

astrological-cultural-spiritual-political
views & commentary...

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THE HERBST NEWSLETTER



Thoughts, dates, & reminders about our lives as members of the craziest species on this lovely planet. Like a message in a bottle washing up on the sandy shores of consciousness...

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Dear friends,

Macro-events in the circus of the collective—especially in politics, economics, and war—are now reaching unbelievable levels, truly Theatre of the Absurd. This leaves the modestly sane among us to shake our heads in bewildered astonishment. Civilization is obviously accelerating down the slippery slope that leads straight to Uranus-Pluto, though still with a ways to go yet before that confrontation. Since I can hardly imagine what to say about the Big World at this point (I feel more and more like Yossarian in *Catch-22*), in this month's commentary I take refuge in something a little closer to home—astrological charts and their interpretation in sessions.

—Bill Herbst

CONTEXT AND CONSCIOUSNESS

A basic problem with astrology is *too much* information rather than *too little*. Every astrological chart is a mandala that contains literally endless relationships of symbols whose implications expand kaleidoscopically as we consider their possible meanings. To delve deeply into any chart—whether the natal chart of an individual life, the moment of a marriage vow, or the chart of a particular event in the collective, such as new and full moons, solar and lunar eclipses, or the seasonal equinoxes and solstices that we pass through each year—is like putting a tiny slice of the space-time continuum under the microscope to reveal an entire holographic world with its own peculiar interior logic. The higher the amplification, the more meanings emerge into view, meanings that often confound expectation and pragmatic assumptions.

This process is akin to Alice going through the looking glass or tumbling down the rabbit hole into Wonderland, or Dorothy being swept up by a tornado and set down in Oz. "*I don't think we're in Kansas anymore, Toto.*"

Astrology is hardly unique in this regard. Any interest or discipline followed deeply enough will yield ever more fabulous worlds-within-worlds-within-worlds. Theoretical physics, mathematics, or even such seemingly mundane pursuits as model-airplane building, cooking and cuisine, or dental bridges—all these are portals into utterly fantastic worlds of seemingly infinite complexity. The language and technical

subtleties of a high-end chef are every bit as esoteric as those of a quantum physicist. To the ordinary lay person, types of wild mushrooms and how to best cook them or the mystery of seasoning a fine sauce is as occult an understanding as quarks and black holes. The same is true of astrology.

Conversely, the pursuit of any discipline reveals knotty problems—contradictions, paradoxes, and other unresolvable elements. Biological geneticists who are unraveling the human genome tell us that the overwhelming percentage of the information contained in DNA-coding appears to be “garbage,” mere artifacts from random or failed experiments along the long curve of the evolution of life on earth, now carried inside us like genetic flotsam and jetsam. Only 1-2% of the DNA information is truly relevant in determining whether an organism will grow into a bacteria, a cow, or a human being.

In other words, the puzzle has too many pieces, many of which don't fit or seem irrelevant to the picture. In addition, certain essential pieces of the puzzle are apparently missing, causing consternation, limiting our ability to see the picture and understand its meaning. In that case, we have to factor in content gleaned from other sources outside the puzzle.

This holds true with astrology as well. Most of the information contained within any astrological chart is ca-ca. It may be symbolically valid, but it's useless in any grounded interpretation. A significant part of the art of using astrology well involves learning how to see and reveal the 1-2% of the information that's critical to understanding the chart as a whole, while not getting bogged down in all the nonsense. This is the old “not-seeing-the-forest-for-the-trees” problem. Grasping the central meanings of the chart require paring down, discarding, or ignoring an overwhelming amount of irrelevant information.

When using astrology as a personal discipline based on the study of one's own natal chart, this paring-down process tends to occur naturally or automatically. We start from what's happening in our lives, from whatever experiences impress our awareness, then we move into our charts to find meanings for that experience. The longer we study, however, the more likely we are to encounter “artifacts” that don't fit the picture. Many astrological students become obsessed with particularly arcane symbolic relationships in their charts that are mystifying. And then it's down the rabbit hole into weirdness.

For instance, some students get overly hung up on the Moon's nodal axis and its supposedly “spiritual” meanings. When asked about this in sessions, I offer interpretations, but I also try to remind student-clients that the *entire* chart is spiritual, not just certain pieces of it, and that they might do better in retaining clarity by moving from their real life to the chart, rather than the other way round.

Context

By themselves, astrological charts offer a very limited amount of *context*. Some, but not much. Textbooks can lay out many of the levels through which paired symbols (such as Jupiter in Pisces, Sun in the 4th house, or Mars square Saturn) may manifest in a given chart, but they cannot specify *which* of those many levels are more relevant in that person's life. In other words, they cannot define the *hierarchy of importance* of those possible levels for a specific individual. To do that, we need the specific context of an actual, real life.

For example, in textbook terms, Venus in the 9th house can indicate a love of intellect and higher learning, and an attraction to abstract systems such as law, philosophy, or religion. Teaching might be implied as well, especially in subjects such as art or aesthetics. Ethics or morality might be emphasized as enjoyable pursuits, or pleasure itself might become the moral basis for living, which might mean anything from a highly-cultured aesthetic sensibility all the way to living as a hedonistic libertine. That same position—Venus in the 9th—also carries the possible meanings of loving long-distance travel to far-off lands or foreign cultures, and an attraction for social diversity, which could mean visiting Bangkok on vacation or living in a multi-ethnic neighborhood in New York City. Further, Venus in the 9th could indicate that significant partners or women in the native's life will be either foreigners or exotic in some other way.

All those are classic textbook interpretations of Venus in the 9th. But which of those levels will manifest in a given natal chart with that position? All? Or just some? Might the levels change and shift over time, so that in one period of life travel is pursued as pleasure, while at another time vicarious experience

through education would be emphasized? The chart itself will not dependably tell us. We need the *context* of a real life to know what experiences are relevant.

Again, this is not much of a problem in the use of astrology as a private or personal discipline. When studying your own chart or the chart of someone you know intimately, knowledge of the person's real life provides natural context. That may not be obvious, but it's always present in the background, operating as an automatic filter. The abstraction of the chart becomes real because we already know what context to apply.

In professional work with clients, however—especially first-time clients—the astrologer *cannot* know the context in advance. Clients must provide the necessary context with real information from their actual lives. Otherwise, the astrologer has no way to accurately select from the myriad levels of possible interpretations. And—perverse enough—the more skilled one is as an astrologer, the more difficult this issue becomes. Baby astrologers might know only three meanings for a certain symbolic combination, all of which they learned from textbooks. So they will offer up those few interpretations no matter what the client's life is like. On the other hand, a seasoned astrologer who's done thousands of sessions and has amassed great experience might know a hundred different interpretations and be able to quickly synthesize many more when given a particular context.

Consciousness

Beyond context, another critical factor missing from charts is *consciousness*. That's a rather imprecise term, but I use it here to cover a wide range of variables: amassed life-experience, focused attention, cultural sophistication, emotional maturity, self-awareness, appreciation for subtlety and paradox, and—last but hardly least—the social skills and verbal tools necessary to effectively communicate those qualities to another person. By itself, astrology won't tell us whether people are paying attention as they live or just sleep-walking through their lives. Charts are essentially diagrams of machinery. They tell us a great deal about how the vehicle is constructed, but they don't tell us anything about who's driving.

Some people are really good at letting us in by sharing verbal information about their distilled experience, interests, and concerns. They talk easily and eloquently. They listen well. Such individuals are generally a joy to work with in sessions. Other people are like closed books. For whatever reasons, they can't, won't, or don't wish to talk about themselves. Everyone has an inner life, but that interior reality is usually hidden, may or may not be conscious, and might or might not be communicable, especially in words.

When I do a first session with a new client, the most important judgment I have to make—one that must be made quickly, within about ten minutes—is about that person's *consciousness*. This has little to do with the chart itself and a great deal to do with the human being on the other end of the phone. I do a little interview at the beginning of each first session: How did you find me? Have you studied astrology or worked with other astrologers? What are you hunting for? What's going on in your life now that makes our conversation worth having? And finally, what do you feel you're on the planet for as a central life-purpose?

Responses are all over the map, especially to that last question. Life-purpose is not a common topic for discussion in social interaction. We aren't trained in third grade to think or talk about our uniquely individual reasons for being, nor about the contradictory themes and paradoxes we must reconcile along the way. As a result, the vast majority of people have little if any experience in sharing their inner thoughts and feelings about why they're alive and what makes them tick. They may have thought about that question privately at great length, but talking about it is often overwhelming. Few people possess a language for that, and fewer still are practiced at it.

I've been asking new clients that question since the mid-1980s, so I've heard about 7,000 responses since then. Most clients say "I don't know," or they give generic answers, the two most popular of which are: "I'm here to love others," or "I'm here to help and serve others." On rare occasions, those particular responses are astrologically accurate for a given individual, but mostly they're bogus, the kind of religiously-correct namby-pamby stuff we learned to say in kindergarten.

Defining life-purpose is at the very heart of my astrological work. It is the Alpha and Omega from which everything emerges and to which everything returns. The term itself is a catch-phrase, of course. I use it to refer to the matrix of experiences that act as a magnetic center—holding us together, giving us meaning, and providing coherence for everything else we encounter, so that our lives make sense to us. Rather than a goal, it's a process.

Even people who are on-track with their life-purposes go through periods of confusion, disorientation, death-and-rebirth, and other unexpected and sometimes unpleasant shocks, but through it all they keep coming back to a core feeling for what they're about and why they're here. Astrology is an extraordinary tool for defining and clarifying life-purpose, to help us stay in sync with the shifting levels and evolving manifestations of our central experience.

If you're thinking of having an astrological session with me, please understand that I need you to talk a little about your life, to provide the necessary *context* to allow me to custom-tailor the interpretation of your chart, bringing it down to earth to make our conversation relevant and real. I can do that very effectively, but I don't do it alone.

This is like tennis: No matter how good a tennis player I am, I can't play my game well unless you hit the ball back to me. If you just stand there on the other side of net with no racket, I might as well go home. On the other hand, if you hit the ball back with pace, I can play with all my skills and savvy, and the game becomes great fun for us both.

Understand also that your chart says nothing about your *consciousness*. That profound mystery has precious little to do with astrology. It's about you—as a living, breathing human being—and it's critical to what we can co-create together.

So, bring your best consciousness with you when we have a session, and you'll get back everything I have to offer.



Bill Herbst resides in Olympia, Washington. To learn about his telephone sessions with clients, go to his web site at www.billherbst.com, and click on the link in the upper right corner for **Sessions FAQ**.

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