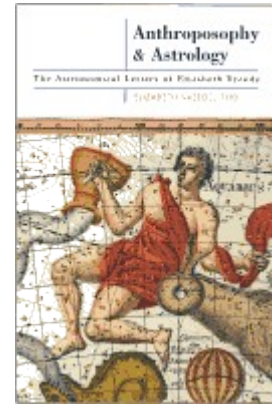


# ANTHROPOSOPHY & ASTROLOGY



## *The Astronomical Letters of Elizabeth Vreede*

**ELIZABETH VREEDE, PH.D.**

Introduction by **NORMAN DAVIDSON,**

author of *Astronomy and the Imagination* and *Sky Phenomena*

### **Contents**

Foreword by Norman Davidson (extract below)

Introduction

YEAR ONE: September 1927– August 1928

1. Astronomy and Anthroposophy
2. Concerning Rhythms and Constellations
3. On the Diurnal Movement of the Stars
4. The Annual Movement of the Sun
5. On the Annual Movement of the Sun and Stars
6. Concerning Our Planetary System
7. Concerning the Movements of Venus and Mercury: The Easter Festival
8. More About the Planetary World
9. Eclipses of the Sun and Moon: Whitsuntide
10. More About the Eclipses: The Saros Period
11. The Precession of the Equinoxes
12. More About the Precession of the Equinoxes: The Nutation

YEAR TWO: September 1928 – August 1929

1. When Mercury Stood in Libra: The Writing of the Stars
2. The Nature of Astrology
3. More About Astrology in the Light of Spiritual Science
4. Isis-Sophia
5. The Life Between Death and Rebirth in the Light of Astrology I
6. The Life Between Death and Rebirth in the Light of Astrology II
7. The Life Between Death and Rebirth in the Light of Astrology III
8. The Horoscope
9. The Future of Astrology: The Life of Christ Viewed in Terms of Astrology
10. Comets I
11. Comets II
12. Comets III

YEAR THREE: September 1929 – August 1930

1. Comets IV: Shooting Stars and Meteors: Cosmic Iron
2. The World of the Stars I: Planets and Fixed Stars
3. The World of the Stars II: The Spiritual Beings in the Stars
4. The World of the Stars III: The Human Being and the Stars

5. The World of the Stars IV: Plants and Stars
6. The World of the Stars V: Nebulae
7. The World of the Stars VI: Nebulae and Variable Stars
8. The World of the Stars VII: New Stars
9. The Copernican System
10. Copernicus, Kepler, and Their Systems: The Movement of the Apsides I
11. The Movement of the Apsides II: Glacial Epochs
12. The World Ages

## **FOREWORD**

By NORMAN DAVIDSON

Copyright © Norman Davidson and Anthroposophic Press, 2001

At the living center of this book lies the mystery of the future relationship between the human being and the stars. At the heart of this mystery there exists a huge turning-point — a reversal between the old and the new which constitutes a way upward and forward into a changed human consciousness and an inner re-arrangement of the world. It is as if our planet would take a new place in the universe — a shift in place as fundamental as the one it took with the Copernican revolution. For the new reversal involves a deep inside-out turning, a surpassing of past knowledge of the human being's birth out of the universe, and a dawning realization of the birth of a new cosmos out of the human being.

What this means moves like a warm breath of life through the pages of this book. The Dutch scientist and astronomer Dr. Elisabeth Vreede is the bold and knowledgeable messenger of this new cosmic order.

She presents it in a mood of unswerving devotion and trust toward her teacher Rudolf Steiner, and writes with a touching candor that arises out of her sense that in these monthly mathematical-astronomical Letters to members of the Anthroposophical Society, she is sharing something intimate about the world with friends. They were written over a three-year period, starting in September 1927, and also arose out of her role as Leader of the Mathematical-Astronomical Section of the School of Spiritual Science at the Goetheanum in Dornach, Switzerland.

The sky, the universe, is so immense and magnificently complex, that any theory about its working can be made to fit into it. Just this makes it so easily abused,

concerning its nature, by superficial or sentimental treatment in the process of it being “spiritualized” by the human mind. The realm of stars is easy to fantasize about and misunderstand, especially with the support of ancient star lore. But Vreede is no sentimentalist. What distinguishes this book and makes it important is the fact that its author is a clear-minded scientist on the one hand, and an extremely earnest and well-informed student of Steiner’s anthroposophy which itself is a “spiritual science” and which, in a thoroughly modern way, unites again the realms of Art, Science and the Spirit.

Three themes can be seen to stand behind this book. One is the descent of cosmic forces into the physical, and their fashioning of nature and the human being. This has to do with the unfolding of evolution out of higher realms. A second theme is the falling away of the human being from these forces of origin, and the individual human being’s struggle to assert and strengthen itself in the external world without support from the forces of the past. A third theme is the ascent of the human being, through its own inner strength, to a new harmony with the divine; to spiritually creative work out of freedom.

Here, the human being comes to influence the planets, instead of the other way round. A new astrology indeed. The path upward was made possible, and traveling it was prefigured, in the wholly transformative resurrection event in Palestine. The three magi were, one could say,

the last genuine astrologers of the ancient world. In a final deed of insight, they bore witness to the earth’s star of destiny, and laid the gift of their occult art at the feet of One who was to carry the spirit of the earth’s future.

With this, there is brought to mind the Pistis Sophia (Faith Wisdom), a Gnostic text of the early Christian centuries. Written in the Coptic language, it describes the reappearance and further teachings of Christ to his disciples some years after the Resurrection. In his *The Secret Books of the Egyptian Gnostics* (MJF Books, 1986) the French scholar and researcher Jean Doresse paraphrases part of the text thus: Jesus . . . abolished the course of Fate; he changed the regular movement of the spheres into an alternating movement, so that the planets could no longer exert their malign influence

upon men, and . . . even the conjurations of the astrologers — hitherto regarded as all-powerful — became meaningless.”

One is also reminded of the words of the Roman Christian theologian Tertullian (c. 160–c. 230) quoted by Rudolf Thiel in his astronomical work *And There Was Light: The Discovery of the Universe* (Andre Deutsch, 1958): “The magical relationships in the heavens existed only up to the appearance of Christ. Through Christ the human being was raised from servant of the stars to master of the stars.” Then, like a harmonic overtone from the same string centuries later, there come the words of the Grail messenger Kundrie to the knight Parzival as he approaches his spiritual goal. The poet Wolfram von Eschenbach describes her at that moment as naming the seven classical planets, which include sun and moon, and declaring that these are “the bridle of the firmament”, adding that all which they “embrace within their orbits, whatever they shed their light on, marks the scope of what it is for you to attain and achieve.” The human hand takes hold of the bridle of heaven.

Aspects of this tremendous reversal residing deep down in the heart of the human being and of evolution, weave through Vreede’s monumental study of human and cosmic life, with the visible starry sky mediating between these two in the clear air of thought and the laws of practical, observational astronomy. She looks upward with the care and expertise of a star farmer and turns over the soil of the modern rocky sky, so that it can be shaped and grown in by the human soul and spirit. She works at preparing for the human being to begin cultivating the stars, in addition to humanity being an offspring of the stars. Behind all this a new astrology (star study) is sought, a new working together of the human and the cosmic — even a mutual working together between them. A new star wisdom (astrosophy) becomes coincident with the cosmic researches of anthroposophy.

In her husbandry of the heavens, Vreede turns over many stones fearlessly. Some of them involve the researches of spiritual science itself. Early on, in the Letter of March 1928, she ventures into the territory of Steiner’s descriptions of lemniscate-type (like figures of 8) movements that he had spoken of in connection with the sun and planets. With clear-minded decisiveness she states that such movements cannot be represented by any abstract scheme. For it is not an intellectual explanation of the universe that is

needed, but a new connection of human feeling and will with the cosmos. Every representation of such things, whether in words or diagrams, she says, cannot be otherwise than one-sided.

Then comes the difficult question of Steiner's references to a switch in the names, in earlier times, between the planets Mercury and Venus. Right away she makes it clear that the astronomers Ptolemy of Alexandria (c. AD 90–168) and Copernicus (1473–1543) gave the same names to each of these planets (e.g., the name *Mercury* was given to the same planet by both astronomers) and that the Copernican system only changed their positions in relation to the sun and earth of an earlier astronomy. She indicates a time (speed of movement) relationship in determining the sequence of planets in the earth-centered Ptolemaic system, as opposed to a spatial and physical relationship in the sun-centered Copernican system.

This distinction between the above two planetary systems is indeed justified. Ptolemy's system also rested on an ancient knowledge of the spiritual spheres of the planets (such as was experienced after death) and had the earth-centered sequence: Moon, Mercury, Venus, Sun. Seen from the earth in terms of time, Mercury moves back and forward in the sky (among the stars and to left and right of the sun) swifter than Venus.

Also, this movement of Mercury keeps closer to the sun than Venus' similar movement to either side of the sun — so later, in considering orbits round the sun, Mercury was looked upon as physically closer to the sun than Venus. Therefore the Copernican sequence, if experienced from the earth, is: Moon, Venus, Mercury, Sun.

Vreede goes on to speak of a consequent transposition between the spiritual spheres of the two planets and their physical orbits. Certainly, on paper, drawn with circles concentric to the earth and to the sun, the two systems of spiritual spheres and physical orbits can overlap. Yet, remembering Vreede's earlier caution on the inadequacies of trying to represent externally the lemniscatory movements of planets, any scheme of overlapping circles threatens to equate an abstract diagram of physically-conceived orbits with inner spiritual experience of the planets.

But an important thing for the reader to learn here is that Ptolemy's old-world, traditional Venus was the same planet as Copernicus' Venus of today.

In the Letter of July 1928, Vreede discusses the slow movement of the sun's spring position round the zodiac of fixed stars, which is measured in thousands of years. Astronomically this movement is called the precession of the spring equinox. If the zodiacal constellations are all considered to be relatively the same length along the sun's path, then today the spring position will move (westward) through one constellation in just over 2000 years. Such a length of time is said to mark out the significant years of particular cultures, such as the Ancient Indian, Persian, Egyptian and Babylonian, etc. However, it is important to note, as Vreede does in her next Letter and in the one of July, 1930, that the beginning of a cultural period should be measured from when the spring sun is in the middle part of a constellation. This reckoning is particular to anthroposophy, and offers an explanation as to why Steiner speaks of the beginning of our modern age (of the consciousness soul) taking place in the 15th century, when the spring sun was well within the conventional fixed-star constellation of Pisces.

Here the reader should be cautioned when studying details of Vreede's long-term dating of events, such as early cycles of cultural periods, movements of the earth's perihelion point through the seasons, ice ages, etc. It has to be considered that, depending on the context, the twelve sections of the zodiac can be measured from the beginnings or centers of each of the following: 1) equal divisions of constellations; 2) the conventional unequal divisions on star charts; or 3) slightly different unequal divisions (to the conventional ones) also used by Vreede and anthroposophical calendar makers. A mixture of these could even prove unavoidable. Anomalies of calculation may be found to be lying in wait.

While explaining the slow movement of the sun's position in spring in the Letter of July 1928, Vreede is drawn into an inevitable discussion of the difference between the traditional astrologer's zodiac (tropical) and the astronomer's zodiac (sidereal). The traditional astrologer's zodiac has the sun's spring position as its starting point. It is a sun zodiac, oriented to the cycle of the seasons of the year, the festivals, and the relationship of sun to earth. It marks out twelve equal "signs" round the sky, behind which lie the "constellations" of fixed stars. The sun's spring position, along with the twelve "signs" attached to it, slowly pass, in thousands of years, over the fixed background of the constellations of the star zodiac. Today's astronomer calculates that the leading spring

point of the sun at the head of the tropical zodiac of “signs” takes about 2,150 years to traverse 30 degrees of the star background (i.e., one twelfth of a zodiac which is divided into twelve equal parts). Therefore, once in about 25,800 years the two zodiacs coincide, Aries on top of Aries for example, which was the case around the time of Christ. Since then the sun’s spring position, and the sun zodiac along with it, has moved almost all the way across the star constellation of Pisces and close to its conventional, modern star-chart boundary with Aquarius. (It will cross this boundary in AD 2597.) So the two zodiacs differ by about one constellation or sign, the sun “sign” of Aries today lying on top of the star constellation of Pisces.

Because the two zodiacs no longer coincide, it could be said that one of them is valid and the other not. In discussing this, Vreede at one point expresses herself in a burst of feeling, claiming that whoever continues to describe the “sign” Aries as the beginning of the zodiac denies the Christ impulse and the spirituality of the stars. Later she refers to the first edition of the *Calendar of the Soul* (*Kalendar* 1912/13; Berlin), which contained — besides 52 weekly verses, zodiacal illustrations, and calendar notes — indications about the positions of the sun and moon throughout the year, beginning on April 1, 1912. She maintains that this first edition confined itself entirely to the zodiacal constellations, in the context of the sun, moon and planets.

However, although the first edition of the *Kalendar* places the sun against the background of star constellations, it places the moon in the astrologer’s tropical zodiac. Vreede herself also points to the fact that Steiner did use tropical (seasonal) zodiacal designations (e.g., Aries for the beginning of the zodiac) in some of his work.

Ptolemy used both zodiacs (the tropical one for astrology) though he knew the difference between them by his calculations. Vreede calls this an error instead of a deliberate choice. Yet each of the two zodiacs has its own rationale. The fact that they have separated since the time of Christ, as they were also separated before that time, is meaningful. But we should let Vreede have the last word on this — a word with which one can readily agree. In the Letter of July 1928, she writes of the placement of the spring sun (or beginning of the “sign” Aries) in the star constellation of Aries, and the connection of this with the wonderful balance of Greek culture. With the crossing of the

spring sun into Pisces, this harmony was destroyed — it had to be destroyed, she says, through the Christ impulse; and with the moving on of the sun's spring position, new forces were released . . .

This theme of the spiritual role of Christ in humanity's future and the changing relationship of the human being to the stars, is frequently brought forward to center stage in this book. In all three years of the Letters, such questions are boldly confronted.

\* \* \*

Apart from her standpoint that the methods of early astrology are out of place today, and apart from her disapproval of modern popular astrology, Vreede does not discount that there is meaning in the stars for the human being. But she does not hesitate to quote Steiner as saying that no one but the most experienced occultist, who stands at the end of his or her path, can really make use of astrology. She also quotes Steiner as writing that the real astrology was an intuitive knowledge and required the development of higher supersensible powers, which, he said, can be present in very few persons today.

Then Vreede explains, in the same Letter of October 1928, that since the Crucifixion human beings must gradually become free from the cosmos; they no longer stand in the same relation to the stars as before. In the centuries following Christ, what could be predicted about a person on the basis of the birth horoscope, or of their destiny on the basis of star positions later in their life, harmonized less and less with the actual facts. She quotes Steiner on how the reading of horoscopes brings dangers for persons who are striving toward esoteric development. Such astrological activity involved a refined egotism and, just when a person strives for inner development, they can easily arrive at such self-seeking, which is the more dangerous because it works subtly.

In this context of human/cosmic relationships, Vreede then brings up the important question of the activity, as taught by Steiner, of the archangel Michael — a being which has been described as a great Fire or Mercury spirit. This "Michael mystery" can only be understood in the light of a human evolution passing from receptivity to activity, from compulsion to freedom, from past to future. It is explained that what gives the human being a real foundation for action in freedom is what the being Michael brings as connecting forces out of the starry and planetary system — forces which can no longer be

compelling, for they do not penetrate into the world of nature. Steiner is quoted on the incarnation process in present times and how Michael keeps the world of stars united, through the human being, with the divine. Today, when the course of the stars is only a continuing of the manner in which the divine worked in the past, this harmony cannot exist unless the human being seeks for it. It could be added that this free creation of harmony with the cosmos also applies to the human being's rise through its own activity into the spiritual worlds during life, and after death.

Elsewhere in these Letters, Vreede goes on boldly to convey some dramatic spiritual pictures. For example, she speaks of:

- the ideal that the human being can overcome the karma which expresses itself in the horoscope;
- how the book *How to Know Higher Worlds* (Hudson, NY: Anthroposophic Press, 1994) contains instruction for becoming independent of the cosmic forces in the right way — and while a person finds himself or herself at home on earth according to their star positions, they must find the forces which make for independence in the right way from these star positions;
- how forces which rain down from the zodiac as a sacrifice, must also reascend from the earth, for through human evolution a new zodiac shall arise.

In contemplating the whole span of this book, one is made aware of the extremely alive yet paradox-like nature of the phenomena that confront the human being when experiencing the evolving universe. In the first pages, mention is made of the stars revealing themselves as colonies of spiritual beings. Two years later, mention is again made of this, with the rider that these spiritual beings are no longer directly united with individual stars. A star is visible to us just because it is no longer the dwelling place of a spiritual colony. The individual stars, she says, are the forsaken bodies of the gods. According to Steiner, stars are the bodies of gods whose souls carry on their activities in a new manner in the world, independent of these bodies.

Then again, while discussing Copernicanism in the Letter of May 1930, it is said that just for materialism, astronomy has always been the pioneer. In the final pages of the book, Steiner is then quoted as saying that astronomy is that science which, sooner than all others, may be restored to spirituality.

Elisabeth Vreede was a faithful starry messenger and pioneer of such a restoration in this resounding word-symphony of astronomical teachings.

N.D.

January 1, 2001

**Norman Davidson**, originally from Scotland, was a journalist in the U.K. for ten years before taking a teacher training course at Emerson College, Sussex. He was then a Waldorf teacher in England for sixteen years, specializing in astronomy, projective geometry, ancient history, and literature. He emigrated and joined Sunbridge College, Spring Valley, NY, in 1986 and was Director of Waldorf Teacher Training for ten years. Mr. Davidson now writes, teaches, and lectures on a variety of cultural topics. He is the author of *Astronomy and the Imagination* (UK: Arkana Penguin, 1988) and *Sky Phenomena: A Guide to Naked-eye Observation of the Stars* (Hudson, NY: Lindisfarne Press, 1993).

Copyright © Norman Davidson and Anthroposophic Press, 2001