

An Interview with Rudhyar
Conducted by Barbara Somerfield
on his 89th Birthday

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In this interview Dane Rudhyar (1895-1985) describes the development of 20th century astrology and insightfully addresses some of the crucial issues surfacing within the astrological community today.

Barbara: *Could you address the question of professionalism now current among astrologers and the idea of a "commitment to astrology" as opposed to what astrology is for?*

Rudhyar: One of the basic things which was attempted by Alan Leo in England and by Max Heindl in America was to relate astrology to a philosophy of life which was not the usual Western academic philosophy. Alan Leo was a Theosophist and very devoted to Annie Besant and the second generation of Theosophists. Max Heindl had been to Europe where he studied with a supposed inheritor of the Rosicrucian tradition. Heindl had been a lecturer for the Theosophical Society in America, and he wanted to translate and reorganize astrological concepts in terms of what he had learned of Rosicrucian theory. Sepharial was also an occultist and a Theosophist.

Before that, particularly in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, astrology was a profession. It was a branch of an occult philosophy, but it was a definite profession — you were the astrologer of a king, of a prince, and so on, and you played a social role. That more or less disappeared in the nineteenth century when astrology ceased to be taught in colleges. The last time it was taught in a university — I have forgotten the exact date, but it was around 1830 — was by a professor in the Rhineland. After it lost its professional status, so to speak, it tried to reorganize itself in relation to the Theosophical movement in England and the Rosicrucian movement in California.

In America, Marc Jones was also a philosopher-occultist on the basis of his own inner revelations, he tried to go back to the fundamentals of astrology from a metaphysical and philosophical point of view. This interested me — I wasn't too taken with the approaches of Alan Leo or Max Heindl. There were a couple of other groups, too, like C.C. Zain's Brotherhood of Light (which became the Church of Light), which also were supposed to be based on the old Egyptian foundation. But astrology was not considered a profession in those groups either. In some cases you were not supposed to receive money

for a reading; astrology was part of a philosophy of life and a religious approach to life.

The other aspect of astrology in America was represented by Evangeline Adams. She made it a profession and did charge what was a lot of money at the time. She used mostly a horary kind of astrology, especially for her Wall Street clients (like Pierpont Morgan and a few others). She managed to vindicate astrology in a famous lawsuit telling the judge all about his son, whom she had never seen, on the basis of his chart. She so impressed the judge that he dismissed the case and made it possible for astrology to be used in that sense.

So, in a certain sense the idea of astrology as a profession is like going back to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; it's an aspect of the neoclassical approach, the return to a fundamentalist outlook.

Beginning with *The Astrology of Personality* in 1935 (it's still my best-selling book), I tried to reformulate astrology on the basis of the new depth psychology which had been started by Freud. Around 1932-33, the first important books of Jung came out in English translation; they inspired me when I got them in 1933. I tried to reformulate astrology using much of the general philosophical approach of Marc Jones, which was very valid and at least presented astrology and its principles in a philosophical light. I tried to present astrology as a symbolic language which could complement psychological insight and particularly the practice of psychological consultation.

The psychologist can know all the details of events as related to him by the client and what he can surmise from the client's dreams, gestures, and actions. But astrology can add to that a general structure which deals with the chart and the life as a whole. While the psychologist gets the data, he doesn't know their structure, their order, their development; the astrologer knows the structure and development but doesn't know the data, the way the symbolic indications manifest as events. By putting the two together I thought you could get a much more definite and meaningful picture.

All this is taken for granted now in those aspects of the human potential movement that are interested in astrology. But in 1934-35, when *The Astrology of Personality* and the series of articles which preceded it were published, this was a very novel idea. Even Marc Jones was not interested in depth psychology. He was interested in the old-fashioned kind of psychology, but he was a very intelligent man who was able to give a personal interpretation. I tried to show that all the factors used in astrology — signs, houses, parts, lunation cycle, and so on — could form a language, a

symbolic language, which then could be of value to interpret the completely new developments in psychology, which has taken thirty years to grow into the popular movement it has become.

From 1936 to 1966 astrology grew very, very slowly, even in America. It was only the generation of young people who became interested in oriental philosophy, yoga, eastern teachers, Zen, and so on, that suddenly turned to my books, which then became popular. Since 1933 I had been in charge of the psychological department of *American Astrology* and *Horoscope* magazines. I wrote articles which dealt with the symbolic nature of astrology, with inner development, development at a higher level, and so on, rather than at the popular, social, business level.

Marc Jones, on the other hand, was primarily interested in social relationships because his philosophy was a kind of social philosophy; it has a metaphysical basis, but in practice he was dealing with social factors. I was trying to get at the core of personal issues, and for a long time I was the only one to do it. Gradually, people like Charles Jayne, Stephen Arroyo, and Marc Robertson became interested in astrology. In the case of Marc Robertson, I was the one who suggested to him that he study astrology during a period of crisis in his life. Charles Jayne took some courses of mine in Philadelphia in 1934 or '35.

All the work I did with astrology was to explain it as a language and the meaning of its symbols — the planets, signs, degrees of the zodiac, and so on. When I finished interpreting that language, I stopped writing on astrology, because there was no point in trying to invent a new language when I thought the old language was perfectly satisfactory to deal with what I thought it was necessary to do. So I finished with *The Astrology of Transformation*, which I wrote in 1978 and which finished what I started more than forty years before with *The Astrology of Personality*.

That doesn't mean that I disapprove of new elements which can be added to the language, because the language is always growing and changing to fit new needs. But very often I question whether there really are new needs and whether new words are not used merely because they are startling and draw attention to the inventor but perhaps do not fulfill a very important need. That, for instance, is why I am not particularly interested in asteroids, because as individual factors I don't think they fill a particular need; as a whole mass they have a place in the solar system, but I don't see any reason to take a little bit of orbiting material and give it significance. If so, why not consider the manmade satellites. I was startled when a magazine editor in the 1950s asked me to write an article on the Sputnik satellite and its astrological effects. At first I thought it was a rather ridiculous request,

but I took it on as a challenge. At the time the satellite seemed to me to be a symbol of a particular aspect of our culture. Now there are so many of them that they are like the asteroids; in their totality they mean something, but you cannot use them as astrological words.

To return to the idea of the astrologer as a certified professional, as I said, it's like returning to the seventeenth and eighteenth century concept of the king or prince or wealthy people and their astrologer. I am not happy today to see people become so dependent on their so-called astrologer that they return every few weeks or months to get advice about how to deal with this or that situation. One consultation usually is not sufficient because the problems of a person are complex; I'm very much in favor of having two or three shorter consultations — not so long that the astrologer and the client get so tired that they only remember fragments of it. But now with tapes it is much easier. But after one has understood the situation with one's life and where one stands, there is no reason not to develop the capacity oneself; you have understood the language and should be able to use it to some extent. Obviously this means dealing with something unfamiliar, and at first one needs to have someone who better understands the symbols. Six months later something may happen, but one should not become dependent. Astrological data --progressions, transits, aspects — do not refer to events but to the possibility of development.

It used to be that the signs and planets were considered as categories or frames of reference, and a planet meant something first, in general, as a planet, secondly in terms of the house. But I think that the house as a type of experience is more determined by the planet than the planet by the house.

What a chart reveals is where your attention is going to be drawn. In other words, if your Mars is in the second house, your attention will be drawn by the expenditure of energy and money, of inherited energy, ancestral energy and money, the things you were born into. If in the third house, your attention will be drawn to the formulation of ideas and relationships and so on. Mars in the sixth house doesn't necessarily mean that you will be sick or you will be a slave or an army man, but your attention will be drawn to problems and issues which deal with service and work and health. Normally, in most cases, your attention will be drawn because of some problem, but those problems won't necessarily involve violence; they will attract or focus your energy. So, all the words in the language of astrology are symbols that focus the possibility of experience but not necessarily an actual event. A symbol doesn't cause events. I think it is most unfortunate that in some astrology examinations you are given a certain date on which you have to

tell what must have happened. The idea that there cannot be any physical, outer event unless there is an astrological event is equally unfortunate.

Barbara: *Along with this big push for professionalism, different groups are developing testing and trying to obtain licensing. Can you speak about the pitfalls involved in licensing and regulating the use of astrology?*

Rudhyar: There are always two extremes. One is an extreme of socialization; any expression must follow a certain collectively acceptable or official form. The other extreme is to allow any individual's opinion or imagination to operate without any discrimination.

In old African tribes, what they call a great dream or vision of one of the members of the tribe, let us say about a storm coming, of a change of weather or an enemy approaching, was not accepted and acted upon until after another member of the tribe would have a similar dream. So, there should be some corroboration or concordance between people. If not, the danger is that people would use anything they hear, any little discovery in astronomy or astrophysics, to immediately jump into finding astrological meaning for it. It's always easy to find a few charts in which it works — and ignore completely those charts in which it doesn't. So, a certain amount of group cooperation is valid. But when a state or organization of people, especially if they don't know anything about astrology, begins to officially sanction it, then a kind of totalitarian situation can result.

The American Medical Association is a remarkable example of this. Entire avenues of research, or interpretation of people's physical conditions, have been blocked because a certain approach has become officially recognized and sanctioned as *the only valid one*. Any individual who thinks differently is blackballed and his professional status revoked. There are a number of cases like that. Now of course there is a little change with so-called new or holistic medicine, but then there is also the extreme of things being used and overused and given unbalanced meaning and value because everybody thinks that their opinion is worthwhile. In some cases it proves successful, but in others it may be harmful. You have to achieve a balance between extremes.

That's why I have always used the basic traditional meanings of the symbols of astrology as a foundation, because these fundamentals probably refer to a kind of meaning which is really logical and applicable to any human situation. What makes the applications significant, whether one can speak of a certain kind of transmission of energy from planets, or a symbolic correspondence, or a "morphic resonance" (to use Rupert Sheldrake's term), is of course very interesting from a philosophical point of view, but it doesn't

need to be discussed or solved when practicing astrology and dealing with a client. These are metaphysical interpretations, and perhaps there is a certain amount of truth in all of them. But at whatever level the truth exists, it is very difficult for us to know. So to fight about, and for scientists to think only of one possibility — direct physical action from a planet to a human being — is ridiculous. That's one possibility, but there are any number of others which should also be entertained.

Barbara: *What is it like for you to be eighty-nine today in 1984?*

Rudhyar: I really don't know what to say. Certain things can be stated from the recurrence of certain cyclic aspects, but things never recur exactly in the same way. Humanity has changed its level of response, to some extent at least, during the last five hundred years or so, and it's very difficult to make predictions or even suggestions strictly on the basis of astrological cycles. I tried to show this in my book *Astrological Timing*. You can see certain possibilities, but you can't say at what level those possibilities will apply. They may apply to some extent at every level, at several levels at once. One can only rely on an historical understanding of the momentum of the trends which have been building during the last four or five hundred years. My tendency is to be rather pessimistic. I see that the momentum, or what you might call the karma of the events and failures of our Western European and American society and nations, is so dire that I find it difficult to see how it could be completely negated or put aside or dismissed, except through some rather drastic changes or events. Now, what those will be, whether they will involve the misuse of nuclear energy, or war, or chemical energy, or cataclysmic changes in the planet, the motion of the poles, or changes in the atmosphere, stratosphere, or ionosphere — I have absolutely no idea. I don't know anyone who could make such definite predictions. I think it's entirely possible that the trend toward a conservative return to fundamentalist religion and its approach will develop further, because every extreme tends to produce a compensatory extreme, as Jung has shown in his psychological work, as of course the Chinese philosophy of yin and yang has demonstrated, and as I've tried to show in my book *Rhythm of Wholeness*. But it doesn't necessarily need to be catastrophic. It can be a progressive development.

The main thing that induces pessimism in me is the very great similarity between conditions today and conditions during the middle and end of the Roman Empire. That doesn't necessarily mean that the Western world or Northern hemisphere civilization is going to pass through the same fate as the Roman Empire passed through. Nevertheless, it's certainly a possibility which every head of state and policy maker should take into consideration — but I'm afraid they don't. The great international corporations behave

exactly as some of the big Roman administrators. We have armies of mercenaries just as the Romans had because the Roman citizens didn't want to go to war; the American people don't want to be drafted. Conditions in crowded cities like New York and Chicago are similar to conditions in Rome under and following Nero. But it took centuries for the Roman Empire to disintegrate, and it may take much longer than one thinks possible for significant changes now — except that today the momentum of changes and the spread of ideas, fashions, and revolutionary movements is so much greater because of television and the media, that the tendency is to believe that changes that took two centuries before might occur in twenty years now.

The revolt of the late-Sixties in Berkeley started something that spread like wildfire to Japan and throughout Europe in a few months. The domino theory politicians love to talk about (because they see only a narrow view), doesn't really apply; it is the spread of a psychological mass-reaction. There is very little one can do to change mass-reactions. The pressure has gone so deep that a terrific revulsion has been created. This sense of revulsion may grow much stronger during the coming years. To what extent it can be canalized or given a constructive or progressive form, I have no idea.

Barbara: In the past you said something very interesting and positive about the potential of the nuclear issue, even though most are so negative about it.

Rudhyar: I am not absolutely sure that a nuclear reaction will have as destructive an effect as people think, or that the mutations it might produce would necessarily be as severe or final as scientists project. They may, but there is also the possibility that out of the millions of negative reactions there may emerge a few positive ones which may release new power. There is the very famous story of the Dutchman (Peter Hurkos), who became clairvoyant after hitting his head. A possible concussion of the brain suddenly released clairvoyant powers which were quite spectacular. It is hard to say. At Bikini Island (where a hydrogen bomb was detonated) vegetation has been growing and renewing itself at a pace that no one expected to be that rapid. The regenerative power of the earth, as an organism, may be as great as the power of the human body to recover from serious illness. Disease may kill most people, but the few who survive may emerge much stronger. Because I had to fight against certain conditions in my early youth, I have built a certain kind of resistance to things which probably affect other people.

The important point which I keep stressing is that it is impossible to try to imagine the future unless you understand the past. One of the saddest

situations in America is the lack of interest in history, especially among young people. As history is taught in such a foolish way, this is understandable. Also unfortunate is the extreme dependence on instant response and instant satisfaction; people in their early twenties want to be successful already, to be powerful and secure in their ways. I realize how long it took me to understand myself, not to mention humanity and the fact that nothing is new. Confucius said that he only began to understand life at sixty. The momentum of change, of excitement, of always wanting something new, prevails; if you don't go with each "new" thing and you live long enough, fifty years later you see that what was new, then completely old and invalid, suddenly becomes new again.

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Barbara Somerfield, founder of Aurora Press, publishes pioneering books that catalyze personal growth and transformation. Aurora Press specializes in contemporary Astrological classics including Marc Edmund Jones, Ronald Davison, Dr. Gauquelin and the work of Rudhyar. As Director of the National Astrological Society from 1969-1986, publisher of the monthly journal *Astrology*, and organizer of 17 international Astrology conferences, she organized many of Rudhyar's lectures, concerts, traveled with him and for him in the USA and abroad, and introduced many of Rudhyar's ideas which are now integrated into contemporary astrological practice.