



Featured Book Review

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Getting to the Heart of Your Chart – Playing Astrological Detective

Frank C. Clifford

(London, England; Flare Publications, 2012)

There is nothing 'ordinary' about *Getting to the Heart of Your Chart*, by Frank Clifford. This quickly becomes evident in the opening pages of the Introduction. Presented as a 'guide to horoscope synthesis,' the author takes us from astrology basics through increasingly more detailed elements of chart delineation, bringing everything together in a way that truly allows the 'heart of the chart' to shine through. To borrow one of Clifford's phrases, this book 'does what it says on the tin'!

Clifford states that there is 'no single, definitive way of reading a horoscope' and one of the essential qualities of this book is that we are encouraged to think for ourselves. Developing a good astrological vocabulary, learning key phrases, and practicing with many varied charts, allows us to look for patterns, make links, and reveal connections to highlight key themes. To do this, the author provides a clear methodology, complete with the rationale behind each step, providing an essential foundation to develop one's individual style.

Selecting a few highlights from the book is a challenging task since there are so many to draw from. However, a brief list from those that stand out might be categorized as taking us back to the fundamentals of chart interpretation. They include: 'The Big Three' - the Sun, Moon, Ascendant blend and their relationship to each other; the importance of the chart ruler, including sign and house positions and whether it is represented in major aspects or configurations; discussion of an 'effective' planet versus an 'influential' planet, and how moving away from labels of dignity and debility open up more potential for constructive discussion with the client; and, analyzing the four angles of the chart including their rulers and the significance they can play in a chart. All of these, and more, are illustrated in multiple chart examples supported with practical worksheets and a step-by-step overview.

In each case, the author takes us through a procedural investigation, picking up clues, and revealing the themes of the horoscope reflected in the life and times of the individual. Biographical highlights, interspersed with astrological chart references, allow the reader to merge technique and context. In some cases, charts of 'key players' associated with the individual's life are also included, reminding us that who we are and what we do is far greater than our own chart.

Perhaps surprisingly, this is a book with many layers. Taking a step back from the horoscope itself, we are reminded that 'our chart does not belong to us, we belong to it.' This underscores the importance of context and two-way dialogue, critical in understanding an individual's lived experience. This allows the astrologer to appropriately interpret the symbolism in the chart resulting in a more profound and useful benefit to the client.

Brushing up against the debate of fate and free will, Clifford supports the notion that the chart is not a 'fait accompli' but, rather, a reflection of 'a moment of time.' And, while the chart may be 'fated' to receive transits, progressions, and directions at fixed, predictable times,' our journey and the choices we make are up to us. Each of us is the author of our own story, reflecting the degree to which we express the potential in the horoscope, all flavoured with a variety of external factors, such as education, culture, and socio-economic conditions.

In summary, the book is professionally written, well-organized and a pleasure to read. The material, tools and processes are practical, easy to understand, and immediately useful. There is something for every level of astrologer. *Getting to the Heart of Your Chart* offers a solid foundation for the beginner, or a great 'tune up' for more experienced practitioners. As Clifford says "...surely if the way we see and experience life affects the way we view charts, then we all have our own, equally important approach." Whichever branch of astrology you relate to, whatever your life experience, we highly recommend this book.