

Astrological Counselling Courses

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Coming from a background in humanistic psychology, I was drawn to astrology by the framework that offered an understanding and acceptance of the diversity and complexity of human nature and human relationships without 'pathologising'.

I am now the Director of the Faculty of Astrological Studies' counselling courses which are based on humanistic principles and were initiated to meet the needs of those astrologers seeing clients. It had long been noticed that perfectly competent astrologers would sometimes stop practising because of issues in face to face astrological work that they felt ill-equipped to deal with. Other astrologers went on to train in non-astrological counselling and psychotherapy courses, but these failed to address the issues specific to an astrological practice. What the Faculty's training courses offer is an opportunity for practising astrologers to explore how to deal with the issues that confront them in their private practice and how to use an astrological knowledge and awareness in on-going counselling. We are interested in helping our students achieve a genuine meeting, whether this is a traditional 'one-off' consultation, or on-going work, rather than simply disseminate information.

The Faculty offers an introductory counselling course which is intended to

help astrologers who see clients for single consultations to manage their practice, and the problems that arise, better. This course teaches basic listening skills based on Rogerian Counselling and other elementary counselling skills, as well as addressing fundamental boundary issues and their psychological significance. It also introduces supervision, which the astrologer can use as a means of reflecting on, and gaining feedback on, their practice and to help them address the issues that will continue to surface.

The Faculty's two year 'Counselling within Astrology' course is a far more adventurous undertaking consisting of roughly one third personal growth, one third counselling theory and practice, and one third supervision of casework. My main involvement is with the personal growth work and with supervision, although I direct and co-ordinate the whole course.

We are now in the second year of our first course and all our trainees are seeing clients for on-going astrological counselling. (We have introduced a low cost astrological counselling scheme.) While there may be some interpretation of the chart, the emphasis is on using the chart to explore whatever issues the client brings. This helps create and facilitate a real exchange between client and counsellor. The very nature of astrology, with

its symbolic language, means that those trained in astrology automatically make connections between issues and events that a client may not have seen as inter-related. Our trainees are able to hear their clients 'speak their chart' and the trainees' knowledge of astrological symbolism provides the framework within which they understand and respond to what is being conveyed.

Traditionally, astrologers in private practice offered a 'character analysis' to their clients. This is an outer picture of an individual's character, personality and behaviour — it is a way of describing and understanding a person as other, as an object. Increasingly, astrologers are finding ways of marrying this objectification with a deeper understanding of an individual's inner reality. While an outer picture is always useful for a client, finding a way of addressing the gap between this picture and the client's experience of themselves is what is important; this is when an astrological consultation becomes therapeutic.

The astrological framework offers a way to understand process and development through the continuous changing relationship between the positions of the planets in the sky and the natal chart. Many of the classic crisis times in life, such as the mid-life crisis, are clearly demarcated by the planetary cycles. Besides these planetary cycles that affect everyone to differing degrees at certain ages, we each have our own personal times of change and growth that an astrological counsellor will immediately recognise from the birth chart. An astrological counsellor may help a client simply by acknowledging and recognis-

ing what may be a difficult time for the client and offering him or her a perspective on the opportunities this time might present for personal growth. The astrological counsellor helps the client to make sense of and understand the process they are undergoing, facilitating insight and awareness and empowering the client to find their way and to feel more in charge of their life. People tend to visit astrologers when they are in considerable crisis and a lot of an astrologer's work consists of providing a framework through which the person can understand the pain they are in and better tolerate this process. In this way the astrological counsellor can facilitate the client's potential to bring about positive change at any given time in their life.

All our trainees are in analysis, therapy or counselling themselves (they are free to choose which suits them best) as well as weekly supervision. A key element of personal growth in the Faculty's 'Counselling within Astrology' course is the use of 'journeys' using guided imagery. These journeys are like waking dreams that are guided to evoke the planetary principles, in order for the participant to discover their relationship to



them. This allows the trainees to get in touch with the different planetary principles in an experiential way rather than just theoretically and is one of the ways we bridge the gap between an inner and outer understanding of astrological symbolism.

In the safe boundaries of the training we explore the inner material that emerges from these journeys and connect it with the symbolism of the chart. The journeys evoke a particular planetary principle through presenting a fairly tightly controlled and related set of symbols and symbolic scenarios that will deliberately trigger a succession of images surrounding this principle. As all trainees are in their own personal counselling or therapy they have somewhere to take any material that emerges that they might want to explore further outside of the course.

Our main theoretical framework remains astrological but within that we explore other theoretical models. We teach and practice Rogerian counselling to help those used to 'disseminating information' find the therapeutic value in

being genuinely listened to and understood. We later introduce ideas from Gestalt therapy and some of the counselling techniques of Gerard Egan, and practise incorporating these into an astrological framework. Various developmental models, including that of Freud, are discussed. We also continually explore transference and counter-transference issues. The client's initial projections onto astrology per se are possibly the biggest impediment to achieving a genuine meeting and an astrologer will have to be constantly aware of their position in relation to these projections: if they identify with them (and some can be very seductive) their work will become distorted.

This is merely a glimpse of a small part of what we are doing as a teaching body. Our main teaching is, and will remain, astrology, which we teach through correspondence courses and classes in London, Bath and Glasgow. I hope I have at least given you a sense of how creative and healing astrological counselling is and the richness and innovativeness of our teaching.



Further Reading

Prudence Jones, *Creative Astrology: Experiential Understanding of the Horoscope*, Aquarian, 1991