

Faculty Day 22.3.2014

Journeying as an Astrologer

This talk will look at the path to individuation that we are all on and how being an astrologer affects our journey.

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I'm delighted to be here today on what is an extremely important occasion for many of you. I remember becoming a new diploma holder vividly – it's one of those moments that is etched in my memory, as it represented the start of my professional astrological career and was a significant step on my journey. I had Jupiter on my MC then and today, it's on my IC, having done a few rounds in between times. And that's one of the things we, as astrologers, do. We pay attention to such things.

The idea that we're all on a journey through life is not just something those with planets in Sagittarius subscribe to. Many of us believe this and our experiences back this up.

As we grow older we can reflect back and see where we've come from and where we are now. This process begins with the mid-life transits but ratchets up a notch or two after the second Saturn Return.

It's not only individuals who are on a journey, organisations are, too and, for most of us here today, our journey and the Faculty's have intersected. Particularly with organisations, their journey is essential to their survival. They have to reinvent themselves to stay relevant to the changing world around them.

Slide FAS chart

And since the Faculty and I went our separate ways in 1998, it has undergone huge changes. Right now it has Jupiter on its Venus, which is conjunct my IC and so this is a happy occasion and I'm back at home with my original astrological family.

A bit like the thinking in some supposedly more primitive people, James Hillman, the archetypal psychologist, would see buildings,

organisations and places as having soul and that western thinking, in our arrogance, have denuded them of this – we have assumed it all for ourselves. The astrological paradigm would certainly support that idea, as we look at the charts of organisations and countries to gain a deeper understanding of their inner nature – their soul.

The birth chart of a baby is often seen as a blueprint of their developing personality and character and shows their potential. Yet, the exact circumstance of their life and of how things will unfold is beyond my remit as an astrologer. What I can see is the kind of experiences they are likely to encounter that will shape their development over the years.

I can suggest, to a parent who has a child with a Sun Saturn square, that such a child will have a fierce inner critic and to do their best not to exacerbate it. I can suggest to a parent with a child who doesn't readily fit into the stereotypical gender roles ascribed to them, that their Cancerian son might be especially creative, like to cook, be more sensitive and less macho than his peers and to protect him so he doesn't have to develop a hard shell or that their Aries daughter might need adventure, to test her mettle and be something of a tomboy.

So, without wanting to limit the potential that the birth chart shows, we astrologers have a unique ability to create space in the minds of the parents for a particular child living in a particular family. I certainly wish someone could have explained to my parents that I was made from different stuff to them and that my journey would be rather different from theirs.

Our journey will have outer markers, achievements, visible progress and setbacks. But, for many, our focus may be more on our inner development. As I was a psychotherapist, it's this inner journey that we take that most interests me. There may well be outer manifestations too, as inner development usually results in outer changes; they run in parallel.

The idea that character creates destiny is at the heart of astrological thinking, so the various events that crop up in our lives can be seen as indicators of how we're doing. We have a unique advantage in that if we are beset by difficulties, a small voice somewhere in the background tells us it's because we're not on the right path. We may not have the answer, we may not know

how to fix the problems or get out of difficulties but in the main we believe in a benign universe that is pushing and shoving us in the direction we need to be going.

We go on developing new levels of understanding about our own charts and continue to make connections back and forth between the events in our lives and our character, as shown by our chart.

So, being astrologers is akin to having a guide by which we can navigate our journey. It doesn't mean we have it all mapped out and that there aren't plenty of surprises along the way but it does mean we have a reference point, our natal chart, transits and progressions, by which we can try to make sense of the twists and turns we encounter.

I'm aware that we astrologers are a diverse tribe, with lots of factions who hold different belief systems regarding what astrology is and can do. While I want to acknowledge these differences, I'm not really going to address them today. Rather, I'll state that my orientation is that of a psychological astrologer, who forecasts but doesn't predict.

My thoughts on astrology and my practice have changed and evolved over the years. How we interpret charts and work with clients, if indeed we do that, changes depending on the stage of life we have reached.

When a client comes who is in their twenties, we will interpret the same aspect very differently from someone who is in the sixties or seventies. Both charts show potential but the potential in the older person's chart may have solidified and become set. Some of what we'd see as inner challenges may now be manifesting as ailments.

So although it's obvious, a young person, generally and hopefully, has their life ahead of them, whereas an older person has much of their life behind them. As we grow older there is more a process of reconciliation to what has been, although I don't want to underestimate the amount of potential that can still be actualised. Once retired and free of the constraints of earning a living, many individuals blossom and get to live out potential that has been sacrificed for financial security.

Jung's concept of individuation is one that many astrologers subscribe to. Called the path to self-actualisation by Humanistic Psychology, it fits with the astrologer's view that a birth chart shows potential that can be fulfilled over the course of a life.

The path to individuation is also describing a journey, measured in psychological development and maturity. This is not linear, however, as it depends on our starting point.

Jung's concept of individuation rests on his understanding of typology and something he calls the transcendent function.

I believe Jung drew heavily on astrological thought in developing his concept of typology, so it's not surprising that so many astrologers find it fits well with their astrological understanding.

However, Jung's theory of individuation is not embraced in the same way, as most astrologers wouldn't assume that developing one of the four functions, which loosely equates to our weakest element, would be an essential part of our journey in life, which is what he believed.

For those who aren't familiar, or need reminding, I will digress a little and explain Jung's model.

Jung describes two attitudes, that of introversion and extraversion, and two categories, each consisting of two functions, one of perceiving and one of judging. The perceiving functions are considered irrational functions. They are intuition and sensation, which astrologers correlate with the elements Fire and Earth. The judging functions are considered rational functions, and are feeling and thinking, which correlate with Water and Air.

Show slide of Four Functions.

In Jung's model, the four functions defined consciousness. Sensation is the function that tells us that something exists, thinking tells us what it is, feeling whether we like it or not, and intuition what potential it has. Sensation and intuition, the irrational, perceiving functions, were seen as a polarity, mutually inhibiting each other, as were feeling and thinking, the rational, judging functions.

The functions were seen as the ways the ego adapted. Jung's theory claims that one function is developed and is then called the superior function, and the remaining three are less developed and called the auxiliary functions. It is considered usual for one of the auxiliary functions to be more developed than the other two and at times this is called the secondary function.

The secondary function is always, in Jung's scheme, in a different category to the superior function. The least developed function is called the inferior function and is always in the same category as the superior function. So, someone with feeling as their superior function automatically has thinking as their inferior function. And the reverse is also true. Someone with intuition as their superior function automatically has sensation as their inferior function.

Each of these functions can be introverted or extraverted. So we have introverted feeling and extraverted feeling, introverted thinking and extraverted thinking, introverted intuition and extraverted intuition, introverted sensation and extraverted sensation.

Jung's view was that all the auxiliary functions were of the opposite attitude to the superior function. So, if introverted feeling is the superior function then extraverted thinking is the inferior function and both the auxiliary functions of intuition and sensation would be extraverted.

Jung's typology is dealing with the ego and consciousness. The superior function is the developed, conscious part of the psyche, while the inferior function is the undeveloped and unconscious part of the psyche. Jung considered that the superior function had to be developed, and that is what gave an individual a sense of identity, but that in later life, in order to individuate, the inferior function had also to be developed, and that this was always at the expense of the superior function. This would typically be a time of crisis.

Marie Louise Von Franz (1971) describes the development of the superior function as 'playing to our strengths' – we find we have a greater facility in a particular function and capitalise on it. The second function is usually developed fairly early on in life, as this provides the individual with some facility with a different attitude. Von Franz suggests that it is when an individual becomes bored with how life is going that a new function becomes developed.

Von Franz writes, 'The ego assimilates its first function and then is content for a while. After a time it assimilates its second function and lives contentedly once more. Then it pulls up a third to the plane of consciousness. Now three functions are assimilated on the upper, civilised level upon which we try normally to live. But one cannot bring the fourth function up to this same level.' One has to go down to the inferior function, and develop 'the middle ground'.

Von Franz likens the four functions to four doors to a room, where we have three doors locked and under our control. They are a part of the ego's conscious functioning. But the fourth door we can't control, and it is through this that the shadow, anima and animus and the archetypes will enter.

These Jungian concepts have become relatively familiar to us all, the shadow being a figure of the same gender that we don't own or identify with, while the anima is the contra sexual figure in a man's psyche and the animus is the contra sexual figure in a woman's psyche. But I don't want to digress too far into this arena, suffice it to say that our journey in life involves grappling with and developing our inferior function, which might well correspond to an element weakness in our chart.

If you subscribe to the Jungian model, the first problem is that Jung's concept of the Four Functions and our way of understanding the elements are at odds. I struggled with this for some time. Most of us know Fire Earth types and Air Water types and Arroyo, amongst others, describes the characters of these elemental combinations in a way most of us will recognise. Astrologers don't see these elements as opposites and antithetical.

However, notwithstanding the above, it now seems to me that we can't superimpose Jung's thinking quite so neatly on to our system, and, for instance, we can have earth in our chart and still have an inferior sensation function.

Jung claimed to value all four functions equally, but acknowledged that Western culture privileged thinking.

Slide with Hillman quote

James Hillman writes, 'So much is feeling the problem of the times that one could preposterously assert that the whole field of psychotherapy resulted from inadequacies of the feeling function. ... Our feeling problems are collective problems ...'

Jung also underestimated the extent to which we are socialised to exhibit certain functions, depending on our gender. So, men are socially engineered to be thinking types while women are socially engineered to be feeling types, whether or not that is in fact your innate nature.

This cultural expectation puts considerable pressure on all of us to develop in a stereotypical way, without due regard for the stuff we're actually made of and astrology can help massively here.

However, the idea that we eventually encounter an issue that we can't resolve is something most of us have experienced. We circle round and round it but try as we might, we remain stuck. Certainly, in my therapy practice I frequently had clients who were frustrated and bored by a dilemma, which they revisited many times, making little progress.

This may well coincide with challenging transits but the issue is likely to be one that's been with us in some shape or form for a very long time, not necessarily something that's immediately associated with the current transits. These may bring it in to sharper focus or put us under pressure.

As a psychotherapist, my attitude was that it was an essential part of our work to spiral round this issue, until a client was able to transcend the problem. There was no solution and that was the whole point. This was the cross of matter to which they were nailed and the only way forward was transcendence. So, that small slither of a new perspective was an all important step towards individuation.

This is where the Transcendent Function comes in. In order to resolve the issue we need to find this new perspective, to rise above our problem or issue and understand it in a new light. Some might liken this to developing a spiritual dimension, an acceptance, although Jung doesn't specify this.

So, in terms of our journey, battling with a dilemma we can't resolve is a good sign. It shows we're encountering an issue that can be the making of us.

The question is does astrology help?

And my answer to this is yes and no.

It helps enormously that we as astrologers think symbolically and have a reflective orientation.

However, and I've said this before, I think those of us who think we can circumvent pain and suffering through 'having answers' are deluded. We aren't spared our fair share of difficulties but maybe we are better equipped to cooperate with our fate.

My stance has always been that while astrology does not necessarily provide answers, it gives a very good indication of the process we're engaged in at any given time. What astrology doesn't do is enable us to avoid painful situations. We still have to go through these learning curves but hopefully we can come out the other side feeling empowered, understanding our chart and ourselves that much better.

These times of difficulty happen to everyone but non-astrologers usually lack the perspective that astrology can bring. It can be hard to see how difficulties that we're encountering might ultimately be to our benefit but if anyone is going to realise this, we astrologers are uniquely placed to do so.

When looking at transits to come, however optimistic and constructive we astrologers are when forecasting change and periods of transition up ahead for our clients, we tend to be more negative when we apply this to ourselves. So, we project our anxieties on to our future transits, not necessarily realising we have a concern here and now. Knowing we have major Pluto transits to come can fill us with dread, which is not a helpful attitude to the period of transformation to come. Some of us may embrace this but many don't.

Another cardinal sin of we astrologers is to use our language as shorthand in situations where a fuller explanation would create greater intimacy. So typically we will say, I have transiting Neptune

square my Sun at the moment and other astrologers will nod sagely in sympathy. In fact nothing of the actual experience has been communicated. So, there's a lack of genuine contact in such exchanges. We're all guilty of this – I know I do it – but if we want to connect with another human being we need to follow this up with some content.

However, as a framework to track our process, nothing compares to the astrological paradigm. I find all the generic transits really useful in measuring where someone has got to in life. Although the personal transits can be all-important in our individual development, the universal transits describe a developmental pattern that affects us all.

I often see clients who have not yet reached their first Saturn Return – maybe they have their progressed Lunar Return and can sense it's round the corner. Thirty is a milestone in most young people's minds and it can hang over them like an axe about to fall.

My approach is always to reassure, that there's still all the time in the world. Nothing is set. Prior to their first Saturn Return there's still plenty of time to experiment, make mistakes, start again. Very few people have found their path in life before their Saturn Return. For those who have, then this can be a point of consolidation but for many of us this is when certain structures we've built up have to be dismantled in order to change direction.

So, for those who think they have found their way, the Saturn Return can be a point when it all crumbles, as they find they've specialised and limited themselves too soon. My advice would always be to keep your options open until after this landmark. If you're on the right path, you'll get promotion or other, reassuring validation, at the Saturn Return.

However, the Saturn Return doesn't only test out whether we're on the right path in terms of the world of work; it's just as important on a personal level. At this point relationships either become stronger, with a firmer commitment or break up. They tend to do one or the other.

Ideally, at the next Saturn square, at around 36, we fine-tune any decisions we made at 30 – this is when they are re-examined and, if found wanting, adjustments can be made. It's more a matter or

fine tuning, rather than the drastic changes than we can sometimes encounter at 30.

However, for many women, this Saturn square behaves quite like the Saturn Return, as women often take longer to find their way. They have various impediments, by way of cultural expectations that they have to disentangle themselves from first. Of course men, too, may have this problem, especially if they come from a family background where they are branching out in a direction that's alien to their family of origin. If this hasn't been resolved at the Saturn Return, then this is the next opportunity.

So, note I call it an opportunity, when the individual concerned may feel as if their life is disintegrating. This is the unique ability astrologers have over others, which can assist them in seeing such an episode in their life in this way too. So, we can help our clients – and ourselves – to co-operate with our destiny.

Slide of midlife transits.

I've mentioned already the midlife transits – Saturn square Saturn, Uranus opposite Uranus, Neptune square Neptune and Pluto square Pluto that we all experience between the ages of 36 and 45. These have shifted and occur at a younger age and in a different sequence, with the Pluto square Pluto now being the first some of you who are younger will encounter, rather than the last, as it was for my age group.

This is a unique opportunity that many of us take to review where we have come from and where we are heading. It's a time when we begin to take on board our mortality and recognise that our time will eventually run out – it's not infinite and certain things we think we'll do one day in the future may not ever come. So, there's pressure to get on with life and do things we've put on the back-burner.

Particularly with the Uranus opposition, we can hanker back to our younger days. Many of us go a little haywire, as we try to recapture a time we feel we are losing. Someone starting to use roller blades or a skateboard at this stage in life would be a typical, fairly benign expression. We have a whiff of our mortality and recognise that certain ways of being will be lost to us if don't try to recapture them now.

Our Neptune square also takes many of us by surprise, as most of us think we know ourselves fairly well at this stage, only to find all kinds of longings starting to surface. Frequently there'll be an inappropriate falling in love, which pulls the rug out from under our feet. Those already on a spiritual path are best equipped to navigate this mid-life transit, as they are more likely to recognise that this is a yearning for the sublime.

This period is well-known in popular culture – called the mid-life crisis – and yet most don't recognise what the underlying processes are.

Typically, if following the Jungian model, we would be becoming better acquainted with one of our secondary functions. This would not be a comfortable period. We would not be playing to our strengths any longer but neither would we be grappling with our inferior function yet. That still awaits us.

Jung spoke of a change in orientation in midlife, where outer achievement was no longer the main motivation. I think this happens more around the 2nd Saturn Return at 59.

The 2nd Saturn Return used to coincide with the age of retirement, which many individuals struggled with. This was often a time of crisis and required a major adjustment, especially for those who had invested their identity into their work. Many do not make it through. It is such an irony that so many people die soon after they retire.

With the retirement age now raised, the 2nd Saturn Return no longer corresponds with retirement but is nevertheless a rite of passage into the third phase of life. This is without doubt a more introverted phase, when achievement in the world is no longer a priority, even for those still working. The focus is on activities that nourish and sustain us and while for some this may still be work, for many the foundations are laid around this time for what will prove to be their main activity once retired.

So, just as at the 1st Saturn Return we lay the foundation stones for our working life, so at the 2nd Saturn Return we lay the foundation stones for the next phase of life, when we have increased leisure.

Not all of us will reach our 3rd Saturn Return, which happens around 87 years of age. And those of us who do won't be looking ahead to a cycle lasting thirty years; we'll know we're coming towards the end of our life. I don't have much experience of this stage, as clients of this age rarely make appointments.

While there are other important generic transits, like the Uranus opposition a little earlier at around 82 years of age, these cover the major universal milestones in our lives.

Our personal transits will also mark milestones in our development. If we're not on the right path or in the right relationship, various transits will force us to re-evaluate where we are and where we're heading.

Now these transits happen to everyone, whether or not they are an astrologer and can produce times of loss, crisis, depression, confusion as well as times of consolidation, opportunity and excitement. The advantage we have, as astrologers, is in understanding the process we're engaged with.

So, we're forewarned and can do our best to cooperate with whatever the universe is asking of us. But being forewarned isn't the same as being able to predict the outcome. We still have to undergo a process.

For instance, despite knowing we have a Pluto transit and that this is a time of deep transformation, we may not know how to translate and apply that to our own circumstances. Typically these transits require us to let go of something that we're desperately trying to hang on to. The more we resist, the more painful this period will be, until the thing, situation, person, is taken from us without our consent. Once we have relinquished whatever it was we were so desperately hanging on to, a sense of peace will descend. If it doesn't, it means there's something else that we still need to let go of.

I remember vividly one of these psychologically troubled times, when I knew I had to let go of something more but didn't know what else the universe was demanding. I'd already split up with my partner and made various other big changes but was still having the kind of dreams and feelings that indicated to me that more had

to go. It was only when I gave up one of my jobs, which was a third of my income at the time, that I felt out of the woods.

In retrospect these times of transition are crystal clear. Once we've emerged out the other side, we can see how life has cajoled us to move on, willy-nilly.

This ability to have insight in retrospect is another example of an advantage we astrologers have over the non-astrologer. It helps us to reconcile to the inevitable.

So for us astrologers, the planetary positions are a constant reference point by which we make sense of the universe. Not just our own life but the events in the world, too. We aren't so surprised by the floods when we see an exalted Jupiter trine Neptune in dignity. There was just too much water for the land and rivers to cope – an abundance of water.

Neither are we astrologers surprised by the storms and high winds – again Jupiter linked to Uranus and Pluto – exaggerating a tense square.

We may feel helpless in the face of the events in Syria, the appalling situation the Syrian people find themselves in but we do see it as another manifestation of the Uranus Pluto square.

Those of you who are mundane astrologers will look at the charts of the countries and their leaders to see who is vulnerable to this extremely challenging square. Where change is resisted the outcome is always worse.

I tend to look at these outer manifestations and, as well as being actual events in themselves, see them as a metaphor for the process many individuals are experiencing.

When the Berlin Wall came down in November 1989, Neptune and Saturn were conjunct in Capricorn and many of us felt a wall inside ourselves dissolve, too.

For me, no event passes, big or small, without my checking the ephemeris to see the exact planetary line up and angles. This is how I make sense of my journey through life.

We also have unique tool when it comes to understanding our interactions with others. Psychoanalysis and psychotherapy have had a lot to say about interpersonal relationships, including how we project inner figures onto others, however, astrology will illuminate far more with regard to our relationships without pathologising either party.

Composite charts in particular offer a unique view of a relationship which belongs to neither party but is a map of what happens when two people come together. This goes far beyond any other model that I've encountered.

I don't want to delve far into synastry, rather to acknowledge what a rich tool it is in understanding human relationships in all their myriad forms.

Even if, when caught up in the challenges that a particular relationship presents us with, we don't have much perspective, we astrologers can, retrospectively, see what the transits and progressions were at the time and which parts of our charts were activated and come to an understanding of what we were meant to learn from that encounter. So in terms of our journey, if we are reflective, our relationships can probably teach us more about ourselves than anything else.

The symbolic thinking that is a way of life for us astrologers is what differentiates us most from non-astrologers. While some non-astrologers will think symbolically, I haven't come across a system that has the richness that astrology offers. So, my journey has been immeasurably enriched by my knowledge of astrology, providing a constant reference point as I navigate my way through life.

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