

# Understanding Astrology: The Moon

by Bill Herbst

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More dramatically than any other body in the heavens, our Moon provides us with sensory evidence (visual and otherwise) that is almost palpable about the existence of cycles in life — the waxing and waning fluctuations of regular, predictable change.

If the Sun is the source of energy and perhaps even consciousness for life on earth and the ruler of daytime, then the Moon — reflecting the light of the Sun — is the ruler of nighttime, providing periodic and partial illumination into the realm of unconsciousness. Although the two bodies are not equal in power, they are equivalent in disk size, at least to our eyes. Science regards that as an illusion of happenstance, and one that will not always be true. The Moon's orbit is very slowly increasing in distance from the earth — about 1.6 inches per year. So, in the far distant future, the Moon's disk, viewed from the earth, will shrink in visual size, and eventually a month on our planet will almost double in length. In addition, the earth's axial rotation will slow, lengthening the day. Throughout human history, however, the Sun and Moon have appeared to be the same size, which will remain true throughout our probably brief sojourn on earth. That equivalence in visual size is significant in astrology.

The technical term in astrology for the Sun and Moon is "Lights," since they illuminate our world. But they can also be referred to as "Planets," which is the generic term in astrology for the major bodies of our solar system. No, they're not planets in the scientific definition, but astrologers know that. The word planet is simply a convenient designation in astrological nomenclature to identify bodies that symbolize significant archetypes corresponding to functional motivations in the astrological system. So, Lights or Planets — either word is allowed.

In astrological symbolism, the Sun and Moon are a little like co-parents. Examined more thoughtfully, however, they are less like partners and more akin to parent and child. Through the lens of patriarchy, the Sun is the father, the authority figure, the giver of structure and law. The Moon becomes both mother and child, revealing our need to give and receive nourishment and nurturing.

In our natal charts, the Moon's condition — by sign, house associations, and interplanetary aspects — indicates very important parts of our makeup (how we're hard-wired). These exist mainly at the level of unconscious or semi-conscious programming and habits.

Habits are critical to human life. When we study something with the intention of learning it, we start out from intention and conscious awareness. As we learn whatever we're studying, the brain converts what we've learned into automatic habits and routines. Not only do we no longer need to be conscious of what was learned, but doing so would get in our way if we tried. For instance, if I had to consciously instruct my fingers to type each key as I write this, the process would be so slow and arduous that writing would be damned near impossible. So, many of the processes in life are assigned to the innate auto-pilot or the learned routines of habit. If I had to consciously remember to take a breath every 20 seconds, I'd be in mortal danger of forgetting to breathe whenever my attention was focused on something else. The rhythmic function of breath in/ breath out is innately built-in to the biology of our brainstems; we don't have to think about it. Other functions require learning and habituation — walking, reading, even rational thought and speech.

All these pre-programmed physical routines are part of the Moon's symbolism in astrology. But the Moon's meanings go far beyond the physical. In fact, the physical routines are typically not referred to at all in interpreting the Moon in a chart. Instead, astrology is concerned with the non-physical levels of our makeup. The word used most often in astrology for the Moon is *temperament*. Psychologically, that's a bit vague. My preference is to further refine that term to mean all the responsive mechanisms of self-protective adjustment to environmental stimuli.

Self-protection, emotional response, the daily ebb and flow of feelings, and the comforts of need fulfillment. For me, those are at the heart of the Moon's astrological meanings.

The Moon reveals the swaddling clothes with which we're programmed to wrap and keep safe our vulnerable "inner baby" — the tender, undeveloped, and immature parts of ourselves. One might think that over time we would need this protection less and less, but that turns out to be untrue. We may grow up, but we retain our inner vulnerabilities. Our tender baby self continues to live inside us and need protection all the way through our lives.

Beyond that, the Moon in astrology represents a kind of buffer between ourselves and the outer environment. Whenever something happens that impacts us from outside, the Moon is our "first responder." In a natal chart, the Moon's condition shows the characteristic patterns of response that kick in to give us time to adjust. In other words, the Moon shows the emotional style of

our immediate and autonomic reaction, which happens before we have consciously decided how to actively or consciously respond. During that initial say, 30 seconds (and perhaps much longer), the Moon's auto-pilot takes over control of our expression and behavior. Later we will return to a more Sun-centered way of behaving, but only after we've made the protective adjustment.

So, if we have the natal Moon in the sign Aries or a Moon-Mars aspect, we will react assertively or even aggressively, like a snake rattling when its territory is invaded. Our first (and unconscious) reaction is urgent, hot, and immediate — instant action aimed at the stimulus. By contrast, the Moon in Capricorn or in aspect to Saturn implies a reaction of shut-down, like getting into a tank and closing the hatch. Our first, unconscious reaction to any provocation from outside is cold, hard, and practical — and sometimes with no behavioral reaction at all. Whether the stimulus is a threat to us or an appeal for assistance, we respond according to our Moons.

This applies not only to practical situations that require a response in action, but also to our characteristic and natural ways of responding to others, how we feel and behave toward them in momentary relatedness.

The Moon also shows what kind of life experiences we need at least some of every day, and yet cannot typically provide from inside ourselves. That's what needs are — the stuff we cannot manufacture from within and must obtain from the environment. In this context, needs (Moon) are quite different from desires (Mars). Desires are what we want or seek. We can, however, live without them in the moment. It's like we're on a hunt, and that hunt is sometimes long-term. Needs, however, are experiences we cannot live long without, at least not comfortably.

We can go without food for months before succumbing to starvation. Our needs for water, however, are measured in days, and our needs for oxygen have a limit of mere minutes. If we lose our way in life and stop living out the meanings of our Suns, we can go for a long time, since the Sun is akin to food. The Moon is more like water or air. If something stops us from getting our Moon experiences of need-fulfillment, reaction/response, and comfort, we don't function for very long before breakdown occurs.

The Moon in astrology reveals the kinds of non-physical experiences we need on a daily basis to remain emotionally comfortable, with a feeling of security (or at least stability). For instance, the Moon in the 12th house reveals a short-term need for solitude and withdrawal from the hustle and bustle of the marketplace. With a 12th house Moon, we simply won't function very long if we don't retreat often into peaceful solitude — a calm and private place, like going to a monastery or retreat. Conversely, the Moon in the 10th house indicates the daily need for a career orientation aimed at achieving success, authority, and

leadership. With a 10th-house Moon, status, respect, and achievement are all part of our pattern of needs.

In either of those examples, it's not enough to get our needs met once. We can't "stockpile" the experiences into a long-term holding tank. Our Moon tanks are metaphorically very small and hold only enough for a little while before they must be replenished all over again. As a result, the Moon shows experiences we must do over and over throughout our lives.

A problem with the Moon (actually, more *our* problem with the Moon...) is that its condition in our charts reveals how and where we experience emotional vicissitudes in our day-to-day lives — the ebb and flow of feelings. We feel OK, then we don't. We're secure, then we're insecure. Maybe something happened, but maybe it's just us. Our Moons tell us what we need *right now* — minute by minute, hour by hour, day by day — and that can be both difficult and tiresome when our feelings aren't comfortable or satisfied. On the positive side, though, the Moon acts as a natural gyroscope. It shows us the necessity of adjusting to life's continual changes as they occur within us and around us, pointing the way to restore our emotional homeostasis.

Over the second half of the 20th century, Americans who were white and economically middle-class or above enjoyed the extraordinary feeling that security was not only possible, but effectively a birthright, and could be achieved even without great wealth or conspicuous power. Today, that belief is no longer a certainty among most Americans. It may well be that the pleasing illusion of security is gone forever. Only the wealthy and privileged maintain that expectation now.

As a pure symbol in astrology, and particularly in the ideal, the Moon is associated with our need for the security and safety of a loving home and family. In real life, of course, families are often complicated, sometimes cruel, and too frequently provide neither safety nor security. Despite that harsh reality, the need for safe belonging remains embedded deep within our psyches. In the vast majority of individual charts, the literal experience of home and family (Cancer and the 4th house) are associated with symbols other than the Moon. Nevertheless, the Moon retains its connection to our need for security and shows us in our charts how and where we seek it, however illusory or challenging such a quest may be.