

On the Perils of Telling People What to Do: The Razor's Edge of Astrological Counseling

by Ray Grasse

HELP

"Should I marry this person?"

"Is this job right for me?"

"What would be a good time for me to have plastic surgery?"

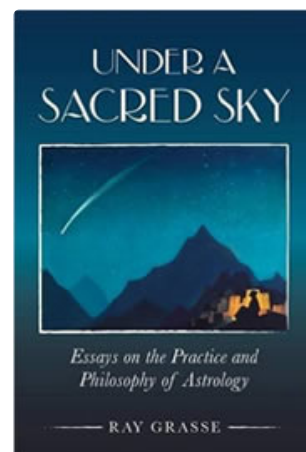
If your astrological practice is anything like mine, these are just a few of the questions you might receive from clients who come to you for insight into the workings of their lives. Years ago, I would have done my best to answer such questions and come up with some sort of definitive "yes" or "no" response.

After all, these people were paying me for advice – weren't they? But like the old Bob Dylan song goes, "Ah, but I was so much older then, I'm younger than that now..." Over the years I've found myself taking a more cautious – and hopefully subtler – approach toward my duties as an astrologer, as I've thought long and hard about what these duties really entail. Am I truly there to make up my clients' minds for them concerning significant life decisions? More importantly, perhaps, what are the real consequences – for both the client and myself – of saying things that could alter a person's life forever? As tempting as it may sometimes be to "help" a person through a genuinely difficult period, there is a thin line between truly helpful counsel and unwise interference with another person's destiny.

Here's one example of what I mean: Many years ago, a friend called to say he was going to travel with a tour group through China in a few months. He had never set foot outside the United States in his entire life, so he was eagerly looking forward to this opportunity and began preparing for his trip in every possible way. Just out of curiosity, and without telling him, I decided to check out his horoscope – and was somewhat startled to find a host of challenging transits firing in his horoscope precisely when he would be on this trip (specifically, powerful Pluto, Uranus, and Saturn transits and progressions). Yes, there was a decent Jupiter trine thrown in for good measure, not to mention a subtle Neptune sextile as well, but by and large it was the sort of astrological profile I myself would probably have avoided were I planning a trip by the stars.

What to do? Should I tell him about his decidedly mixed aspects or button my lip and keep it all to myself? A few years earlier, I would probably have done the "altruistic" thing by volunteering my advice on the matter, and thus sparing him the problems of a potentially terrible trip. But the day before drawing up his chart, it happened that I had stumbled across a passage in a spiritually-oriented book that impressed me deeply and set me to thinking. The passage stated that true mystics or gurus never volunteer their teaching uninvited – a spiritual version of Star Trek's "prime directive" of noninterference, you might say. I'd heard this general idea before, but because it popped up so close in time to this current dilemma, it made me reflect all the more deeply on my tendency to offer counsel to friends or family even when it wasn't beckoned. So after deliberating for a bit, I decided to hold off telling my friend what I thought about his difficult planetary energies during the upcoming trip to China.

So, what happened? As it turned out, my friend went on the trip – and it proved to be a life-changing experience in ways neither of us could have foreseen. While he was hiking through a remote region of China with his tour group, a local villager in a nearby area suffered serious injuries; my friend knew some basic first aid, so he became closely involved with the rescue efforts. As could be expected under the transits, the entire scene was indeed one of chaos and anxiety, yet the resulting experience marked a key turning point in his young life. Not only did it bring him into contact with an aspect of foreign culture he wouldn't have experienced otherwise, but it also served as a catalyst for his becoming more involved with humanitarian activities on a global scale.



This essay is taken from Ray Grasse's book "Under a Sacred Sky" which can be ordered at [Wessex Astrologer](http://WessexAstrologer) or amazon.com

And most likely, none of this would have even happened had I opened my big fat mouth and volunteered my sage advice early on.

A Fine Line

Since then, I've been much more careful about freely, or at least too casually, dispensing my advice to people. But what if a client asks me for my advice on major life decisions? Surely that wouldn't violate the spiritual principle of noninterference, would it? But even then, I find myself being as careful and nondirective as humanly possible. After all, who among us is truly wise enough to know all the ramifications of any given situation, whether acted upon or not? No astrologer is omniscient. We cannot know all the variables of any situation, so we need to approach our discipline with a certain humility regarding our own grasp of "what is best" – or what isn't.

Even more to the point, who can say that a certain experience should be avoided simply because it may prove physically or emotionally difficult? How can we really know for sure what lessons a person might need to learn from a certain challenging situation? History is replete with individuals whose lives were changed – or whose lives, in turn, changed the world – by seemingly difficult experiences. Take Rosa Parks, the American black woman who almost single-handedly initiated a civil rights revolution in the early 1960s by refusing to move to the back of that Birmingham bus. Without knowing her actual horoscope, it's safe to say that Ms. Parks probably had some very "challenging" aspects during the time of her epochal confrontation. I've sometimes wondered how I would have handled it had someone like that come to me for astrological counsel beforehand and asked me what to do during that particular period. Would I have told Rosa to simply avoid confrontational situations during that time? Or even stay at home on those "bad" days? Much as I hate to admit it, I fear that, 25 years ago, I probably would have done my best to steer such a person away from potentially difficult situations like those.



What is the solution here? Do we simply refrain entirely from giving advice or pointing the client in one direction or another? Not necessarily. There are some things that I would suggest as corrective measures when dealing with this problem:

First, I try to remember that my role as an astrological consultant is not to make up my clients' minds for them, nor to tell them how to live their lives; rather, it's to provide them with as much information as possible to best help them make their own decisions. In that respect, the astrologer is less of a guru than a coach – helping to draw out the client's own inner

wisdom and intuition in situations.

Astrologer Christina Fielding remarked that she prefers to see the client as "driving the car," while she is the "ride-along," the person reading the map. In that spirit, I see my purpose as being there to help to illuminate the situation as fully as possible and to point out the potential ramifications of the situations or decisions to be encountered on the road ahead – while ultimately leaving the final decision up to my clients. As part of that ride-along process, I may choose to inform them as comprehensively as possible of both the "good" and "bad" possibilities inherent in any option before them, but I don't make the final judgment call.

Here's a simple example that illustrates how this might work. Say a predominantly Aries individual walks into my office and asks whether he should marry someone who, it turns out, is also a heavily Aries personality type. Taking a simplistic and judgmental approach, I might well look at this situation and tell him that two Aries-type individuals forming a partnership could make for a fairly volatile combination and, for that reason, might best be avoided. But taking a more nondirective, noncoercive approach, I could instead point out to the client the potential problems he could encounter along with the potential perks that could arise from such a synastry – and let him decide which way to go with it. Indeed, such volatility might prove to be the very thing that a given individual might want in a relationship. I once heard an astrology teacher say: "If you want to end a relationship with an Aries, simply stop arguing with them. They'll get bored and go search out someone else to do battle with!" A bit oversimplified, perhaps, but fairly accurate, based on my own research. The key here is that I haven't told the client what to do, but merely helped to illumine his choices.

Now, let's consider how this same non-prescriptive approach might be applied in a more predictive setting, using transits or progressions. Take our earlier example of my friend's trip to China: Had my friend come to me before leaving on his trip and asked for my opinion of the energies at work during that time, I could have told him that the chart indeed indicated some challenging times ahead that might even involve a major crisis of some sort. But I would also have made it clear that this didn't necessarily mean he shouldn't go on the trip! Not only were there some Jupiter and Neptune trines and sextiles happening at the time, but I might have pointed out to him that the challenging aspects could make for a potentially transformative set of experiences which might be important to him.



But what if I saw no "harmonious" aspects to balance out the challenging energies at the time, and there was a real possibility of bodily danger or long-term problems arising from the trip? In those cases, I would make the client aware of the true extent of the difficulties, yet still be careful not to tell him what to do. For instance, my personal preference for handling such a situation would be to say something along these lines: "I can't tell you whether to go on this trip or not, but what I can say is what I would do if I were confronted by this set of energies – and in this case, I would personally choose not to travel under those transits." Period. By taking this approach, I have avoided making up the client's mind for him, and I have also avoided the potentially difficult karma of changing his life, one way or another – a factor that all astrologers should keep in mind when dispensing advice to friends or clients. What's critical here is that I have honestly given my assessment of the situation from an astrological standpoint – the very thing my clients pay me for – yet I have not compromised my own standards in the process.

Helping Clients Help Themselves

The other point I want to make is a bit more subtle but, in some ways, even more important: My job as a more esoterically-based consultant is to help clients to get in touch with their own reserves of intuition in situations and to draw upon those reserves when making their own decisions regarding these situations. A useful analogy here is the Chinese book of wisdom, the I Ching. This ancient text was never really intended by its creators to simply answer questions about major life decisions, but rather to provide a series of metaphorical images that could serve to unlock the individual's own inner wisdom regarding those problems. By reflecting on a symbol that arises in response to a question, one begins to understand the hidden dynamics underlying everyday situations.



What does all this mean on a practical level, when dealing with astrology clients? Let's say a person comes to me and asks whether she should pursue a certain career or not. After giving her all of the input I can, in terms of what the horoscope says about her life or hidden talents,

I might ask her to stop for a moment and try to get in touch with what she feels. As Milton Erickson and therapists like him have long told us, there is profound wisdom contained within the unconscious, if we could but learn to tap into it. And one simple way of doing that is by slowing down the mind, as well as the breath.

Close your eyes, and notice how your body/mind feels when contemplating a decision. Does your stomach tighten up in anxiety when you consider this choice? Do you feel a certain

"yes!" whispering from deep within when you contemplate that option? More often than not, I find that people already know at an intuitive level the right thing to do – they're just looking for an outside confirmation of that inner knowing.

This is how I've come to see my role as an astrologer in the lives of people who come to me for advice or insight. Of course, this stance isn't popular with every one of my clients, especially those who are looking for someone to take responsibility for their lives. But with each passing year, I'm convinced that this is the wisest approach both for them and myself.

It leaves me with a clearer conscience about my impact on others' lives, and it helps me to maintain some semblance of dignity about my own role as an astrologer. After all, when I got into astrology some 30 years ago and was first enraptured by the possibilities of a life immersed in the wisdom of the stars, somehow that vision didn't include the prospect of telling people the best times for plastic surgery, or whether to marry that Elvis impersonator from Dubuque.