

Indra's Net and Astrology

An Update to "Astrology and the New Physics"

by William Keepin, Ph.D.

The earlier article, "Astrology and the New Physics," offers a glimpse of how astrology can be understood as an application of the fractal nature of consciousness. To shed further light on this, it is helpful to invoke the ancient mystical insight known as Indra's Net, conceived by *rishis* of yore in Hindu and Buddhist traditions to represent the mystical oneness of reality and its intricate fractal structure.

Indra's Net is imaged as a vast lattice of glistening jewels, such that if you look closely into the facets of any particular jewel, you see all the other jewels reflected there. Each jewel contains in its own facets the reflection of all the others. Moreover, looking closely at the reflected jewels in any one facet, you discover that each of these reflections contains (in its facets) a yet smaller reflection of all the jewels. The result is a vast network of self-similar lattices of jewels reflected on ever smaller scales, as you look ever more closely into the facets of any one jewel. This magnificent image portrays the esoteric structure and unitive essence of divine consciousness: As above, so below — the microcosm replicates the macrocosm. Indra's Net is one of the earliest representations of the fractal structure of consciousness — presented in a compelling visual illustration that hints at the intricate relationship between the one and the many.

When we imagine Indra's Net in our mind's eye, most of us readily visualize a magnificent array of glistening jewels. And without thinking about it, we generally visualize the jewels as being of roughly the same size, in a stationary array.

Let us now imagine that we bring Indra's Net into space-time manifestation: We add spatial and temporal variation. Spatial variation means that the jewels will be of all different sizes, and we might further suppose that, say, ten of these jewels are especially huge compared to all the others. Temporal variation means that we set all the jewels into motion, and let us suppose that the ten largest ones are moving in, for example, elliptical orbits (sharing one point of focus).

Now, if you look into the facets of each particular jewel, you see not only all the other jewels reflected there, but also the dynamic movement of all these jewels, replicated in miniature. Thus the swirling motions of the entire network of jewels are replicated in the facets of each single jewel. In particular, you'll see the movements of the ten largest jewels as a dominant dynamic feature in the facets of each jewel. Hence, each jewel "contains" within itself, in some sense, the entire cosmos of jewels and its dynamic evolution over time. Given the predominance of the ten largest (planetary-sized) jewels, there will naturally be a corresponding predominance of their motions within the reflections of each jewel in the lattice.

This metaphorical thought experiment offers a simple visual image of an astrological ontology.¹ In summary: Take Indra's Net, add space and time, and you get astrology (or some form of astrological ontology and hermeneutic). Astrological ordering is thus the natural and inescapable consequence of the oneness of consciousness as it comes into the (fractally structured) *manyness* of space-time manifestation. The result is a vast cosmos of myriad intercon-

nected self-similar patterns — in space, in time, in matter — manifesting on vastly different scales. Time itself has a fractal structure, with temporal microcycles replicated within longer temporal macrocycles (which is how the astrological technique of "progressions" works).

Indra's Net, with the addition of spatial and temporal variation, offers a visual image of what we might call a dynamic fractal — a fractal that evolves over time — which is the essence of how astrology works.

The self-similar structures of a fractal are sometimes called **holons**. Some observers have assumed that astrological correlations must be the result of causal links between holonic levels — either "downward" causation (planets influencing people) or "upward" causation (people influencing planets). Neither is the case. There is no larger holon causing effects in a smaller holon, or vice versa. Astrological correlations are not due to physical causes; they are due to the mystical oneness of existence, which manifests intrinsically in fractal-like structures. The holons themselves are not the oneness, although they are connected to it from within. The oneness lies in the interiority beyond the manifestation — which is one and the same process going on inside the stars and inside you. When Jesus said, "I and the Father are one," or the ancient *rishis* proclaimed *tat tvam asi* ("thou art that"), they were speaking beyond all appearances and manifestations to this innermost essence of divine being — total mergence with the living spirit. This is true oneness; everything else derives from it.

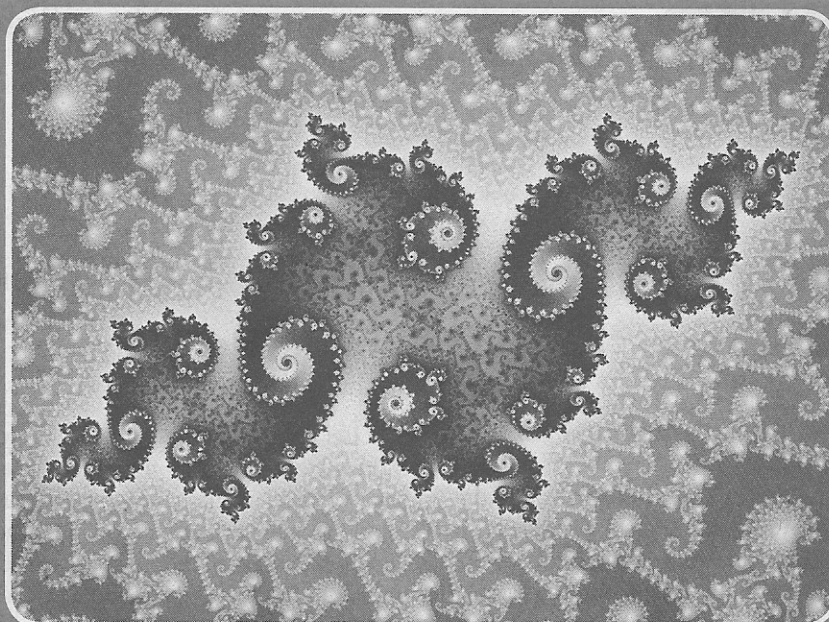
Fractals mimic the relationship between divine process and manifest creation. The Mandelbrot fractal, for

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example, is the consequence of a single, simple process. Mathematically, it is the simplest of all nonlinear processes.² Yet, this one simple process gives rise to the vast — indeed infinite — complexity of the Mandelbrot set. In close analogy, the entire cosmos, in all its depth and rich complexity, is the consequence of a single divine process. As Meister Eckhart expressed this, “God is a simple essence.” Unite with that essence, and you are united with everything. Identify with that essence, and everything exists within you.

We can carry our imaginal thought experiment with Indra's Net a step further by supposing that new jewels are constantly being created or “born” afresh, emerging into existence at various points in space-time. Let us imagine that new jewels are created in a certain way: They manifest initially as a transparent mystical liquid, which then rapidly freezes into a solid jewel. We can further imagine that, when the jewel first manifests in liquid form, the light emanating from all the other jewels is impressed upon its sensitive, permeable surface just as it freezes into form, thereby delicately etching into its surface a permanent replica or a subtle engraving of the state of the cosmos at that point in space-time. This jewel, then, bears this unique imprint from that point onward, serving as a kind of ambassador to the future from the unique space-time moment of its birth. As time moves forward, one can observe the dynamic dance of all the other jewels reflected in the facets of this one jewel. These reflections are superimposed upon this jewel's particular etching and are thus mediated in certain ways, according to their interactions with the unique imprint that this jewel carries from the moment of its first emergence into manifestation.

This gives us a glimpse of how astrological transits work. The reason the planets are such a central focus in astrology is not that they cause anything; Pluto does not send down “rays” that influence us to do Plutonic things. The reality is far more profound and subtle



A “Julia Island” appears in the super-magnified Mandelbrot set

than that. The planets and the Earth and humanity are the same living process — unfolding at vastly different scales. The planets provide the most convenient “holonic” scale by which to read the larger cosmic process as it unfolds in time: They are far enough away to see the big picture, yet close enough to observe what's going on.

The planets are alive — inside us. Not only the planets, but the entire cosmos is alive in each one of us. This is not some facile New Age metaphor; it is the living truth. This is the esoteric reality expressed by *tat tvam asi* — or by “I and the Father are One.” It means, to give a particular example, that the living process taking place at this very moment inside the planet Neptune is simultaneously taking place inside you. You and Neptune (and all the planets and the entire cosmos) are the living expression of a single dynamic unfoldment — moment to moment — of the one divine essence. And this is why astrology “works.” Astrology is merely the (imperfect and incomplete) human science that results from the perfect and complete divine oneness, fractally manifest throughout the cosmos.

Until recently, Indra's Net could be dismissed as an ancient mystical image, utterly irrelevant to our modern scientific era. But today, science is discovering its

own version of Indra's Net in the emerging fields of fractal geometry and chaos/complexity theory — which are proving to be extraordinarily powerful. Yet, these inspiring developments may be just the tip of the iceberg. The ultimate “integral science” or unified theory of everything — the holy grail so ardently pursued by orthodox scientists and new paradigm thinkers alike — may one day emerge in the shocking (and, to some, unwelcome) form of astrology or some fractal generalization thereof. For astrology is simply a practical and integral application of the inherently fractal nature of consciousness.

Notes

1. The supposition that ten jewels are planetary-sized is arbitrary, chosen to reflect local conditions relevant to us humans, but this does not limit the metaphor. At other places in the vast universe of jewels, there could be other dominant spatial and temporal patterns, but the same principle still applies: Each jewel reflects in its facets the universe as seen from its particular position in the space-time universe.

2. Mathematically, the process is $Z_{n+1} = Z_n^2 + c$, a quadratic function that is the simplest of all nonlinear processes. Moreover, since every analytic function is locally quadratic (via Taylor series expansion), the fractal structure of the Mandelbrot set is universal to all nonlinear analytic functions.

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