

The Heroine's Journey
By Beverlee Brown
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"If you were to write a play about your mother, what would the title be?" I sometimes pose this question to clients who come for astrological consultations. I have borrowed the question, I hasten to confess, from Roy Alexander's enlightening book, "The Astrology of Choice". It's an effective beginning to an astrology consultation, since it leads comfortably to an exploration of how clients perceive themselves to have been influenced by their mothers. Our ensuing discussion helps me determine how far they have come in their quest for individuality.

Joseph Campbell's book, "The Hero With A Thousand Faces", describes the age-old story of the hero's journey, or quest, so richly portrayed in myth and fairy tale, and renowned as George Lucas' inspiration for "Star Wars". In this commentary I will be focusing my observations on the relationship between mothers and daughters, based on the daughter's astrological birthchart.

Any birthchart shows one's quest for individuality. And, like the familiar hero's journey archetype, there are predictable stages in a woman's journey, including separation, initiation, and conflict, which, ideally, will ultimately lead to return and the reward, or victory. The healthiest journey, it seems to me, and the most rewarding, is one in which a woman discovers and celebrates her own magnificence, while learning to honor her mother's individuality as well.

I take a psychological approach to astrology; in fact, I would go so far as to say that astrology was the earliest precursor of psychology. Like psychology, astrology is rich with symbolism. For instance, the Moon in your birthchart symbolizes, first of all, your mother; so your relationship with your mother is indicated by the aspects to the Moon in your chart. Often a birthchart has both easy and challenging aspects to the Moon. As an astrologer I need to determine how a client perceives her relationship with her mother in order to see how she is actualizing the potential portrayed by her chart. In other words, where has she arrived at this stage of her "Heroine's Journey"?

Unconsciously, we pick up energy from our parents at the time of our birth, and carry it forward with us to a greater or lesser degree for our whole lives. We sort of don our "idea" of our parents as a mantle of our own appropriate mode of behavior as well as our outlook on life. It has a great deal to say about our psychological makeup. If, as some believe, we have *chosen* to be born to these particular parents, possibly this undercurrent in our personalities springing from that early observation of our parents' perspective is what we frequently hear described as our "Karma". So this energy—this judgment of how life "is", stemming from our early childhood memories—catapults us on our heroine's journey.

Many women clients, during astrological sessions, assure me that they love their mothers very much, or that their mother is their best friend, or some such caveat. Obviously, if there are only flowing aspects to the Moon in their chart, such as sextiles or trines, (planets separated from the Moon by sixty or 120 degrees which indicate an easy sharing between mother and daughter) their assurances are quite genuine. They are among the lucky few whose journey does not demand of them so wrenching a separation from their roots in this lifetime.

And yet, in our effort to make our unique contribution to the world, don't we need to separate from our family—at least for a time, as we explore our own potential? Curiously, I've noticed that having *only* flowing aspects to the Moon in a birthchart can foretell a sort of arrested development.... where the person either does not care to, or does not feel the need to make the heroine's journey for herself.

On the other hand, some women with challenging aspects in their chart, such as squares or oppositions (planets 90 or 180 degrees away from the Moon) or naturally unfriendly planets such as Saturn and Pluto conjunct (close to) the Moon, are adamant in their assurance that their relationship with their mother is perfectly lovely, thank you.

Since these aspects indicate a struggle with, or a wound from the mother, I press further: "Did you wish to follow in your mother's footsteps? Is she someone whose lifestyle you chose to follow?"

Reluctantly, perhaps out of loyalty, the truth then begins to seep out. "Well, no, my mother always tries to control me," comes the admission, my client seemingly embarrassed by the lengths she has had to go to in order to live life on her own terms. When I explain the energy in her birthchart, pointing to the very legitimate need for her to protest, as in the old TV commercial: "Please, Mother! I'd rather do it myself!" the client actually seems to draw a sigh of relief.

I became interested in pursuing the idea of the heroine's journey when I began to notice how many women of my acquaintance and among my clients seemed to harbor anger or resentment toward their mothers. Without their even being aware of it, their negative feelings had created roadblocks in their other important relationships.

I vividly recall one client—a young woman who glumly revealed to me a string of broken relationships. As it happened, she also was estranged from her mother. I told her quietly, "Until your relationship with your mother is working, none of your relationships will work."

"Who told you that?" she demanded, incredulously.

I explained that everything I had studied told me this; not only astrology, but the bible, A Course in Miracles, and the est training, to name a few. All these disciplines teach forgiveness.

Each astrological birthchart serves as the blueprint for our “mother issues”—and therefore the “Heroine’s Journey”. My own chart could serve as the poster child for mother/daughter discord. And yet, thanks to my understanding of astrology my mother and I enjoy a warm, loving relationship, despite my chart’s having virtually every challenging aspect to the Moon that one could imagine.

My Moon is squared by both Saturn and Pluto and is conjunct Uranus. Saturn can sometimes feel like limitation and Pluto is definitely descriptive of control issues. The conjunction of Uranus to the Moon in a chart describes an unusual—perhaps even eccentric—mother. While I don’t have Mars either conjunct or opposite the Moon which shows impatience with, anger at, or separation from the mother, I do have Mars in the Fourth House—the house which I assign to the Mother, and that boils down to the same sort of energy. I also have several planets in the sign of Virgo, and I have observed that an emphasis on Virgo in a chart often produces the feeling of having to earn the love of one’s mother.

So, how has all this challenging energy manifested in my life? Some of my earliest memories are of having been restrained, or controlled by my mother with what felt to me like “fear” tactics. For instance, I mustn’t ice skate...the ice was too thin. I mustn’t drive a car, I was too young. I certainly shouldn’t go hot-air ballooning! That was extremely dangerous! (Mind you, by this time I was in my mid-forties.) And on and on. What I couldn’t understand was why she was afraid for me to try things when I wasn’t afraid myself. Why did she try to control my every move?

It wasn’t until I studied astrology at a rather advanced age that I learned that my mother’s birthchart has the majority of planets in cardinal and water signs—which gives her chart a “signature” of the sign of Cancer—the cardinal water sign. Cancer, above all, seeks safety.

My chart, on the other hand, has the majority of planets in cardinal and earth signs, which gives it the “signature” of Capricorn—the cardinal earth sign. Simply stated, my mother and I make our choices and decisions quite differently based on the energy of our individual birthcharts. My mother, with a lot of water and little earth in her chart makes her choices emotionally and cautiously, often coming from a position of fear, since, with almost no earth in her chart, she doesn’t feel safe or “grounded”. My chart has the earth that hers lacks, so I make my choices and decisions based less on emotional considerations and more on what’s practical, or expedient.

Neither of our ways of being is “wrong” or “right”. We just are the way we “are” based on our charts’ energy. Nevertheless, my personal heroine’s journey required me to give up the need to don the mantle of my mother’s fearfulness and to assume responsibility for a self-confident approach to life. I had to *learn* to live my life on my own terms. There were a lot of challenges along the way to this realization, which are directly attributable to the challenging aspects in my chart. These challenging aspects show what I have come here to overcome.

When I studied astrology the key to understanding my mother became available for the first time. So now, even though I am a senior citizen, and my mother is still “worrying” about me, I can say—and mean it—“I understand you can’t help worrying about me because you love me and are concerned for my well-being. But I feel quite sure that I’ll be all right if I make this choice.” This validates both of our positions.

The journey to this understanding has been a long and arduous one. But I no longer need to succumb to my mother’s fears, nor do I need to irritably resist them or label them irrational. I simply need to listen to my own voice while at the same time “hearing”, if not adopting, my mother’s.

This approach is what A Course in Miracles calls “forgiveness”, what the est training called “granting a little being”, and what Astrology calls evolution. This is the quest we are on as daughters, seeking to simultaneously honor our own way of being and our mother’s. Each of our charts shows the path our particular heroine’s journey will take.

So. If *you* were to write a play about *your* mother, what would its title be?