

ASTROLOGY

What do think of the following? Do you take it seriously? Would Judaism accept it?

Libra (Sept. 23-Oct. 23). Get in touch with your playful side. Do something creative like change your hairstyle, shoot a roll of black-and-white film on your old camera, or rearrange your furniture.

Sagittarius (Nov. 22-Dec. 21). You party child! If anyone knows how to have a good time, it's you! Everyone follows your lead. At the office, your carefree attitude sets the tone for your department. At home, an unexpected phone call brings exciting news.

If you find this amusing, it has served its purpose. This excerpt from the Los Angeles Times Horoscope concludes with the following disclaimer: "*The astrological forecast should be read for entertainment.*"

However, this doesn't mean that there is no validity to Astrology; rather we may not know how to read the stars as well as the ancients. Many people are surprised to learn that Judaism in fact accepts Astrology, as the following sources illustrate:

Jewish Sources Regarding Astrology

Abraham

Genesis 15:5-8

"And Abraham said, Lord G-d, what will you give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is Eliezer of Dameseq? Behold, you have given me no seed, and one born in my house is my heir. And the word of the Lord came to him saying, 'This shall not be your heir, but he that shall come forth out of your own loins shall be your heir'. And He brought him outside and said, 'Look toward the heaven and count the stars if you are able to number them, and He said to him, so shall thy seed be'."

Shabbat 156a

אמר אברהם לפני הקב"ה רבש"ע בן ביתי יורש אותי אמר לו לאו כי אם אשר יצא ממעיך
אמר לפניו רבש"ע נסתכלתי באיצטגנינות שלי ואיני ראוי להוליד בן אמר ליה צא
מאיצטגנינות שלך.

Abraham saw in the stars that he would not have children. G-d replied, "Your offspring will be as numerous as the very stars in which you see you'll have no children'.

Moses

Exodus 1:16

וַיֹּאמֶר, בְּיַלְדֹכֶן אֶת הָעֵבְרִיּוֹת, וַרְאִיתֶן, עַל הָאֲבָנִים : אִם בֶּן הוּא וְהִמְתֵּן אֹתוֹ, וְאִם בַּת הוּא
וְחָיָה.

“And the King of Egypt spoke to the Hebrew midwives...and said...if it be a son kill him, but if it shall be a daughter, she shall live.”

Rashi explains that Pharaoh was only concerned about the Jewish sons because his astrologers told him that in the future, the savior of the Jews would be born. They were right - Moses was born shortly thereafter.

Compare this with the following. Is there any difference between the two decrees?

Exodus 1:22

וַיִּצַו פַּרְעֹה, לְכָל עַמּוֹ לֵאמֹר: כָּל הַבֶּן הַיְלֹוֹד, הַיְאֹרָה תִשְׁלִיכֶהוּ, וְכָל הַבֵּת, תַחֲיִינוּ.

“And Pharaoh charged all his people saying, every son that is born you shall cast into the River, and every daughter you shall save alive”.

Rashi explains that here Pharaoh’s decree included the Egyptians as well. On the day Moses was born, Pharaoh’s astrologers told him, ‘the savior of the Jews has been born, but we don’t know if he is a Jew or an Egyptian. However, we see that he will eventually be punished through water’. Therefore, Pharaoh ordered all male children born on that day to be thrown in the Nile. Again, the astrologers were right.

Note: What they didn’t perceive is that the punishment that Moses would eventually receive regarding water would be on account of *Mei Meriva*.

The Exodus

Exodus 10:10

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים, יְהִי כֵן יְהוָה עִמָּכֶם, כַּאֲשֶׁר אֶשְׁלַח אֶתְכֶם, וְאֵת טַפְכֶם; רְאוּ, כִּי רָעָה נִגְדַּ פְּנִיכֶם.

“And Pharaoh said to them, Let the Lord be with you, as I will let you go, and your little ones. Look to it, for Ra’ah is before you.”

Pharaoh first agreed, then tried to dissuade them by saying, ‘Ra’ah is before you.’ Rashi explains that there is a certain star named Ra’ah. Pharaoh said to them, I see through astrology that this star will rise toward you as you enter the desert, and it is a sign of blood and death. In fact when the Jews served the golden calf, and G-d sought to punish them by death, Moshe countered, ‘The Egyptians will say G-d intentionally took them out under the influence of the star Ra’ah in order to kill them’. Was Pharaoh’s prediction accurate?

Pharaoh’s prediction was accurate, but Moses’ argument on behalf of the Jews caused G-d to change the edict of blood to the blood of circumcision before entering Israel.

Mazal or G-d?

If astrological influence, or *mazal*, is as central as these sources suggest, does everything depend on mazal? Doesn’t G-d have any say in the matter? According to the following Gemara, is it up to mazal or G-d?

Moed Katan 28a

אמר רבא חיי בני ומזוני לא בזכותא תליא מילתא אלא במזלא תליא מילתא דהא רבה ורב חסדא תרוייהו רבנן צדיקי הוו מר מצלי ואתי מיטרא ומר מצלי ואתי מיטרא רב חסדא חיה תשעין ותרתינן שנין רבה חיה ארבעין בי רב חסדא שיתין הלולי בי רבה שיתין תיכלי בי רב חסדא סמידא לכלבי ולא מתבעי בי רבה נהמא דשערי לאינשי ולא משתכח.

Longevity, children, and sustenance do not depend on merit rather they depend on one's mazal. The proof is from Raba and Rav Chisda. Both were tzadikim in whose merit rain would fall. Nevertheless Rav Chisda lived 92 years, Raba 40; Rav Chisda made 60 weddings, Raba 60 funerals; Rav Chisda had bread of fine flour even for the dogs and wasn't lacking, Raba didn't even have enough inferior bread for his family.

How does this compare with the following?

Nida 16b

אותו מלאך הממונה על ההריון לילה שמו ונוטל טפה ומעמידה לפני הקב"ה ואומר לפניו רבש"ע טפה זו מה תהא עליה גבור או חלש חכם או טיפש עשיר או עני.

The angel that oversees pregnancy is called Leylah. He takes a drop in front of G-d and says, Master of the Universe, this drop, what shall become of it? Will it be strong or weak, wise or unintelligent, wealthy or poor?

Resolution: G-d decides what a person's particular characteristics will be and manipulates conception such that those characteristics will be implemented at birth through the mazal in effect at that time. Keeping in mind that the word mazal comes from the word *nozel* which means "to flow down", consider the following explanation:

Ramban, Deuteronomy 18:9

When G-d created everything from nothing, he made the upper worlds rule the lower worlds. Everything on the earth is under the influence of the stars and planets according to the way they oversee and rule them...Similarly, He placed angels above the planets and stars which serve as souls for them, and rule them according to the will of G-d which He constantly imposes upon them.

The Kabbalists explain this in more detail: G-d, referred to as *Ein Sof*, created and directs divine energy through four worlds, *Atzilut*, *Beriya*, *Yetzira*, *Asiya*. *Atzilut* is the world of the ten sefirot, *Beriya* is the throne through which the influence of the sefirot is directed down to *Yetzira*. *Yetzira* is the world of angels, who are like souls to the stars. *Asiya* is the world of Creation, including planets, stars and constellations. G-d's will emanates from *Ein Sof* through the sefirot in *Atzilut*, is directed through the throne in *Beriya* and then transmitted to the angels in *Yetzira*, who as "souls" to the luminaries, radiate influence down to the heavenly "bodies" in *Asiya*, which in turn affect all beings on earth.

The system described by the Ramban is referred to by the terms *Mazal Elyon*/Upper Mazal and *Mazal Tachton*/Lower Mazal, where "upper mazal" is the directive of G-d through the angels and "lower mazal" is its manifestation in the luminaries. Interestingly, the misunderstanding of this system is the source of idolatry, as explained by Maimonides:

Rambam, Avodat Cochavim 1:1,2

In the days of Enosh, the people deviated, and the counsel of the wise people degenerated into stupidity...Their mistaken reasoning was that since G-d created the skies and spheres as part of nature, and placed them high up [in the skies], and gave them dignity, as servants who serve Him, it would be appropriate to laud, glorify and honor them as well. It is the will of the Almighty to make great and to dignify those who make Him great and honor Him, in the same way that a king wants honor for the servants who serve him - such is the honor of a king. Once this matter was decided upon, they proceeded to build temples to the stars, to bring sacrifices to them, to laud and glorify them verbally and to bow down to them...This was the core of idolatry, but the knowledgeable worshippers did not deny the existence of G-d by saying that only such-and-such a star exists...

After some time, prophets of falsehood arose, and said that the Almighty [Himself] had commanded them to serve such-and-such a star, to bring sacrifices to it, to offer drink offerings to it and to build a temple containing its form...In this manner, people started to make figures in the temples, under trees and on the tops of mountains and hills, and they congregated and bowed down to them...The prophets said that through this service one will multiply and be successful...and said that the star itself, or a sphere or angel, had spoken to them about how to be served, and what may or may not be done.

This matter...became propagated throughout the whole world. Owing to the passage of time, the honored and fear-inducing Name was forgotten by all, and was not recognized. Everybody...knew only their forms of wood and stone, and the temples of stone that from childhood, they had been educated to bow down to [and] worship...Even the wise people amongst them...imagined that there is no G-d, but only the stars and spheres, of which they made representative figures. But as for the Creator, there was not a single person who recognized Him, except for various individuals, such as Hanoach, Methuselah, Noah, Shem and Ever. Things continued in this manner until Abraham...was born.

Mazal or Merit?

If mazal is determined from the outset by G-d, can it not be affected or changed through merit? Consider the following sources suggesting mazal is fixed and unaffected by one's individual merit.

Moed Katan 28a

חיי בני ומזוני לא בזכותא תליא מילתא אלא במזלא תליא מילתא וכו'.

Longevity, children, and sustenance do not depend on merit rather they depend on one's mazal etc.

Shabbat 156a

האי מאן דבחד בשבא יהי גבר ולא חדא ביה...מאי טעמא דאיברו ביה אור וחושך האי מאן דבתרי בשבא יהי גבר רגזן מ"ט משום דאיפליגו ביה מיא האי מאן דבתלתא בשבא יהי גבר עתיר וזנאי יהא מ"ט משום דאיברו ביה עשבים האי מאן דבארבעה בשבא יהי גבר חכים ונהיר מ"ט משום דאיתלו ביה מאורות האי מאן דבחמשה בשבא יהי גבר גומל חסדים מ"ט משום דאיברו ביה דגים ועופות האי מאן דבמעלי שבתא יהי גבר...חזרן במצות האי מאן דבשבתא...יהי קדישא.

One's character traits are determined by mazal according to the day of the week in which one is born, coinciding with what was created on that day (the translation of the above is presented here as tables):

<u>Day</u>	<u>Attribute</u>	<u>Detail of Creation</u>
Sunday	One-sided, Leadership	Light/Dark
Monday	Anger, Seclusion	Separation of the Waters
Tuesday	Wealth, Promiscuity	Herbs, Vegetation
Wednesday	Intellect, Memory	Luminaries
Thursday	Charity, Generosity	Fish, Birds
Friday	Religious fervor	7 Mitzvot, Tree of Knowledge
Saturday	Holiness	G-d Sanctified the Sabbath

Alternatively, consider the continuation of the above source regarding our question as to whether merit has any effect on mazal:

Shabbat 156a

מזל שעה גורם האי מאן דבחמה יהי גבר זיוותן יהי אכיל מדיליה ושתי מדיליה ורזוהי גליין...האי מאן דבכוכב נוגה יהי גבר עתיר וזנאי יהי מ"ט משום דאיתיליד ביה נורא האי מאן דבכוכב יהי גבר נהיר וחכים משום דספרא דחמה הוא האי מאן דבלבנה יהי גבר סביל מרעין בנאי וסתיר סתיר ובנאי אכיל דלא דיליה ושתי דלא דיליה ורזוהי כסיין...האי מאן דבשבתאי יהי גבר מחשבתיה בטלין ואית דאמרי כל דמחשבין עליה בטלין האי מאן דבצדק יהי גבר צדקן...האי מאן דבמאדים יהי גבר אשיד דמא.

Or they are determined according to the mazal affecting the hour in which one is born. [A different planet rules each hour. Only the visible planets have an effect (Uranus and Neptune were observed in 1781 and Pluto in 1930). Excluding Earth, 5 planets remain: Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Venus, and Mercury. Sun and Moon also have affect and are also included, totaling 7.]

Sun	Chama	Openness, Independence
Venus	Noga	Wealthy, Promiscuous
Mercury	Cochav	Intellect, Acumen
Moon	Lavana	Secretive, Dependent
Saturn	Shabtai	Inaction/Invulnerability
Jupiter	Tzedek	Righteous
Mars	Ma'adim	Belligerent

One can deduce the planet that was ruling at the hour of one's birth as follows: The planets were fixed on the evening of the 4th day of creation. Since the world was created during the equinox, day and night were each 12 hours, night starting at 6 PM and day at 6 AM. Therefore, starting Day 4 at 6 PM with Saturn, they changed each hour until arriving to Day 5 at 6 AM with Mercury, and so on. Accordingly, the planets dominating the 1st hour of the morning of each day of creation were as below. Since they are the planets always ruling at 6 AM, one can count forward or backward according to the order of the planets to determine the planet ruling at the hour of birth. Therefore, someone born between 3 and 4 PM on Friday, for example, would be under the influence of the moon.

The planets influencing the 1st hour of the morning of each day of creation:

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7
Sun	Moon	Mars	Mercury	Jupiter	Venus	Saturn

Note: The following parenthetical information is always interesting to most people. Many are amazed that something as basic as the non-Jewish names of the days of the week are based on idol worship, which is an adulterated version of astrology based on ancient Jewish sources. That is, the non-Jewish names of the days of the week are based on the names of the planets that ruled at the beginning of the morning of each day of creation (based on Rashi, Shabbat 129):

Latin languages:

Domingo (Sun)	Lunes (Moon)	Martes (Mars)	Miercoles (Mercury)	Jueves (Jupiter)	Viernes (Venus)	Sabado (Saturn)
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Corresponding to the Roman gods of:

Sun	Moon	War	Swift tidings	Weather	Love	Agriculture
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Names of gods in Norse Mythology:

Tiw	Odin	Thor	Frigga
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English:

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday (Tiw's day)	Wednesday (Odin's day)	Thursday (Thor's day)	Friday (Frigga's day)	Saturday
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Note: Recall that according to Rambam, non-Jews deified the planets, calling them by names of the gods, and dedicated the days of the week to them.

While the previous sources suggest mazal is fixed, on the other hand, the Torah is replete with promises of wealth, health and life for keeping the Torah, and punishment of poverty, sickness and death for transgressing the Torah. This implies that these matters depend on merit.

Also, consider the following:

Shabbat 156a

אין מזל לישראל...שנאמר (ירמיהו י) כה אמר ה' אל דרך הגוים אל תלמדו ומאותות השמים אל תחתו כי יחתו הגוים מהמה - הם יחתו ולא ישראל.

There is no mazal for Israel [meaning, Jews are not subject to the influence of the stars], as in the verse (Jeremiah 10:2), "So says the Lord: of the way of the nations you shall not learn, and from the signs of the heaven be not dismayed, for the nations are dismayed from them." They are affected by the stars, Jews are not.

Resolution: While mazal plays a great role in determining one's portion in life as well as one's character traits, it is not entirely fixed. It can be changed.

Based on the Ramban quoted above, the Kabbalists explain that just as Mazal Elyon affects Mazal Tachton, i.e. the cosmos, so Olam HaMishpat (judgment) affects Mazal Tachton. This means increasing one's spiritual merit can improve one's mazal. Here are two examples of mazal being changed because of merit:

Shabbat 156a

שמואל ואבלט הוו יתבי והוו קאזלי הנך אינשי לאגמא א"ל אבלט לשמואל האי גברא אזיל ולא אתי טריק ליה חיויא ומיית א"ל שמואל אי בר ישראל הוא אזיל ואתי אדיתבי אזיל ואתי קם אבלט שדיה לטוניה אשכח ביה חיויא דפסיק ושדי בתרתי גובי א"ל שמואל מאי עבדת א"ל כל יומא הוה מרמינן ריפתא בהדי הדדי ואכלינן האידינא הוה איכא חד מינן דלא הוה ליה ריפתא הוה קא מיכסף אמינא להו אנא קאימנא וארמינא כי מטאי לגביה שואי נפשאי כמאן דשקילי מיניה כי היכי דלא ליכסיף.

Shemuel and a non-Jewish sage named Avlet were sitting as a group of workers went by on their way to cut reeds in the meadow. Avlet said, 'That one won't return alive because a snake will bite him and kill him'. Shemuel said, 'If he's a Jew he'll return'. He returned and Avlet checked and found a beheaded snake in the man's bundle of reeds. Shemuel asked him if he did any good deeds, whereupon he said that he spared his friend embarrassment by contributing to the communal meal for him without anyone noticing.

Shabbat 156a

ר"ע הויה ליה ברתא אמרי ליה כלדאי ההוא יומא דעיילה לבי גנא טריק לה חיויא ומיתא הוה דאיגא אמילתא טובא ההוא יומא שקלתה למכבנתא דצתא בגודא איתרמי איתבי בעיניה דחיויא לצפרא כי קא שקלה לה הוה קא סריך ואתי חיויא בתרה אמר לה אבוה מאי עבדת אמרה ליה בפניא אתא עניא קרא אבבא והוו טרידי כולי עלמא בסעודתא וליכא דשמעיה קאימנא שקלתי לריסתנאי דיהבית לי יהבתיה ניהליה.

The astrologers told Rabbi Akiva that on his daughter's wedding day she'll be bitten by a snake and die. After the wedding, she took out the pin from her hair and poked it into a hole in the wall near the bed for safekeeping. In the morning she pulled the pin out, together with a dead snake that the pin had pierced. Rabbi Akiva asked what good deed she had done. She said that a poor man had entered the wedding when everyone was involved in the meal and didn't notice him. When she saw him, she gave him her portion.

Does Merit always Change Mazal?

From Shabbat 156, "There is no mazal for Israel" (meaning Jews can rise above mazal through mitzvot) it seems that mazal can be changed through increasing merit. In addition, mazal can be modified and utilized for good:

Shabbat 156a

האי מאן דבמאדים יהי גבר אשיד...אי אומנא אי גנבא אי טבחא אי מוהל לאמר רבה אנא במאדים הואי אמר אביי מר נמי עניש וקטיל.

One who is born under the influence of Ma'adim (Mars) will be either a blood-letter or a murderer; alternatively a shochet (kosher slaughter) or a mohel (circumcision). Raba

countered that he was born under the influence of Ma'adim and is none of the above. Abaye replied that as a judge, he punishes wrongdoers.

Pesikta Rabati, Chanukah, 2:6

When Samuel went to anoint one of Yishai's sons, he saw David who was born under Ma'adim and thought he was a murderer. David used his Ma'adim trait to fight the wars of G-d. Even though David was not allowed to build the Temple because of the blood on his hands, G-d told him, "The blood you have spilled is like the blood of a sacrifice before me".

Note: Saul's mazal, on the other hand, imparted within him humility, but he used it wrongly by ignoring G-d's order and giving in to the people's compassion for King Agog and desire for the property of Amalek. Therefore the kingship was taken from him (Yoma 22b).

However, from the following it seems that merit doesn't change mazal:

Ta'anit 25a

רבי אלעזר בן פדת דחיקא ליה מילתא טובא עבד מלתא ולא הוה ליה מידי למטעם שקל ברא דתומא ושדייה בפומיה חלש לביה וניס אזול רבנן לשיולי ביה חזיוהו דקא בכי וחייד ונפק צוציתא דנורא מאפותיה כי אתער אמרו ליה מ"ט קבכית וחיכת אמר להו דהוה יתיב עמי הקב"ה ואמרי ליה עד מתי אצטער בהאי עלמא ואמר לי אלעזר בני ניחא לך דאפכיה לעלמא מרישא אפשר דמתילדת בשעתא דמזוני אמרי לקמיה כולי האי ואפשר...א"כ לא בעינא אמר לי בהאי אגרא דאמרת לא בעינא יהיבנא לך לעלמא דאתי תליסרי נהרוותא דמשחא אפרסמון.

R' Elazar ben Padat was direly poor. One day he let blood and because of his poverty he had nothing to eat afterward. He put a clove of garlic in his mouth and fainted. The rabbis came to visit him and saw that as he slept: he cried, then smiled and then a spark of light leaped from his forehead. When he awoke, he told them that G-d was sitting with him and he asked, 'How long shall I suffer this great poverty?' G-d replied, Elazar my son, if you want I can re-create the world from the beginning, and perhaps you will be re-born under the mazal for wealth. R' Elazar cried and said if you have to destroy the world and then only maybe it will help, better I remain poor. G-d promised him 13 rivers of precious oil. R' Elazar smiled. Then G-d touched him on his forehead, and a spark of light went forth.

Resolution: The previous cases which indicate that mazal can be changed or modified are dealing with Mazal Tachtan which can be affected by Olam HaMishpat (judgment), or can be improved within its normal boundaries. Here, regarding R' Elazar b. Padat, the Gemara is dealing with Mazal Elyon that cannot be changed.

Note: Ramchal, Derech Hashem 2:3:1 writes that G-d causes each soul to be born under a very specific mazal in order to determine each person's highly individual purpose in creation. Each individual fits in the entire scheme of every individual in every generation to bring the world to its ultimate completion and perfection. Changing Mazal Elyon then, would require re-arranging the mazal of each and every soul ever born, which is tantamount to re-creating the world from the beginning.

The Zodiac

Chapter 4 and 5 of *Sefer Yetzira*, attributed to Abraham, establishes a correlation between the 12 Hebrew months, the 12 signs of the zodiac and 12 different faculties or senses to be improved upon during each month:

<u>Month</u>		<u>Name of Sign</u>		<u>Symbol</u>	<u>Tribe</u>	<u>Faculty/Sense</u>
(Eng.)	(Heb.)	(Heb.)	(Common)			
April	Nisan <i>Pesach</i>	T'leh	Aries	Ram <i>korban</i>	Judah <i>thanks</i>	Speech <i>haggadah</i>
May	Iyar	Shor	Taurus	Bull	Issachar <i>scholars</i>	Thought <i>Torah</i>
June	Sivan <i>Shavuot</i>	Te'umim	Gemini	Twins <i>tablets</i>	Zevulun	Motion <i>supporters</i>
July	Tamuz	Sartan	Cancer	Crab	Reuven <i>"see"</i>	Sight
Aug.	Av	Ari	Leo	Lion	Shimon <i>"hear"</i>	Hearing
Sep.	Elul	Betula	Virgo	Virgin <i>purity</i>	Gad	Action <i>teshuva</i>
Oct.	Tishrei <i>Rosh Hash.</i>	Moznaim	Libra	Scales <i>weigh deeds</i>	Ephraim <i>fruitful</i>	Coition <i>relations</i>
Nov.	Cheshvan	Akrav	Scorpio	Scorpion	Menashe <i>neshima</i>	Smell <i>spirituality</i>
Dec.	Kislev <i>Chanukah</i>	Keshet	Sagittarius	Archer	Benjamin <i>warriors</i>	Sleep <i>long nights</i>
Jan.	Tevet	Gedi	Capricorn	Kid	Dan <i>judgement</i>	Anger <i>correct anger</i>
Feb.	Shevat <i>Tu b'Shevat</i>	Deli	Aquarius <i>water</i>	Water Draw	Asher <i>bounty</i>	Taste <i>eating</i>
Mar.	Adar <i>Purim</i>	Dagim	Pisces	Fish	Naftali	Laughter <i>joy</i>

Conclusion: Judaism recognizes the validity of Astrology and the affect of planets and constellations on a person's mazal. In fact, it is G-d who placed the celestial bodies in place and directs Divine influence from upper spiritual worlds down through them to the physical world. Accordingly, he determines when a person will be born such that the configuration of the stars at that time will have the desired effect. Non-Jews who attribute independent power to the stars, an idea originating in idolatry, are limited within the dictates of the system. Jews, however, who recognize that G-d is the source of mazal, usually have the ability to transcend it through appealing directly to G-d through prayer, Torah and mitzvot. The zodiac itself enables one to "live with the times" by connecting to the spiritual perfection attained by the founders of the Jewish nation, improving ourselves month by month, in order to perfect ourselves within our mazal and ultimately raise ourselves entirely above it.

Note: Although we haven't found sources regarding whether a righteous non-Jew can transcend mazal, it is possible that by believing in G-d and keeping the 7 mitzvot as commanded in the Torah, a non-Jew's merits and prayer might also supercede mazal, similar to a Jew.