

My Journey as an Astrologer: How I Regard Sessions

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In the 1970s, when I was a young punk working astrologer in my twenties, I had an idea about what I might be able to offer people with astrology. Having had since late childhood the primary goal of becoming a psychologist, plus having already spent almost four years as a psychology undergraduate in America's factory system of collegiate "education" (at Michigan State University and the University of Missouri at Columbia), I felt that I knew a little something about cognitive psychotherapy — basically, "talk therapy" of various kinds, from the classic, long-term Freudian psychoanalysis that became almost a running gag in culture during the first half of the 20th century, through the smorgasbord of therapies developed in the 1960s — Jungian, Maslovian, gestalt, reality, role-play, interpersonal, transactional, psychodynamic, creative arts, primal scream, etc. In that turbulent decade, all sorts of healing alternatives were explored, although the majority remained firmly within the medical model of clinical deviations in personality and/or behavior that were deemed to be less than well-adjusted or outright unacceptable psychologies.

(Somewhere along the way between the 1960s and now, psychiatry moved away from its earlier orientation of mostly talk therapy to focus almost exclusively on behaviorally-focused, pharmaceutically-based solutions. I regard this approach to therapy as "better living through chemistry." That is, however, another essay entirely. I note it here merely as a sidebar.)

Although I had been the beneficiary of a very good primary and secondary education in suburban public schools, my college experience at university had been pretty much a disaster, and my faith and trust in the institutions of education and psychology were at low ebb. My take at the time on most standard psychotherapies available in the 1970s was less than sterling. In short, I was extremely dubious about the value of most talk therapies.

In particular, I didn't like the medical model, with its inherently imbalanced power relationships between doctor and patient. While I understood that some people were so damaged that they represented a real danger to themselves, others, and society in general, that wasn't the arena that interested me.

For me, the point of being a professional astrologer in private practice working mostly with individuals was not to rescue seriously damaged people from the

psych wards. Nor was it to foster more well-adjusted or productive members of society. I was completely uninterested in helping people to fit in, adjust to social norms, or conform to standard expectations. A lot of society and social science in general were aimed at achieving that end, but contributing to the smooth operation of the human beehive wasn't compelling for me.

I was interested in something less standard and more exotic. What I wanted to explore was consciousness itself — what it is, where it comes from, and how we might better foster its development within individuals and groups. To this end, astrology seemed better-suited than most other languages and symbolic or categorical systems. At least the astrology I knew did.

"Fitting in" seemed to require ignoring much of what we truly were and reshaping ourselves into a one-size-fits-all mold. I wanted to work in the opposite direction, toward recognizing whatever we inherently were by identifying and highlighting our most unique and natural selves, then refining those facets to allow their most graceful and creative use. Sometimes this would mean learning how not to fuck up, but often it meant going one's own way, even when that was confusing or insecure.

Back then, in the 1970s, I hadn't yet become cynical about the possibilities offered by America. Sure, America was clearly full of shit, but it still allowed room for individuals to flourish "between the cracks." But, of course, that was before neoliberalism, algorithms, and deep state surveillance.

But back to therapy. During my first decade as a working astrologer, I hoped that I might be able to offer my clients something that was a bit like therapy, but better than traditional therapy. By "better," I meant quicker, a lot cheaper, more useful, and probably more enjoyable than the lengthy and typically expensive courses of "treatment" that were standard in most talk therapies. Of course, in a saner country than America, therapy would have been less expensive for the client or patient. But our American obsession with money and wealth combined with our disdain for universal health care combined to make insurance coverage rare, dicey, or unavailable, even as part of the medical model.

I don't mean to suggest that I regarded astrology sessions as some miraculous solution to the myriad, daunting challenges of life in society and our yearning for happier and more satisfied lives. Hardly. In fact, my most basic, bottom-line assumption was that no easy solutions to humanity's core problems existed or was ever likely to be found. But, having admitted that, my hope was that I might be to conduct astrology sessions in a manner that would still serve my clients as a more successful experience to foster at least some healing and help them become more authentic people than traditional talk psychotherapies.

This would, of course, require clients to approach the work with an orientation that was at least similar to mine. I needed clients who had already rejected, at

least to some extent, society's standard models of expectation. Given my social life during the 1970s, however, this wasn't much of a problem. At that point in my 20s, I was surrounded, virtually inundated, by people roughly like myself who had fervently embraced the subculture of the 1960s, with its emphasis on New Age Metaphysics and alternative Spirituality.

Sure, there was a certain gonzo element to all that. Some people were fools who took everything in the most superficial or crudely literal ways — from Tibetan Buddhism through Jane Roberts' Seth material, to Carlos Castaneda's mysticism and all the different "holistic" healing modalities then being tried, such as TM, EST, Rolfing, Alexander Technique, etc, especially at exotic institutional retreats like Esalen at Big Sur and the Naropa Institute in Boulder. New Age cultism was always a shadow aspect of spirituality that mistook glamorous ego for authentic maturity, and the devotees of many such practices (Reiki, MariEI, Kofutu, Crystals, Healing Prayer Circles, and the like) were all too often not people I regarded as ideal clients. My work was better suited to less woo-woo and more down-to-earth.

In the 1980s, however, my attitudes about therapy changed, in part because of my own personal experiences, and in part because the culture moved on. I came to feel that some traditional talk therapies could offer a value all their own, particularly in functioning as viable practice in a safe environment toward developing better communication skills and more effective self-expression in relationships with others.

Also, in that decade, my own deepening experiences in the technical astrology of natal charts and moving cycles wafted me away from my previous therapeutic orientations and metaphysical perspectives in my session work with clients. I had begun my study of astrology with the strongly humanistic orientation of Dane Rudyhar. Humanistic astrology could be expressed in a sailing metaphor. It's not the winds that determine where our ship goes, but how we set our sails. In other words, humanistic astrology holds that our charts do not dictate who we are.

Over time, as my experience grew in learning how charts worked, I gradually moved away from the notion of our having boundless choice in how we respond to the problems of our inner programming. My youthful faith faded in our ability to control our own reactions as I realized that our ability to shape our own lives was distinctly limited. I came to believe chart factors were sometimes dominant (not always, but often), and that in those times graceful acceptance would be a preferable adaptation than attempting to change our condition.

Happily though, the loss of one kind of optimism was replaced by another. By the end of that decade, a new paradigm emerged that has remained with me ever since. I began to consider the information I shared in sessions as a confirmation of what my clients already knew about themselves. That was a game-changer. It meant that I didn't always need to have good news about the chart for the work to be beneficial.

Were there interpretive elements I could see in my clients' charts that they might be unaware of or didn't realize about themselves? Oh yes, for sure. These could include various personality characteristics or the probable manifestations of specific major transits. When I tried sharing these insights that clients weren't likely to have realized, they tended to bounce off. I got a lot of that "deer in the headlights" look from my clients. Over time, my experience strongly suggested to me that clients couldn't absorb much information about themselves and their lives that they weren't already aware of. And this wasn't limited only to clients I regarded as less insightful or self-aware. No, it included even people I regarded as particularly mature, intelligent, and "in the flow." As a result, I gradually began to censor what I shared in sessions. Over the decade of the 1980s, I developed a working set of filters to determine what I'd share versus what I wouldn't.

A request I've heard over and over from clients is: "*Tell me everything — good or bad. Don't hold anything back.*" I understand why clients say this, but it's impossible (and for good reason). There are ways of looking at or thinking about any chart that are so harsh and frightening that anyone hearing such interpretations about themselves would run screaming into the night. There's simply no benefit for the client nor a payoff for me in saying any of that.

The way I tend to think about this is usually in terms of economics rather than morality or ethics. The fee for a session with me is \$207.00. That's simply not enough money to justify my taking responsibility for telling my clients *everything* I see in their charts with blunt and brutal honesty. If a client were to pay me \$10,000 for a session, I would gladly tell him or her absolutely everything I saw in as unfiltered a way as I could. Otherwise, no. Clients get a lot from me, but not everything.

But back to where the goodness is. Except for extreme narcissists and clinical sociopaths, most human beings are at least a little bit uncertain about their own self-knowledge. Where self-awareness is concerned, there is often lingering doubt even about personal matters that seem clear, obvious, and definite. Having an astrological session with me typically provides information on a wide array of topics, but, at the very least, the session will include certain basic truths about ourselves. These can range from our central life-purpose (what's in it for us), to our main mission (our contribution to the world), to the meaning and tone of a particular time-frame in our lives — major periods that carry a specific tone or set of challenges.

Often, the information reflects what clients already know or sense about themselves. Usually it's similar in meaning, but in different words (since I'm doing the talking). Other times it's uncannily close to their inner self-talk, with almost exactly the same language coming from me as from within themselves (clients have told me this over and over). I wonder about that. I've concluded

that it happens because I get “in sync” rhythmically or vibrationally with my clients during the conversation, although I’m not aware that it’s happening. It’s as if I can then “listen in” on what they’re thinking.

One quality shines through whatever I share: a kind of *confirmation* that is available almost nowhere else. The powerful effect of such confirmation is its effectiveness in reducing doubt, fostering calmer peace of mind, and sometimes even increasing one’s confidence to deal with difficult situations.

When I began astrological session work 50+ years ago, I didn’t have a clue that it would take this direction. At the time I had doubts that astrology might not last for me as a discipline or a livelihood. I simply had no other viable options, however, so I went ahead with what life offered.

I’ve written before and will reiterate again here that my work with astrology has been a little like being at the carnival and buying a ticket for a ride on the rollercoaster. Just a ten-minute ride for 50¢, a mere half dollar — no big deal. Once on the ride, however, I couldn’t get off. And the ride didn’t stop after ten minutes. Heck, it didn’t stop after a year or a decade. There were a couple times over the 50 years when I thought the ride might be over, but nope. Those were just temporary lulls.

As the rollercoaster whooshes along the track, some days have been exciting. I’ve had my hands over my head many times, shouting “*Whee!!*” Other days, when the ride plummets in gut-wrenching twists and turns, I’ve found myself at least metaphorically puking my guts out over the side. All in all, I’ve had good times, bad times, and most everything in between on this astrology ride. I presume that many people could attest to something similar in certain parts of their lives that seem to be, if not entirely fated, at least beyond their control. That’s been true for me in very central ways.

[Note: My read of my own chart suggests that this may be connected somehow with the powerful symbolism of the outer planets Uranus and Pluto in my life. I don’t fit in many normal roles — that’s Uranian — and my life-journey has been shaped time and again by forces far beyond my will or my control — that’s Plutonian.]

One thing has remained quite obvious to me over the entire 50 years. I can’t get off this rollercoaster until the ride is over. And it’s not over yet.