

Go With the Flow or Swim Against the Tide?

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Typically, people interested in astrology want to know “good” and “bad” times for doing things. To begin with, that’s really dicey, since the astrological system itself is value-neutral and doesn’t speak in terms of good or bad. Moving people away from their good-bad orientation is damn near impossible, however. It’s as if a lot of people, well, some for sure, but I think it’s probably a lot of people, seem to believe that a secret archive of ultimate judgment exists in the universe, like a cosmic Supreme Court — an infallible moral guide that takes into account every variable, every permutation, every nuance, all the expanding ripples of consequence and karma, then gives the final pronouncement of confirming something as “good” or condemning it as “bad.” God, the Akashic Records, the Wise Elders of Alpha Centauri, whatever (or whomever).

That strikes me as somehow childish, like believing in Santa Claus or the Easter Bunny.

Not that I’m all in for moral relativity. The *“anything goes, everyone has good reasons for what they do, you just have to see it from their perspective”* thing also leaves me cold. I like simplicity as a principle and an ideal, but I mistrust simple answers for complex questions, and I sure as hell don’t accept facile solutions for complex problems. There’s no easy fix for what ails us as humans. If there were, we would have found it by now. We haven’t. Yeah, I’m pretty sure that many of us have experienced “Ah-Ha!” moments in our lives when something we’d grappled with unsuccessfully suddenly seems clear, as if the answer had been staring us in the face all along, just waiting for us to awaken from our habitual sleep to see the obvious. Eureka! That’s rare, though, and often is a momentary fantasy, just another escape hatch that turns out to be a dead end.

So, while I resist the impulse to make sweeping judgments about good and bad, I do feel that good and bad are relevant to reality.

In astrology — my longstanding arena of study, experience, and expertise — the hope of finding a compass to guide one through the swampy jungle of life’s uncertainties is a significant part of why people turn to the stars. The quest for meaning and coherence are well and good on their own, but the more pressing questions that bring people to the astrological table are typically about dealing with the relation of interior consciousness and exterior circumstances. What the

hell am I supposed to do now? Or do next? Should I relocate this year? When is the best time for me to get married? Do I take that new job or stick with the crappy job I've got? And so on. Two factors are critical here: *content* and *timing*. What to do and when to do it.

In personal astrology (or impersonal astrology, for that matter), this boils down to an either/or question, which happens to be the title of this commentary: Should I go with the flow or swim against the tide? Should I resist the current or stop fighting and let it carry me where it wants to? Should I move forward assertively or lay low and wait? Which approach is safer? Which will lead to a "good" outcome (meaning an outcome I'd like)? Which will reap me the happiness, joy, and satisfaction I yearn for? And which will plunge me into the hell of failure, denial, and suffering?

Here's the weird part: Your astrological chart (meaning your natal chart and all its personal cycles moving through time) doesn't care. The symbols never say "Do this and don't do that." In fact, charts don't give any advice at all about what you should or shouldn't do and when. Charts describe what's going on behind the curtain. They indicate what *IS* in the archetype field (at least they do if you accept the tenets of astrology as a system...).

You know who does make judgments, based on astrological charts, about what you should do and when? *Astrologers*, that's who. Charts don't interpret themselves. They don't speak. They sit there, on the page or on-screen, just staring at us. It's human beings looking at those charts who interpret the symbols, placements, patterns, and cycles, then fearlessly stride into the lion's den (where angels fear to tread) and make pronouncements about what we should or shouldn't do and when.

So, keep that in mind. If you're consulting an astrologer, what you're getting is the astrologer's opinion. And going in, it's helpful to know the astrologer's bias in reacting to whatever he or she sees in the chart.

Some astrologers seem to believe that indications in a chart, especially with regard to cycles and timing, need to be countered to maintain balance. If the chart factors lean one way, they'll advise the client to lean the other way. The astrologer might see a major period where Neptune is active in the chart and say, "*You'll have a marked tendency to float away on clouds of fantasy, so be sure to keep your feet on the ground.*" Or the astrologer could see a period of strong Saturnian emphasis, and the advice might be, "*You'll tend toward over-seriousness or even depression, so lighten up!*"

That approach has never seemed right to me. Not because it's "wrong" — as I stated at the beginning of this piece, I'm not certain about judging right or wrong — but because of what I've learned about people over my 46 years as a working astrologer and 12,000 sessions with clients.

I've learned that people can't fight the archetype field. In sailing, we use the wind to propel our ship in whatever direction we want by how we set the sails

and steer the ship. We can go with the wind, or we can tack against the wind. Living, however, is not like sailing (sailing is much simpler and easier to learn...). My experience with myself and other people is that we don't know how to tack in our lives. We may try to reset our sails and change course, but we almost always end up going with the wind.

I'm not suggesting that this is the "right" way to live. Maybe if humans were more conscious and less habitual, we could exercise more control and choice in our life-journeys. Maybe if we had more power or more love we could override the pushes and pulls of the archetype field. I don't really know why we can't. I'm just reporting what I've seen in myself and others over and over and over for 70 years now. For whatever reasons, going with the flow inside ourselves seems to be the strategy that works most often.

What this means is that in my professional session work, I always cheerlead and lobby for my clients to embrace whatever I see indicated in their charts.

In the two examples I listed above (Neptunian and Saturnian periods), here's a little slice of what I might offer to a client. With Neptune, I could say, *"You're going to Disneyland. Pack a bag. You're taking a ride up in a balloon, but don't tell yourself to take along a parachute, because you'll forget to bring it. You're dreaming, so don't even try to wake up. When the dream is happy, enjoy it. If the dream turns nightmarish (as it may), feel that too and flow with it."*

I won't tell my client to be practical, disciplined, reasonable, or dutiful, because those are not Neptunian qualities.

With quarterly Saturn transits, I might say, *"You've been driving down the road of your life-journey, and now you've come to a railroad crossing. The gates are down, the lights are flashing, and a long freight train is clickety-clacking at 10 miles an hour through the crossing. The train is so long that you can't see either the engine or caboose. Your only option is to stop. Stop and wait. Yes, I understand that you feel frustrated and impatient, but every time you try to move forward, you'll be blocked. Bide your time. This too shall pass."*

Both those examples are over-simplified, of course. In an actual session, the chart provides much more extensive and detailed information. Also, sessions are real conversations and co-creative experiences. I bring the astrology, clients bring their real lives, and we reveal the meaning together. What I wrote in the examples above is just a small part of a bigger picture.

To be clear, when I suggest going with the flow and not swimming against the tide, I'm not talking about politics or society. The middle of the bell curve holds no charms for me. I'm all for individual integrity, principled resistance, and conscientious civil disobedience. The flow and tide to which I refer in this commentary are from another realm entirely, and that's where astrology lives.

Your chart is not your enemy. Work with it, not against it.