its being an integral part of other and greater Lives.”⁴⁵ The response of the individual to the many circulating energies being a flexible and even fluid matter, composed mo-

ment to moment of the choices that define character, it might then be said that choice of response to circulating energies determines destiny. In fact, this is the position taken by the esoteric astrology of Alice Bailey and the Tibetan, much to the undoubted approval of Alan Leo's thereby justified soul.

Even so, Leo's thinking might be accused of having left ragged edges here and there. For example, the exact manner in which this choice centered doctrine fits together with the doctrines of reincarnation and karma calls for a certain delicate assemblage of ideas of which only a few are capable without having it spelled out. Still, Leo must be credited with having shifted the emphasis of the astrological dialogue of his time away from entrapment in fated patterns and toward the ability to work with energies. This assertion certainly helped clear the path for related notions which would be brought out in Bailey's *Esoteric Astrology*.

As thinkers advanced in their fields so often do, Leo was greeted by much incomprehension and criticism from his peers, an example of which is contemporaneous astrologer C. E. O. Carter's comment on Leo's *Esoteric Astrology* as "a big volume containing virtually nothing worth reading."⁴⁶ Later, twentieth century historian Patrick Curry would accuse Leo of being "no giant intellect," adding that Leo's study of Blavatsky had failed to cultivate much of a discerning mind in him.⁴⁷ These points could perhaps be debated, but at any rate, Leo may have been more of an intuitive than an intellectual, which is not necessarily any great failing.

In all fairness, it should be said that Leo seems to have caught the vision of an Hierarchically inspired esoteric astrological system, or at least remnants thereof. Evidence that he suspected even more than that of which he was certain seeped out in a plea placed in the front pages of his *Esoteric Astrology*. Opined Leo, "If we could obtain more information concerning the Seven Rays, the seven sub-divisions of each, and their connection with the Seven planets, we should know considerably more concerning esoteric astrology."⁴⁸

Epilogue and Epitaph

Alan Leo was released from his physical vehicle in 1917,⁴⁹ just a couple of years before the Tibetan would take up his work with Alice Bailey. The torch seems to have been passed during this short time, for as is now known, the very things for which Leo sought in his plea to the ethers were granted throughout the period that the Tibetan Master worked with Alice Bailey. In Bailey's *Esoteric Astrology* begun some twenty-two years after Leo's transition, the Tibetan unveiled just the type of information Leo had specifically requested, provided via the abundant discussion of the nature of the seven rays found throughout the Bailey corpus. A continuity of vision and interest is thus suggested.

As a fitting tribute to one who appears to have been a forerunner in the dissemination of the esoteric astrological doctrine, an "esoteric epitaph" for Alan Leo might be taken from the Tibetan's own estimation of Leo's writings. It might say:

Let rest the soul of Alan Leo,
for he "approaches the closer
to the esoteric interpretation of astrology,
whilst Sepharial is purely exoteric."⁵⁰

May it be hoped that Sepharial would take no offense.

1 Alan Leo. *Esoteric Astrology*. Destiny Books, 1913/1983, p. 114, 131.

2 Alice A. Bailey. *Esoteric Astrology*. Lucis, 1951, pp. 508 - 509.

3 Alice A. Bailey. *A Treatise on Cosmic Fire*. Lucis, 1925, p. 765.

4 Bailey. *Esoteric Astrology*, pp. 15 - 17.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 277.

6 Alice A. Bailey. *A Treatise on White Magic*. Lucis, 1934, p. 436.

7 Bailey. *Esoteric Astrology*, p. 219.

8 *Ibid.*, pp. 16 -17.

9 *Ibid.*, pp. 18 - 19; Bailey. *A Treatise on White Magic*, pp. 435 - 436.

10 Leo. *Esoteric Astrology*, p. 139.

11 Bailey. *Esoteric Astrology*, pp. 222, 513 - 514.

12 Leo. *Esoteric Astrology*, p. 149.

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- 13 *Ibid.*, p. 83.
- 14 *Ibid.*, p. 90.
- 15 Bailey. *A Treatise on White Magic*, p. 436.
- 16 Bailey. *Esoteric Astrology*, pp. 18 – 19.
- 17 Leo. *Esoteric Astrology*, p. 102.
- 18 *Ibid.*, p. 261.
- 19 Bailey. *Esoteric Astrology*, pp. 297 – 298.
- 20 Leo. *Esoteric Astrology*, p. 261.
- 21 Bailey. *Esoteric Astrology*, p. 126.
- 22 Leo. *Esoteric Astrology*, p. 261.
- 23 *Ibid.*, p. 47.
- 24 Bailey. *Esoteric Astrology*, pp. 553 – 575.
- 25 Leo. *Esoteric Astrology*, p. 37.
- 26 Bailey. *Esoteric Astrology*, p. 410.
- 27 Leo. *Esoteric Astrology*, p. 39.
- 28 *Ibid.*, p. 63.
- 29 The Tibetan stated in Bailey's *Esoteric Astrology*, p. 4, "...the solar system must no longer be regarded as a point around which the zodiac revolves...."
- 30 His *Esoteric Astrology* opens with a two-page spread of the zodiac divided and subdivided in the manner of Hindu astrology, or Jyotish. However, Jyotish is sidereal, which system Leo did not embrace, for his planetary placements are in the tropical system. Hence, Leo seized upon only portions of Jyotish.
- 31 Leo. *Esoteric Astrology*, pp. 36, 37, 39, 42.
- 32 *Ibid.*, p. 276.
- 33 *Ibid.*, pp. 51, 52.
- 34 *Ibid.*, p. 45.
- 35 Bailey. *Esoteric Astrology*, pp. 209, 464.
- 36 Leo. *Esoteric Astrology*, p. 46.
- 37 Bailey. *Esoteric Astrology*, pp. 57 – 58.
- 38 Leo. *Esoteric Astrology*, p. 139.
- 39 *Ibid.*, p. 15.
- 40 Bailey. *Esoteric Astrology*, p. 693.
- 41 Patrick Curry. *A Confusion of Prophets*. Collins and Brown, 1992, p. 123.
- 42 *Ibid.*, p. 159.
- 43 *Ibid.*, p. 161.
- 44 *Ibid.*, p. 132.
- 45 Bailey. *Esoteric Astrology*, p. 292.
- 46 As reported in Curry. *A Confusion of Prophets*, p. 145.
- 47 *Ibid.*, p. 159.
- 48 Leo. *Esoteric Astrology*, p. 20.
- 49 James H. Holden. *A History of Horoscopic Astrology*. American Federation of Astrologers, 1996, p. 194.
- 50 Bailey. *Esoteric Astrology*, p. 132.

