

# Love and Power

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Some things work better together than alone. Well, not “things,” exactly, but I don’t have a more precise or better term for what I’m referring to — principles? processes? perspectives? orientations? Sort of, but not quite. I’m talking about Love and Power, of course, since that’s the title of this commentary. Those are simple words for complex and diverse categories of human experience. Each has many meanings, and later in the text I’ll define the very specific ways I’m using them here. First, though, a little background.

I’ve been a full-time, working astrologer in private practice for 45 years. Over that time I’ve done about 12,000 sessions with clients — mostly individuals. My work involves discussing and defining the central meaning and major themes of my clients’ lives, and the changes that are built into their journeys through life.

Early on, I realized that traditional astrological interpretation of the kind presented in textbooks (while necessary as part of any astrologer’s expertise) would not be enough. For starters, that alone would never satisfy me. I wanted to explore other people’s inner experience and compare it to my own, to better understand both the common similarities that bind us together as humans and the individual differences that make each of us unique. Also, textbook delineations, however lengthy and detailed, are not always particularly useful. They’re a little like dining at a cheap all-you-can-eat buffet: As much food as you want, but not necessarily nutritious, and sometimes not aesthetic or tasty. Then too, textbook interpretations tend not to address the paradoxes and seeming contradictions of our lives as human beings. I wanted to be able to tell stories that would stick with my clients in a way that would not only reflect their own self-knowing (meaning that they would recognize themselves in my words), but also nourish and sustain them beyond the session.

To do this, I needed to understand in a deeper way the symbolic mandalas that are astrological charts. To a large extent, astrology itself taught me how. In fact, astrology has taught me a great deal about life. But, in addition, I needed perspectives from beyond astrology. Charts alone are never enough. While a given chart provides an almost endless amount of symbolic information, context is required to organize that information into a coherent whole — to separate the wheat from the chaff, so to speak, and convert a hodge-podge of contradictions into a coherent, meaningful overview. Charts provide some context from within,

but not enough. From cultural factors to more personal variables, external context is critical in accurately deciphering what charts can tell us about ourselves and our lives.

Along the way, I discovered certain frameworks — like lenses or filters — that allowed me to better see and interpret the sublime patterns within charts. One of those frameworks is the lens of Love and Power. I offer it in this commentary not as an all-encompassing vision of how life works, but simply as one practical tool among many that has worked nicely for me and might be worthwhile to share.

Here in the 21st century, humanity faces the challenge of coming to grips with the wise use of our new-found and awesome collective power. What is certain is that our power will be used. The unknown is whether that power will be used for good or ill — to move us forward in our evolution or to destroy ourselves in extinction.

But power is not the only factor at play. Love plays a critical role also.

I need to define my terms here: *Power* (in the way I'm using it) means the ability to manipulate any environment to transform it from one form to another. Power is the driving force of creation. *Love* (in the way I'm using it) means the recognition of the essential perfection of anything, perceiving beyond its outer or overt manifestation the inward, and often subtle, signature of the divine. Not judging a book by its cover is something that Love understands.

How do love and power augment each other in real life? Let me offer an example: Everything around food requires power — from growing or hunting the basic foodstuffs, through cooking in preparation, followed by eating a meal, all the way to digesting whatever we've eaten — every step in that chain of events involves the use of power to transform the food, dis-integrating its previous composition into different forms, ultimately providing the nutrients our bodies use for fuel, sustenance, and even pleasure.

Is all food "good"? No. Some foods are better than others, as are approaches to cooking, dining, and digesting our food. So, what constitutes "goodness" with food? How do we tell good food from bad food? Ah, this is where love comes in. Love reveals the perfection that lies within the outward manifestation, sometimes visibly (as in how a perfectly ripe apple looks and tastes) and sometimes invisibly (as in the care with which a vegetable is planted, grown, and harvested). And it's not just in quality of the food itself where love plays a telling role, but also in the preparing, serving, and eating. Bad preparation, artless cooking, or sloppy presentation can impair or even ruin good food, and gluttonous eating may disturb our digestion or harm our health. Love adds the critical element of reverence to each process. Love allows us not only to perceive perfection, but respect it as well.

Power and love are natural and necessary complements. Each works infinitely better together and in harmony than alone or in conflict.

For instance, power without love produces *chaos*. We can change an environment with sufficient power, but without love we don't know what to change it into, nor the right ways to change it. The result is the proverbial bull in a china shop. We may express our power, but doing so will inevitably produce unintended consequences and often negative repercussions. The imperative to acquire and use power is so urgent in humans that we are frequently (I would argue usually) too impatient to wait for love to reveal the perfection of its application. Our tendency to apply force is intended to address problems, but that's not the same as actually solving our problems. Too frequently, our efforts to address one problem lead inadvertently to new and unforeseen problems we didn't consider or anticipate.

On the other hand, love without power produces the *suffering* of unrealized hopes and ideals. Love can illuminate for us the perfect inner state of any environment or situation, but without power we can't transform the environment to realize that perfection in actual experience. If I love you, I see your perfection — the beauty, intelligence, grace, and uniqueness that exist within your manifested form. In the absence of power, however, I can't draw you closer to me. I can't reduce the distance between us or eliminate our separateness to bond with you in joy and fulfillment. Instead, I experience the disappointment and pain of unrequited love. Anyone who has ever been in a one-sided love affair (and many of us have) knows that suffering.

Harmony is achieved by a balance of power (whether willful and conscious or automatic and programmed) and love (true and graceful understanding of the essential nature of something). Each supports the other to achieve the desired result. When they operate alone, however, the results are usually not pleasing.

Let's say that you're driving down the road in your car. Something goes wrong, and you're forced to pull over to the side of the road. You know how your car is supposed to operate, but what if you know nothing about the mechanics of your vehicle? Ah, that's enough love, but not enough power. Should you open the hood and begin randomly pulling out wires? The likelihood of fixing the car that way is zero, and you'll almost certainly make the situation worse.

Many marriages fail for the same reason. At the beginning, the love is ample, but lack of power in the inability of the partners to structure the relationship and guide the interaction can eventually erode the love, leaving each feeling more and more helpless and unhappy, leading eventually to separation or divorce.

Too much power can also derail even the best, most loving intentions. Consider the 2003 invasion of Iraq. The neocons in the Bush administration were confident that overthrowing Saddam Hussein and restructuring that country

would be a piece of cake (or a slam dunk, to use a phrase that was bandied about at the time). Doesn't everyone everywhere long for American-style democracy? The answer is no. Sure, we had more than enough military power to depose Saddam, but we failed to understand the Iraqi culture and its longstanding internal religious conflicts. Obviously, American motives were self-interested rather than altruistic, but love can work in either dimension, as long as the perception of the situation is accurate. That means truly comprehending the essence at the heart of anything, whether a person, a situation, a process, or even a country. Tragically, however, we were narcissistic and arrogant in our presumptions about Iraq, and that's not real love — real love sees clearly, without delusion or blinders. Time and again, American foreign policy has been guilty of not understanding the essential nature of other cultures, which is a failure of love, not power.

Do I apply the framework of Love and Power to every chart in sessions with clients? No. I don't impose any particular framework on the charts I interpret. This is not one size fits all. Instead, I let each chart speak to me, based on its particular patterns, shapes, and configurations. Then I connect that to the actual human being with whom I'm conversing, allowing what they tell me and how they feel to me to determine how I will organize all the information. With one chart (and person), I might see numerous possible frameworks through which to co-create the session, and, over the course of the conversation, I might shift from one to another. With a second chart (and person), a single framework might be obvious to me, so I take that and run with it. And with yet a third chart (and person), no overriding pattern might emerge in my mind, so that I literally create that session one verbal exchange at a time. In that third category (which is rare), the session is like a jigsaw puzzle, and I may not know until the end what the picture of the assembled puzzle looks like.

In general, I'd say that Love and Power qualify for me as a coherent framework in about 30% of the charts I see. I don't use it with all 30%, however, since each session with a client presents different variables that affect my approach.

Human brains operate in two modes: fast and slow. Fast mode occurs with innate predispositions (such as the autonomic nervous system: breathing, heartbeat, etc.) and learned routines. Fast mode is immediate, nearly instantaneous, and largely emotional, operating beneath conscious awareness. Slow mode occurs during cognitive deliberation, rational thought, and while new learning is underway but not yet habituated. An example of learned fast mode is touch typing on a keyboard. Once habituated, typing becomes automatic. [As an aside, I have long believed that the challenge of learning is less a problem for humans than the difficulties of un-learning; automatic fast mode is extremely resistant to being dismantled, so we struggle with the persistence of learned habits, even when they no longer serve and may harm us.]

Through natal charts, astrology is particularly well-suited to distinguish for any individual the functioning of symbolic archetypes in these two modes. This is often interpreted in an evolutionary way, as past versus present versus future. Certain combinations of symbolic factors in natal charts can be understood as inherent predispositions; other combinations are emerging through evolving experience. The framework of Love and Power often takes this shape when used as a lens to understand a chart: One of the two dimensions is already “programmed” in specific or definite ways, and is thus relatively more automatic or habituated, while the other is developing, and is thus more center-stage in the conscious and deliberative growth of personhood.

For instance, if Love is already well-understood and predisposed within an individual’s experience of life, the challenge of conscious intention (i.e., growth and maturity) may be to develop greater Power to provide a harmonious balance that produces more effective outcomes. Or vice versa. Even more often, a pattern of cycle activations happening during a certain time-frame indicates a particular way that the balance and harmony of Love and Power are (or might be) reformed or fine-tuned. That’s relevant because my work is always focused on where someone is now in his or her life, to account for the ever-changing panorama of twists and turns required within a longer-term overall meaning, purpose, and direction.

That provides me with a working structure I use within a session to illuminate an individual’s life journey — whether we are discussing strategy and tactics for a certain period (usually now and into the coming years), making sense of a pattern of emotional reaction in our lives, or defining the meaning of events to provide a better sense of coherence (to reduce anxiety or uncertainty). I don’t generally predict outcomes (along lines of good or bad, whether a client will succeed or fail, or be happy or unhappy). That’s way above my pay grade. I do, however, discuss intention and how the challenges and opportunities of a given time period fit into the larger patterns of meaning and purpose in my clients’ lives.

The great thing about the framework of Love and Power as I use it in my work is that my clients can apply it intuitively. It’s simple enough to be easily understood and remembered, yet has a poetic and spiritual sensibility that allows our real lives, which sometimes seem chaotic, to make better sense to us. But astrology is not required. Assessment of the balance and harmony between Love and Power offers meaning and insight without reference to any other system of understanding.