

The Relevance of Astrology in Times of Collective Uncertainty

by Bill Herbst

Version 1.1 (posted on 20 February 2018)
© 2018 by the author, all rights reserved

We live now in an age of uncertainty. Yes, people still get up in the morning and go about their business. They get dressed, brush their teeth, go to work, deal with whatever tasks the day brings, come home, and eat dinner. They continue to navigate through their relationships with family, friends, co-workers, and strangers — the checker at the grocery store, the teller at the bank. They continue to make plans, as if life were normal. But, either obviously or subtly, directly center-stage or lurking at the edges, life is no longer normal.

Something fundamental has changed, or perhaps given way. The ties that bind the collective have frayed and loosened, sometimes severing entirely, as if the glue that held everything together had come unstuck. This is apparent in our politics, but, more and more, it is seeping into every other aspect of life. The uncertainty is particularly true in America, whose hypercomplexity has become unmanageable, and where the empire is clearly on a downward trajectory, despite protestations to the contrary from the talking heads on television. The economy is healthy, they tell us — the markets are fine. But about two-thirds of the country no longer believes that. Public trust in institutions has eroded to a low ebb never before seen, and with good reason. Too much of what goes on in this country is, in one way or another, a scam, a con, like three-card monte or a shell game. Those who run the games — akin to casino owners — win, and everyone else loses.

Anything could happen from this point on, and sporadic crises increasingly pockmark the landscape. The 20th century was, for all its chaos and suffering, the “American century.” The 21st is not.

From my point of view, the question arises: During such times of collective uncertainty, does astrology — especially the personal astrology of individual lives — continue to have any relevance? Or do the tidal forces of unpredictable and possibly terrible collective events reduce it to meaninglessness?

Collective disasters — whether natural or man-made — sweep up everyone in their path, regardless of what’s in their astrological charts. If we could examine the natal charts and active cycles of everyone involved when an earthquake hits

or a commercial jet goes down, we wouldn't find much, if any, indication of those events in the individual charts of those involved. Perhaps some element of risk might be revealed in a small percentage of the natal charts or major transits, but, by and large, personal astrology would tell us next to nothing about the likelihood of that particular disaster occurring at that time. Some astrologers have worked long and hard to discover the keys to predicting such events by examining the mundane charts for the moment of a disaster, but — to the best of my knowledge — no obvious or reliable system has emerged, and certainly nothing that specifies such events with consistent accuracy. Usually, the closest an astrologer can come to a symbolic indicator is some minor element in the chart for the moment, and even then it's a stretch.

Beyond that, astrologers never have access to the individual charts of people caught up in a disaster. On 9-11, for instance, 3,000 people died when the Twin Towers collapsed. No study has ever been done on the individual charts of those who died. Beyond the daunting effort and time of undertaking such research, accurate birth information for so many people is simply not available in the public record.

So, I am left with my basic assumption: That collective events override the astrological indications within personal lives.

The 20th century was particularly tragic in terms of mass events that affected humanity in fatal ways. Two world wars, between which was a global great depression, interspersed by pogroms, famines, and pandemics, prematurely ended the lives of 150,000,000 human beings. Compared to the dire portents of the 21st century, where severe climate disruption and/or nuclear holocaust are now ever-increasing risks, 150 million souls could represent a mere pittance of the toll, just a drop in the bucket.

In such times as these, where we literally face the possible extinction of our species, does personal astrology continue to provide a positive resource?

My answer is yes. While astrology cannot safeguard us from dire collective events (the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, as Shakespeare wrote), it can do one thing better than any other system I've ever found. The astrology of personal lives, through natal charts and cycles activating through time, can and does describe the meaning of our individual journeys through life, specifically, the kind of life-experience and focus that allow us to build a sense of personal meaning and coherence. Put in the simplest terms, the astrology of our personal lives tells us what we're here for. Natal charts are mandalas, literally symbolic maps, that reveal which life-experiences provide us with central meaning that acts as a magnetic center to bring all our various facets into alignment.

That is no less true even if our lives are cut short or snuffed out by some collective event that arises out of the blue to overtake us. We are, after all,

mortal. Everyone dies. That's how life on earth evolved and is maintained. The question is not whether we will die, nor even when, but what we do with the time we have while we draw breath and experience life in bodies. That's when we have at least some choice about who and how we will be. Astrology can be an aid to that process, allowing us to live with a little more grace, understanding, and — at times — even greater acceptance of our limitations.

No, astrology cannot guarantee success or happiness. It won't help anyone win the lottery or find the perfect mate. Those are fantasies. Astrology can, however, make us feel more at home in our lives by reminding us of who we are and what we're about. It can enhance our sense of purpose and our experience of meaning.

That should not be dismissed or taken lightly. It makes a real difference, no matter what else happens.