

PSYCHOLOGICAL ASTROLOGY - A Tool to help us on The Journey to Becoming Ourselves

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Psychological astrology has, like the old Roman god Janus, a double face. It can provide a surgical scalpel which cuts through to the underlying motives, complexes and family inheritance which lie behind the manifest problems and difficulties which the individual faces; and it can also provide a lens through which can be viewed the teleology and purpose of our conflicts in context of the overall meaning of the individual's journey. [1]

As thinking beings our quest is not merely to seek happiness, but mostly one of finding understanding, clarity and meaning. Throughout our lives and in particular when we reach the powerful junctures of adolescence, late 20's, midlife and early 60's we are prone to feel an internal pressure to seek answers to the crucial underlying questions - why am I here? What is my purpose? What is my potential? Am I fulfilling it and if not how can I do so?

Self-understanding with a view to individuation lies at the center of most western psychologies. In the words of James Hollis "individuation is the humbling task to serve what our deepest nature asks of us." [2] It involves attempting to become more fully ourselves, who we are at our core, rather than who we think we need to be or are told we have to be. This is neither easy nor painless.

Hollis describes how individuation, which was one of Carl Jung's biggest contributions to psychology, "is misunderstood as egotism or self-absorption. Rather, individuation has to do with becoming, as nearly as one can manage, the being that was set in motion by the gods. Such a path is seldom if ever the path of ego gratification, creature comforts, vacillation and flight. It is the cruciform path of the self which will seek its own fullest being whether the ego cooperates or not". [3]

The path involves finding and re-owning and living the bits of ourselves that we never met as well as the bits that got squashed, distorted, or sacrificed along the way. However, often it is easier to "walk in shoes too small and live in lives too small"[4] Like the bird in the cage that refuses to leave the familiar however limiting it may feel, we too can find the possibility of living our truth too frightening to even contemplate.

As Nelson Mandela said in his speech "Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure". [5]

So how do we begin the process of re-owning all the bits of ourselves?

What are some of the questions we must ask ourselves and how does Psychological Astrology help us to find answers?

The following may be a useful starting point: [6]

1. Where do you feel stuck in your life? (If something from your past dominates your present life it signals that you are stuck, thus blocking your energy and your possibilities of moving forward and limiting your real choices).
2. Where are you asking for others to take responsibility for your life?
3. Where is your unlived life, which haunts, summons or intimidates you?
4. Where is the spontaneous child you once were?
5. In what way are you carrying the unlived life of your parent?
6. Where is your unresolved relationship with your parent/s preventing you from finding real fulfillment in your adult relationships?
7. What complexes run your life?
8. Can you risk being a larger person; can you bear the pain of growth over the pain of remaining afraid, small and lost?
9. What are your fears and which of them are based on childhood experiences? Can you bear them happening and what will happen to you if you do not bear them and stay stuck?

Jung and Freud were pioneers in naming and exploring the unconscious; that part of us that we are not aware of and yet if left unexplored can play havoc over our behaviors and our lives. As Jung said, *When an inner situation is not made conscious, it happens outside, as fate*[7]. This can be particularly evident in relationships. For example the individual who has an unconsciously strong innate need for freedom and fails to recognize that they are living it out either through choosing partners who act it out for them by leaving the relationship or by choosing partners who are unavailable or unable to commit.

The astrological chart is a superb map for navigating this mysterious terrain for it is not only a portrait of those parts of us which we are willing to acknowledge or are happy for the world to see. It tells the whole story, revealing all the characters, and exposing aspects of our natures we may try to conceal not only from others, but from ourselves as well. Nor do astrological symbols moralize or pass judgment on what is good or bad. Each astrological symbol contains a spectrum of positive and negative qualities and a teleology or inherent meaning.. We can to some degree educate and manage or at the very least provide constructive outlets for what we are conscious of in ourselves. But if we are unconscious of something it

will sooner or later find a way to dominate and control us. What we are unconscious of has a way of not only erupting from within, but of materializing from without. [8]

A Psychological Astrology consultation is a dynamic process between the astrologer and the client. The client is deemed to be the expert on his/her self. The astrologer can assist her/him on their journey by translating the symbolic language of the natal chart into a comprehensible form. However, it is the client alone who knows how much and which areas of her/his chart s/he has been able to live out and integrate. As well as personal choice this is also determined by cultural/societal parameters.

Our journey to find ourselves is mythologized in most cultures of the world through the story of the hero's journey or quest. [9] The stories differ in the nature of the hero and the obstacles or tests he/she has to face. Astrologically the hero's journey is the Solar Quest. [10] By this I mean the journey to find our astrological Sun, which effectively means the journey to understand our chart as a whole.

The driving force behind the hero's journey is the desire to find his true origins. The answer to the question: who am I? The first phase of the Hero's quest inevitably involves leaving his/her comfort zone, which in many myths such as Parsifal and the Holy Grail is represented by having to leave one's mother. Psychologically this entails leaving behind the pull of the womb, the familiar things which have embodied security and comfort for us, and our primal and often literal home.

Astrologically this means leaving the comfort of our moon sign, which we tend to live in mostly as children and taking risks in unfamiliar territory in order to become our Sun - our essence. The hero leaves because he hears the call to adventure through a dream or a crisis or through other adventurers going by and urging him to join them. This first call to adventure usually happens at the first Saturn return at age 28/29. It comes again later in life particularly during the midlife transits and during the transits of Saturn, Chiron or the outer planets to our natal Sun. If we have not heeded the call to adventure in the past it will knock on our door even more loudly as time goes on. If we keep refusing to heed it we sacrifice a part of ourselves. In doing so we risk a sense of deep unfulfilment and possibly depression as well as the possibility of trying to live our un-lived life through our children, thereby unwillingly putting immense pressure on them.

Sometimes the hero starts his journey alone and meets helpers along the way. In other cases he gathers or finds a group of supporters or companions as in the story of "Jason and the Argonauts". Astrologically the companions we take with us or meet are represented by the planets in our chart, which form helpful aspects as well as some of the planets transiting our chart at particular times in our life. Often the hero is taught skills along the way by the other gods. Astrologically we all have resources in our chart, which often we are not aware of and which will not flourish without some training. The hero needs to become physically and emotionally tough and self-sufficient to survive hence he needs to learn discipline as well as survival skills.

Along the way the hero is faced with many challenges and obstacles, which he needs to learn to overcome. These are threshold crossings. If he fails in any of the tasks he has to extend the journey for a longer period of time so that he can meet the same challenges yet again and try a different method of dealing with them as he grows into maturity. (The natal chart describes the type of hero we need to be and the nature of the dragons we are likely to be faced with. It will not describe whether we will succeed or not). The journey entails the hero facing his deepest fears and dealing with the envy and anger of others who have not heeded their own calling. This means learning to be alone. Many of the tasks are physical like slaying dragons and lions but the hero needs to use his mind as well as physical courage to overcome the hurdles. The hero is also aware that the slaying of monsters is not about needless slaughter and cruelty. He must take only what the gods have required and thank them at the end of the journey. Often the hero represented this through wearing the pelt of the animal he conquered such as Hercules with the lion's pelt. This was a sign of respect for the animal's strength and courage.

Finally the hero arrives in a new place and is faced with the biggest challenge. If he has learnt the lessons he needed to learn along the journey and succeeds in this final task he usually inherits a kingdom and becomes the reigning monarch. He also discovers his true origins and members of his family as well as a spouse. Often he meets a dying king who turns out to be his grandfather. Hence he has found the archetype of the father within him and is now a man ready to take on the responsibilities of adulthood.^[11] Astrologically this is the place of understanding what our purpose is in life and what our strengths and weaknesses are with humility and compassion for ourselves and others. It is where we truly see and accept ourselves. This is maturity and in reaching this point we inherit responsibility to be the elder and help others.^[12] The son or daughter becomes the parent.

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[1] Liz Greene and Howard Sasportas "The development of the Personality" Weiser Books Pg. XIV

[2] James Hollis "Creating a Life: Finding your Individual Path" Inner City Books Pg. 135

[3] James Hollis *ibid* pg. 69

[4] James Hollis "On this Journey we Call our Life, Living the Questions" Inner City Books pg. 16

[5] Nelson Mandela Inaugural Speech, South Africa 1994 taken from quote by Marianne Williamson

[6] Some of these questions were adapted from James Hollis "Creating a Life" chap. 20 pgs. 119 - 122

[7] James Hollis "On this Journey we Call Our Life" pg. 31

[8] Liz Greene and Howard Sasportas "Dynamics of the Unconscious" Arkana Pg. IX

[9] Many of the Greek and Roman myths describe the hero as male - this is mainly due to the patriarchal culture of the time although there are myths such as Innana's descent into the underworld, which clearly portray a heroine on the Solar Quest. For the sake of simplicity I have used the term hero to refer to both female and male.

[10] For further information on the Solar Quest see Liz Green "Apollo's Chariot, The Meaning of the Astrological Sun". CPA publications

[11] Both men and women need to understand the mother and father archetype and how it is constellated for them.

[12] Sadly many of us forget to find ourselves before we try to help others thus ending up burnt out, as there was no "I" there in the first place to give to "you". A wonderful healer called Elaine Heller regularly reminded me many years ago that we can only give from a position of fullness. To be full we need to be true to who we are.