

# The Eastern Window

by Penny Farrow

**Editor's Note:** Cross ventilation produces a breath of fresh air. It is desirable in a house and even in a magazine! In this spirit, we are featuring a series of short articles designed to make some of the basic building blocks and ideas of Vedic astrology more accessible to all. We anticipate that opening the Eastern Window can clarify the complementarity between great astrological traditions.

## What's it all about, Alfie?

This is the title of a very popular song used to promote the film *Alfie*, released in 1966. The opening lyrics are timeless and relevant:

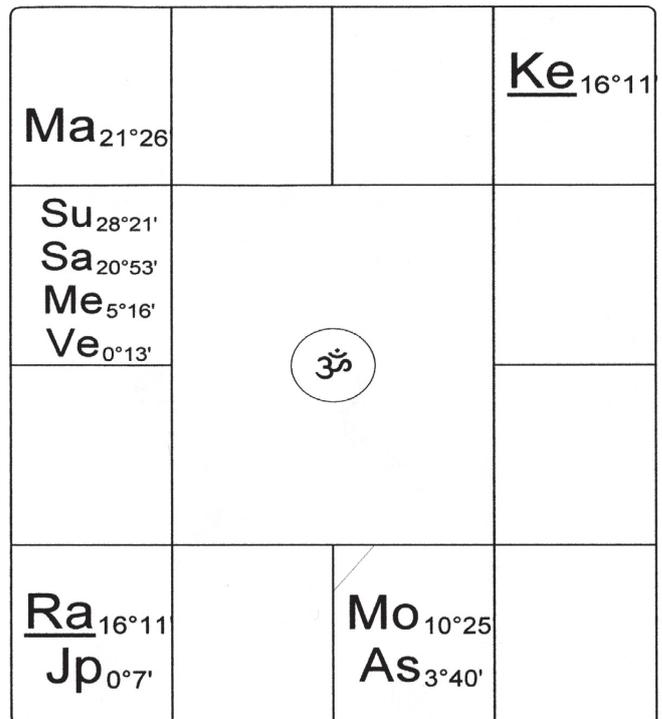
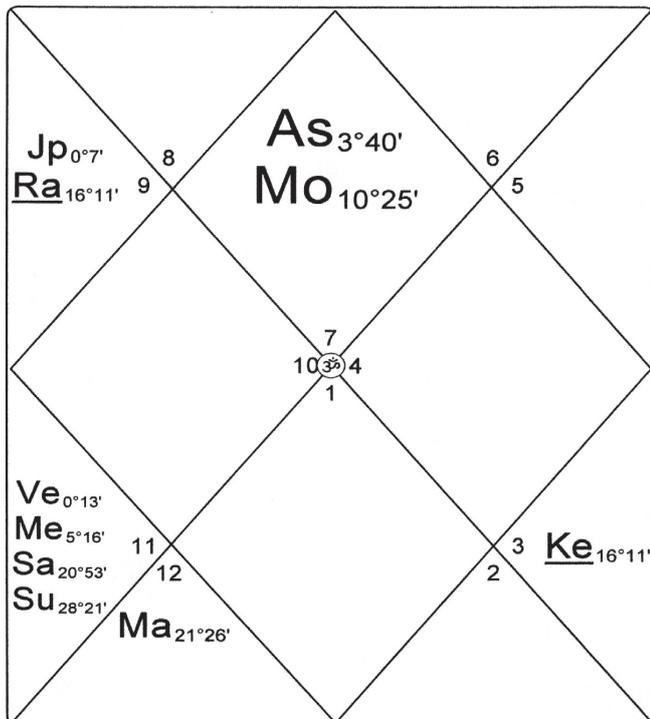
“What's it all about, Alfie?  
Is it just for the moment we live?  
What's it all about when you sort it out, Alfie?  
Are we meant to take more than we give?  
Or are we meant to be kind?”

A ubiquitous question astrologers are often asked is “What is my purpose?” My Indian clients and others who follow Eastern teachings might ask, “What is my dharma?”

Vedic astrology is often pigeonholed as focusing on objective material reality and prediction instead of examining psychology, modus operandi, and, yes, purpose. Nothing could be further from the truth. However, culturally speaking, in the Indian tradition these latter questions are usually addressed to one's spiritual preceptor rather than to the Jyotishi. But this does not mean that Vedic astrology lacks the insights and tools to delve deeply into the subjective.

The Vedic tradition birthed perhaps the earliest framework for understanding these most existential concerns. Pre-dating by eons the beautiful modern explorations of these questions — such as Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs<sup>1</sup> — is the Vedic concept of the four *purusharthas*. This ancient teaching resembles Maslow's pyramid enough that one might wonder if he wasn't one of those ancient rishis now dressed up in Western garb to re-establish these basic truths.

## Antonin Scalia • North Indian and South Indian charts, Lahiri ayanamsha



The very word *purushartha* can be broken down into its two component parts: *purusha* and *artha*. When *artha* comes at the end of a compounded expression, it can be translated as “for the purpose of.” *Purusha* is one of those words that can mean so many things, depending on context; however, for our purposes, let’s go with “being” or “existing.” So, essentially, we can say the four *purusharthas* are the four basic purposes or aims of life. All four are vital to living a balanced life.

What are they? In Maslow’s model, the first two levels of his pyramid are about basic needs — both physiological and psychological — which if not met will truncate the ability to move toward higher values in life. This would equate to the *purushartha* called **Artha**: a life that is fundamentally organized around the pursuit of security in all its attributes — shelter, food, education, job, etc. It usually translates into a focus on money as the means to ensure the future.

The next *purushartha* correlates somewhat with Maslow’s next level, which he frames as love and belonging. **Kama** is defined as the pursuit of enjoying and experiencing life, including love and relationship, but we can generalize it as seeking that which we like and avoiding that which we don’t like.

In nature, we see these two operating in the right balance through a kind of species intelligence. My teacher liked to say, “You will not see a hungry cat rolling around playfully in the sun. Food comes first (Artha) and then the pleasure (Kama).” He observed that only man can mix this up. It is called credit card debt. Take the cruise and then work to pay it off.

In fact, when traditionally taught, the *purusharthas* depart from Maslow’s pyramid by putting **Dharma** first, as it is the great divide between humans, who have free will, and the rest of the plant and animal kingdom. However, there is, in some animals, a kind of species dharma that drives them to sacrifice in order to protect their young — in the case of dogs, for example, sacrificing for their alpha leader. But this is not equivalent to the capacity for self-reflection, which is enabled by the development of consciousness that culminates in the human nervous system.

The view that Dharma is the great dividing point and should be the basis of a human life is completely validated by the structure of the astrological chart, as we will soon see.

Dharma can be expressed simply as the golden rule: Do the right thing, do what needs to be done without harm or selfishness. Live your life in accordance with natural law. This is similar to the third level of Maslow’s pyramid and his concept of esteem in its higher expression, but again, the two are not identical. We feel better about ourselves and have self-respect when we are not engaging in “the end justifies the means” behaviors.

And the final *purushartha* is **Moksha** — complete freedom grounded in the realization of the unbounded fullness that unites everyone and everything. It represents a cognitive shift of functioning from searching for fulfillment in the material world to the understanding that fullness is already there and simply needs to be revealed. This would correlate with Maslow’s concept of self-actualization at the top of his pyramid.

The four *purusharthas* are mapped in the astrological chart to four trines. The Dharma trine includes houses 1, 5, and 9; the Artha trine is 2, 6, and 10; the Kama trine is 3, 7,

and 11; and the Moksha trine is 4, 8, and 12. Note that the important 1st house, the seed of the tree of the entire chart, is a *dharma sthana* (“place of dharma”).

Finding the predominant *purushartha* is not as simple as counting the number of planets in the relevant houses, though. Certainly, if a majority of planets are making a particular trine, there will be an emphasis on that *purushartha*. The trick is to determine which way it will play out. There are specific guidelines for assessing which *purusharthas* predominate and whether they work together productively or provide a lifetime of paradox.

Let’s look at an example of a chart clearly dominated by Dharma. (See **Figure**, facing page.) Whatever your political leanings might be, there is no question that late Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia devoted his entire life to the pursuit of his vision of justice. Note that six out of his nine *grahas* (“planets”) are in the Dharma trines (houses 1, 5, and 9), and most importantly, that includes all three of his dharma lords (Venus, Saturn, and Mercury, respectively). It is always good to note where the Ascendant lord resides, since as a Dharma lord, its location in a Dharma house is a strong signal to examine the Dharma combinations carefully. Scalia centered his life and career based on his deeply held beliefs, which constituted acting in strict accordance with the law.

We could spend an entire article analyzing the ins and outs of how this predominant *purushartha* played out in Scalia’s life, why he was so passionate about upholding the letter of the law, and his personal style in doing so. Suffice it to say that understanding the dominance of Dharma is a huge piece of understanding Scalia.

Once you start to look into this way of approaching a chart, you will find that analysis of all four *purusharthas* is an insightful tool for assessing people’s priorities as they move through life and as they interact with others who might have a different emphasis from theirs. Becoming fluent with the *purusharthas* can provide the key to answering that gnawing question: What is my purpose in life? What’s it all about, Alfie?

### Chart Data and Source

**Antonin Scalia**, March 11, 1936; 8:55 p.m. EST; Trenton, NJ, USA (40°N13’, 74°W36’); AA: BC/BR in hand.

### Reference

1. A. H. Maslow, “A Theory of Human Motivation,” in *Psychological Review*, (1943), No. 50, pp. 370–396, <http://psychclassics.yorku.ca/Maslow/motivation.htm> (accessed in January 2017).

© 2017 Penny Farrow – all rights reserved

**Penny Farrow** has an M.S. degree from Cornell University and has had an extensive career as a teacher, researcher, and businesswoman. She has been involved in the Vedic tradition since 1971. She has studied Jyotisha intensively since 1991, primarily under the personal tutelage of Hart deFouw, and taught Jyotisha and Sanskrit at Vedic Vidya Institute in San Rafael, California for eight years. Penny was honored with a certificate from Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan for promoting Jyotisha in the United States. She now resides in Florida, practicing and teaching Jyotisha and Sanskrit full time. Telephone: (415) 497-2014; e-mail: [info@vedicchart.com](mailto:info@vedicchart.com); web-site: <http://www.vedicchart.com>