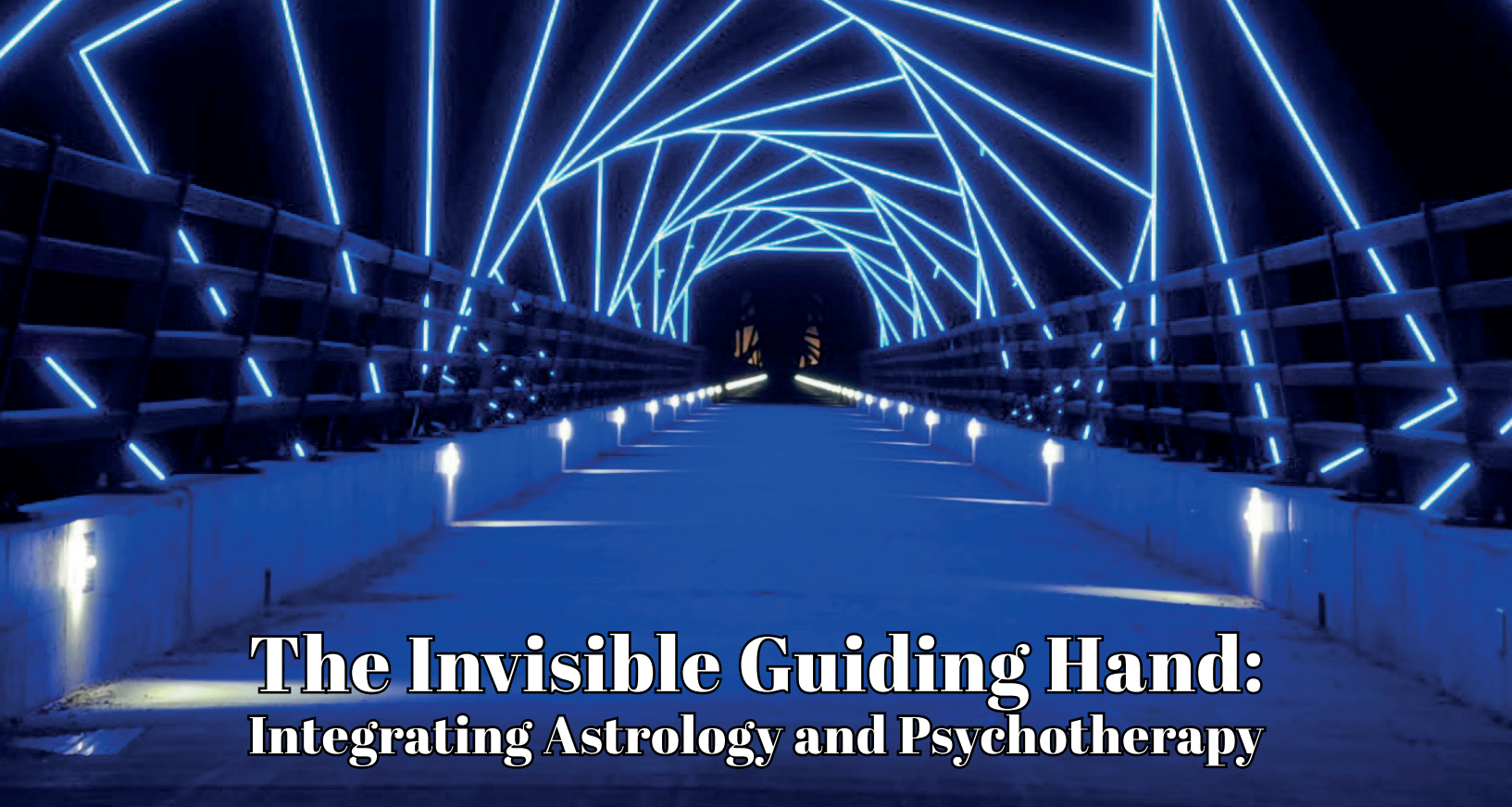




The Invisible Guiding Hand: Integrating Astrology and Psychotherapy

by Andrea Conlon

Astrology is a powerful and unique lens through which we can understand ourselves. Using this lens with psychotherapy offers profound opportunities for healing that other approaches may miss.

Astrologically informed psychotherapy represents a growing alternative career path for those who desire to work more closely – and more often – with a client and their healing process. There are an increasing number of practitioners doing this, with most operating under the radar.

If you are called to be a therapist and if astrology holds the ultimate authority on how you understand people and your own life, then you may be a candidate for this integration.

Theoretical foundations

We can position astrologically informed therapy within both archetypal and transpersonal psychology frameworks. Both focus

on how humans connect to existential dimensions beyond personal identity. In particular, archetypal psychology has a close link to astrologically informed therapy because we use the archetypes of the planets and twelve signs of the zodiac to build a bridge between the human and the cosmic. This can be healing to those who may have felt an existential isolation, loneliness and meaninglessness.

From time immemorial, humanity has had a need to find and experience their place in the cosmos. Astrology helps us discover the soul's connection to the mythic, archetypal realm. It offers powerful insights but, to be useful, it must *ground* this archetypal understanding in the client's lived experience, where they can make practical use of it and develop a felt connection to their chart.

In this piece, I will share my experiences over several decades of working as a therapist using astrology as my primary theoretical lens. Single-session chart readings have never been fully satisfying for me because they stop short of helping a client work through their situation. I always want to do more and develop longer-term relationships with clients. If you share this feeling, perhaps this alternative approach could be a better fit for you as well.

As astrology becomes more accepted, especially among younger people, there will be a growing demand for therapists with this orientation. One client said, 'I think it's a brilliant combination.' Such music to my ears! I look forward to a time when astrology will be recognized as a respected and more mainstream theoretical model within psychotherapy.

Validation from Jung

We astrologers already have Carl Jung in our corner. He stated that healing cannot occur without a direct encounter with the numinous – the sacred. This is precisely where astrology becomes invaluable. Our birth chart connects us to a larger cosmos *beyond* the personal. We become linked to a mysterious and meaningful universe. Jung said, 'Meaning makes a great many things endurable – perhaps everything.'¹ Simply put, meaning powerfully contributes to our



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psychological well-being, and learning to trust what is unfolding can make all the difference.

I have found inspiration and validation from Jung in walking this sometimes lonely path. Jung's writings are peppered with astrological statements – he prepared the charts of all of his patients – but here is the rub: Jung left no methodology about how he integrated astrology into his clinical work.

The relationship between Jung and astrology is complex, partly because he somewhat concealed this aspect of his work. Perhaps this reflected his internal split between scientist and mystic. Likely it was to avoid society's bias against astrology. Interestingly, you cannot rely on contemporary Jungians to know much about astrology or be particularly astrology-friendly. As Steven Forrest has noted in his talks, it seems that Jungians merely humor Jung's deep involvement with astrology.



If you are called to be a therapist and if astrology holds the ultimate authority on how you understand people and your own life, then you may be a candidate for this integration.

We astrologers remain outsiders in both the broader culture and the world of psychotherapy. To choose this path, we must accept this reality and believe passionately in astrology's authority as a map for healing and self-realization. We take this path because we can do no other. Again, I quote Jung, 'Free will is the ability to gladly do that which I must do.'²

Practicing astrologically informed therapy

While I will share a few examples of how I use astrology in therapy, there isn't a strict procedure because each therapeutic relationship is unique to the two people involved. How could it be otherwise?

Increasingly, serious students of astrology want a therapist who understands astrology. When the client knows the language of astrology, I can use it directly. But astrology can also be very effective even when I don't use a word of it. For these clients, astrology works quietly in the background, shaping my words and language – like an invisible guiding hand.

Between the extremes of a client being familiar with astrology and one who doesn't know it at all are many levels – as, for instance, where a person is open to learning how their chart might offer spiritual and psychological guidance. At this point in my career, all my clients know of my astrological orientation and in fact have chosen me for that reason.

Dual training: walking in two worlds

If we are drawn to astrological psychotherapy, we will need to get dual training and, in effect, walk in two worlds. We are doing this integration because we are called to being a therapist – it is a better fit for our core self, intrinsic energy, and our chart. We should be

proficient enough in astrology to give consultations, and we also need to have a grounding in therapeutic practice.

Consultations have a performance element, requiring more yang energy, whereas therapy demands more yin energy. For example, in reading mode I have specific areas to cover: the main themes in the birth chart, key transits and progressions. But therapy is more improvisational than a reading. In a first session with a therapy client, I am in listening mode for what is front burner for them.

The astrological therapist combines the two. We follow the client, allowing them to initiate the themes, while accompanying them with astrological presence. As a therapist using astrology, *we become a cosmically informed empathic companion.*

When someone seeks an astrology consultation, they expect an active session with the astrologer doing most of the talking. In contrast, a therapy client expects to be listened to. Being listened to is a medicine in itself. A therapist receives the client and offers presence. In fact, offering presence may be the most important element of helping others heal. As an astrological therapist, I offer *astrological presence*.

Therapeutic modalities and astrology

While astrology can be inherently healing, as a therapist we have another modality of psychic healing to offer clients. We differ from a chart reader because we are helping to *work through what the chart pictures*. This requires the safety and support of our relational presence over time, which is a step beyond a single-session reading.

Throughout my career, I've trained in numerous therapeutic approaches: Jungian, Psychodynamic, Buddhist Psychology, Self Compassion, Internal Family Systems (IFS), somatic approaches, and currently Accelerated Experiential Dynamic Psychotherapy (AEDP). Yet the authority that astrology holds for me in how I understand people has never wavered. As I study the various theories, I find important links to astrology's inherent healing capacities. And you

too will discover the models in psychotherapy that speak to *you*, and that blend effectively with astrology.

Psychotherapy has evolved over recent decades toward somatic approaches that address the healing of trauma. This stems from the realization that trauma resides in the body and must be accessed through the body. To practice therapy effectively today, we need to learn about somatic theories that recognize the inseparability of psyche and body. Currently, I am training in AEDP, which I chose because I wanted to make my work more experiential and expand my skills in working with trauma.

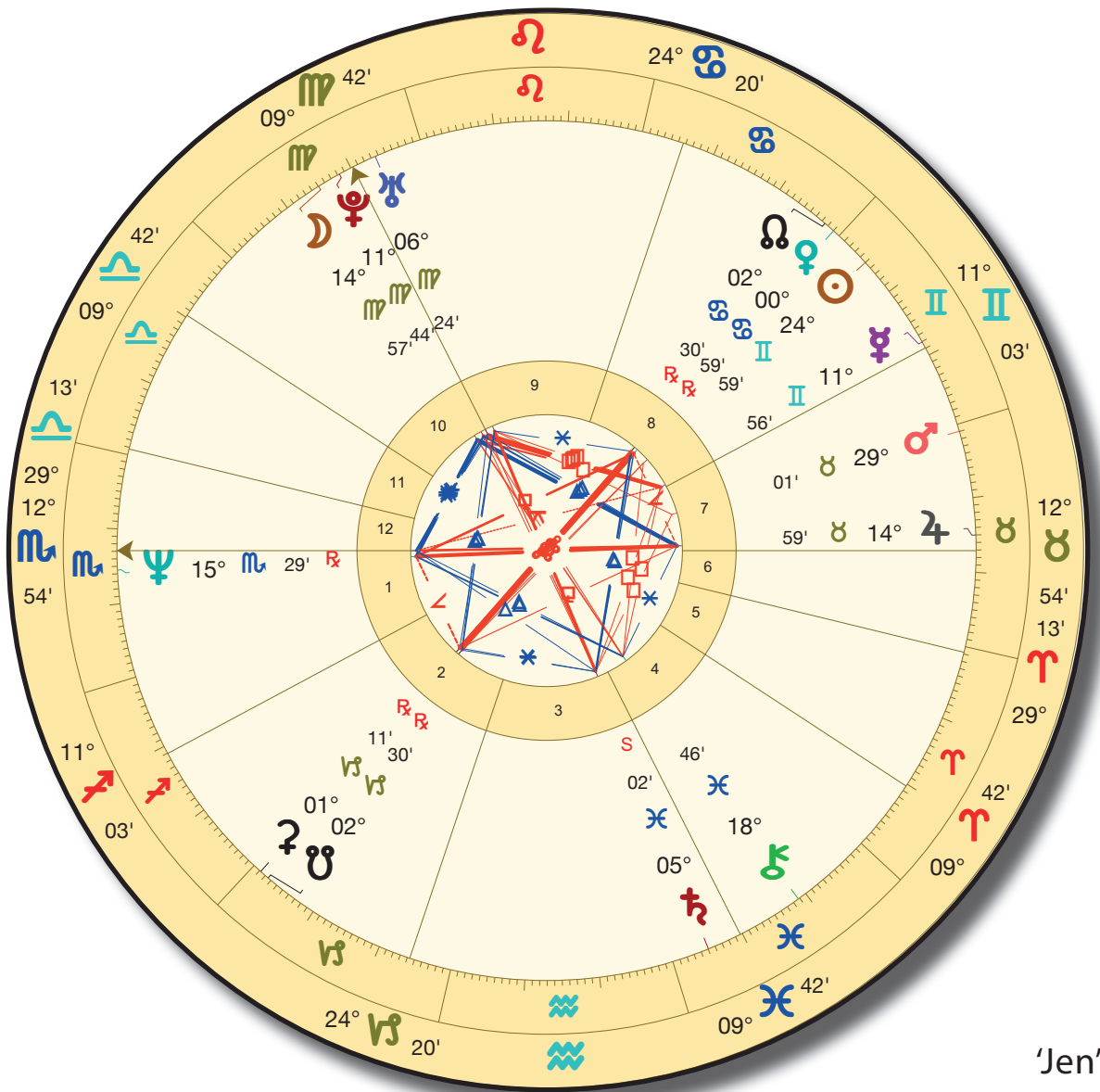
Undoing aloneness

What resonates so powerfully with me about AEDP is its signature concept of *undoing aloneness* and the suffering associated with traumatic aloneness. Diana Fosha, the creator of AEDP, says, 'Aloneness in the face of overwhelming emotion is the epicenter of psychological suffering.'³ AEDP proposes that psychopathology results from the individual's unwilled and unwanted aloneness.

'Jen' (chart below) came to me in deep grief over the sudden death of her husband. The significant transits were Saturn in Scorpio crossing her Scorpio Ascendant (conjunct Neptune), and Mars conjunct Pluto the day of his death. She became an instant single parent, and spent many years alone.

The nodal axis consistently provides brilliant guidance. Here, the nodal picture is South Node in Capricorn (disposited by Saturn in Pisces), and the North Node in Cancer tightly conjunct Venus in Cancer in the 8th house. This indicates a strong, disciplined nature whose evolutionary direction is toward a transformative, emotional relationship. Because of this, I held a place of hope for another relationship for her.

Almost a decade after the death occurred, she became involved with someone new but had much resistance to it. She viewed it as an indulgence because she was so needed by her children and aging parents.



'Jen'

I repeatedly reflected to her how *nurturing herself through a deep mating bond* was possibly *her most important soul work in this lifetime* (North Node conjunct Venus in Cancer). Over time she was able to open herself fully to the relationship. Recently, she told me how my consistent efforts – to encourage her to allow herself to love and be loved – have helped her claim something so fulfilling for herself.

When astrology reaches a deep, archetypal level, clients experience relief and feel seen and accompanied. The cosmic system can become like a nurturing mother, even if at times she practices tough love.



***As a guiding hand – albeit sometimes
an invisible one – astrology provides
a unique framework that connects
personal struggles to cosmic patterns.***

Affirmation as intervention

How powerful the desire to be known is! When working with someone's chart, we're saying, 'I see you and I want to celebrate you.' There is pleasure in recognition, that 'click' when someone finally names what has never been seen or acknowledged. *This is soul medicine.*

AEDP maintains that actively affirming a person constitutes an intervention. Isn't this what we already do with astrology? *Thank you for seeing me; it gives me more confidence to be myself!* A therapist simply takes this affirmation further.

A client, 'Angela', with Saturn in Scorpio on the Ascendant square her Sun in Aquarius, felt profoundly validated when I affirmed that she did not have an easy relationship with light social interaction or putting herself forward. She described herself as 'never feeling safe around other people'. Being alone was her safety zone. Being able to view this as an archetypal issue and not a wholly personal, biographical issue gave her a different way to hold a difficult core life issue.

Although we can't change our astrological configurations, they don't condemn us to an unalterable fate. We can work with our innate energies and heal our psychic wounds. Transformative growth is possible even with the most difficult of chart configurations. In this case, we can seek to amplify Saturn in Scorpio's gifts of emotional and psychological depths and, in general, Saturn's gifts of maturity, mastery and reliability.

We have to be very careful how we communicate astrology. How easily we can become a critical parent with astrology, as though we are chastising someone for the hard aspects in their chart or for the lack of an element. Steven Forrest emphasizes to his students that

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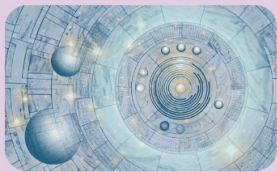
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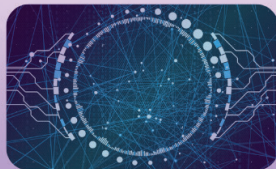
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every chart is perfect. Recently he warned against using the language of debility (e.g. detriment, fall) to a client: 'Don't say that to a civilian because it will communicate that they have a bad chart.'⁴ Instead, we want to *affirm* who they are, and their capacity to work with their birth chart.

Orientation to suffering

In a chart reading we generally describe how to work with challenging aspects, but we are not involved in a prolonged process of working *through* them. The therapist not only acknowledges suffering, but actively engages with it as it emerges in the client. And the therapist demonstrates a capacity to *share* in that suffering over time.

Likewise, we help our clients open up to the truth of their feelings *as they are*, instead of quickly shifting into solutions. As Carl Rogers, the great Humanistic psychologist, said, 'The curious paradox is that

when I accept myself as I am, then I change ... we cannot move away from what we are, until we thoroughly *accept* what we are. Then change seems to come about almost unnoticed.⁵

AEDP appeals to me because it integrates relational and somatic presence. I want to slow down and deepen the astrological material, grounding it through my relationship with the client. Rather than simply conveying astrological placements, I want to observe how they resonate with the client. Are they creating a sense of peace and calm, or potentially a sense of anxiety or even brooding terror? I want to slow down and process these reactions *with* the client.

With Sun and Ascendant in Cancer, 'Jon' was a highly sensitive and highly anxious man who took many months of sessions to reveal that he was gay. Needless to say, trust was built very slowly. We worked together for several years on so many issues related to accepting his sexuality, including disclosing it to family members. The weight of internalized homophobia was a heavy burden, which seemed to permeate his whole being. He was very close to his father, who later became a loving ally in Jon's acceptance of himself.

Feeling safe in the therapy dyad is always crucial. Seeing my Cancer Moon conjunct Jon's Sun and Ascendant helped me trust that my gentle presence was just what he needed. He was often deeply upset and I helped him to manage his emotions, becoming a 'lunar emotional regulating source', as Greg Bogart puts it.

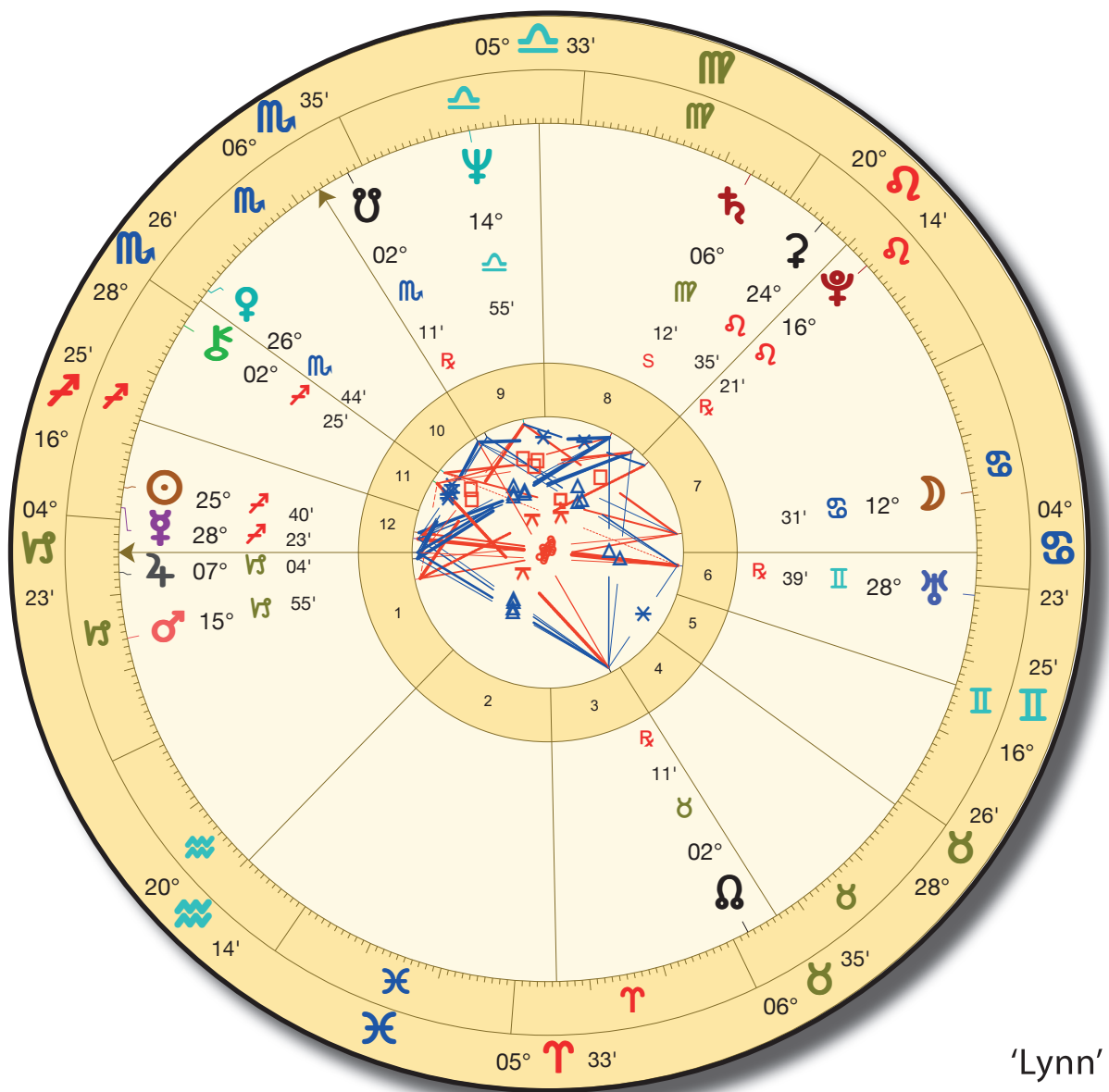
The challenge of delivering information

Clients can only absorb so much in any session, and applying it to their lives takes even more time. We must also take care when unpacking astrological material – in particular when addressing challenging natal aspects or a difficult transit. We don't want to intensify fear, but also shouldn't whitewash potential meanings. Here the astrological therapist can accompany the client by taking time with a transit or placement, creating space for the varied, complex and messy feelings that might arise from, for instance, Pluto transiting the Moon.

Confronting death

Facing death brings up many of the most profound issues in life. Here, too, I find that the wisdom of astrology informs the therapeutic process in significant ways.

'Lynn' (chart below) became a client while coping with Stage 4 metastatic breast cancer. She had been diagnosed in December 2018 when transiting Saturn had just crossed her Ascendant and Jupiter. This transit brought issues of aging, mortality and a difficult confrontation with health. I worked with her for the last eighteen months of her life. She chose me specifically for therapy because of my astrological orientation, mentioning a longstanding interest in astrology despite limited knowledge of it.



With a Sagittarius Sun and Mercury in the 12th (in opposition to Uranus in Gemini), she had been a spiritual seeker throughout her life. She even shared that her relationship with God was more important than anything – more important than her marriage or children. We explored how, with the power of transiting Neptune squaring that opposition, she was having her ‘final exams’ on this life issue. She was now poised to enter a portal beyond self and ego.

Close to her death, she expressed how meaningful it was that I affirmed her central life mission as a mystical seeker. Her South Node in the 9th house indicated being strongly conditioned by religion, and now her core life energy, the 12th-house Sun, was working in the realm of direct mystical experience. How profoundly we can amplify and mirror a person’s soul purpose with the birth chart!

While she could have received this interpretation in a chart reading, our work together was far broader. We addressed complicated relationships with her husband, children and other family members. It is hard to imagine all of this happening in a single session. There was too much to discuss and this only emerged during our extended time together.

It is a deep honor to accompany someone facing death. At times, Lynn could calmly face her impending death, but sometimes it felt like a hostile takeover. Her chart revealed great strength and self-reliance with Mars, Jupiter and the Ascendant in Capricorn. What didn’t come easily was allowing herself to be cared for by others. As the second child of twelve, her emotional needs were largely unmet. I was able to affirm and amplify her Moon in Cancer in the 7th house as an important energy that she could now be open to and access. In those last months, it was a revelation for her to experience others giving to her.

Two months before death she shared this dream: She was on a boat looking over the edge. She then jumped into the ocean. She expected to go straight down but then struggled to bring herself back up. Finally, with no strength in her arms or legs, she knew that, with her next breath, water would enter her lungs and she would die. Lynn realized the dream meant ‘a total and complete

surrender to the divine'. We shed tears together as she confronted her approaching death. The power of transiting Neptune was evident here. I've often seen Neptune in the lead-up to someone's passing, as a connection to the material world diminishes.

Conclusion

Integrating astrology and psychotherapy offers a profound path for both practitioners and clients seeking deeper meaning and healing. As a guiding hand – albeit sometimes an invisible one – astrology provides a unique framework that connects personal struggles to cosmic patterns, undoing the aloneness that lies at the heart of psychological suffering.

For those called to this dual path, the journey requires courage to stand outside conventional approaches, but it offers rich rewards through the depth of connection and the transformation possible when the cosmic and personal realms meet in the therapeutic space.

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Andrea Conlon LICSW is an astrologer and psychotherapist in private practice in Port Townsend, WA. She offers astrologically informed therapy, which she considers to be her life's work. She obtained a Master's Degree in Social Work from Arizona State University and studied Jungian psychology at the North Pacific Institute of Analytical Psychology. Her current interests in psychotherapy are AEDP, Compassion Focused Therapy, Buddhist psychology and psychedelic-assisted therapy. She aims to be a transformational presence for others by using astrology and other therapeutic modalities. www.andreaconlon.com; andreaconlon@msn.com

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