

Nursing and Astrology: One Nurse's Story

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One warm-weather evening twelve years ago, while ambling through the Cambridge, Massachusetts library, I found a literary treasure that would change my life. The book, *Suggestions for Thought by Florence Nightingale: Selections and Commentaries*¹, contained Nightingale's thoughts that she had written 133 years earlier. I discovered things about Nightingale that I had not learned in nursing school.

I discovered that Nightingale was a metaphysician, an architect, a statistician and a hospital administrator. I read about Nightingale's holistic perspective to health care and recognized a kinship with her, a validation of my own perspective of nursing that I had not experienced before. When I came to one passage, I gasped because Nightingale was talking about what I recognized as the astrological elements, fire, air, water and earth. Nightingale wrote:

*"We must not only compare our sources of belief with those of others, but we must compare each of our own sources among themselves. Feeling, if in a healthy state, is as import a source of belief as reason. The phrase "human reason" is devoid of sense. Is reason more human than feeling, or less super-human than conscience? Let us listen to them all, for these are the voices God has given to be our guides."*²

For over twenty years, I had traveled parallel paths, one as a nurse, and the other as an astrologer. This was an experience of living in two worlds, and I had not expected they could intersect. Yet here I was, reading Florence Nightingale's own words about the qualities of the elements and the importance of living with them in balance.

As a professional astrologer, I understood that one of the greatest challenges in life relates to how we use the elemental energies. Astrology is not alone in its regard of the elements as core to life. Native American spirituality and Eastern medical traditions, such as acupuncture and Aryurveda, regard the elements as both internal and external energies. In the Western systems of astrology and Native American tradition, fire relates to belief, air to reason, feeling to water, and earth to the physical body. Each of us has a unique distribution of these elements based on the map of the sky at the time of birth.

For example, elemental integration for someone with the least amount of energy in fire means bringing belief into his or her life, whether that is belief in one's self or belief in life, in general. Fire in this regard refers to devotion, a knowing without knowing how one knows, a belief in the absolute. Belief at this level releases freedom, love, courage and vision to spark creativity. For someone with the least amount of air energy, finding balance with the elements means stretching one's capacity to explore and share ideas. Air swirls thought and connection and it is curious. The element of air is also a mediator, blending above with below and one with the other.

Water energy represents connection on the cellular level, as water does within the human body and on planet Earth. For someone with the least amount of water energy, finding balance means gaining comfort in feeling and in sharing those feelings. Feelings support intuition, such as a “gut feeling”, that something is right. Water, therefore, represents that fluid expression of intuition where one connection leads to another and rationality, or thought, (air) is not involved. In that sense, water also represents trust. We see an example of this trust as water flows everywhere without changing its shape; rather, it bends to the shape of what is underneath or around it, as it does with rocks in a creek.

It may be hard for someone with the least amount of energy in earth to be in her body. This manifests as someone who ignores the body’s need for fuel and refreshment; she just keeps going without regard to stop/rest messages her body tries to send her. Managing money represents another challenge for a person with the least amount of earth energy. Earth energy likes concrete thinking and balancing the plus and minus ledgers. In money matters, just as with the body, it is best when input and output are in balance and the practical, patient, staid energy of Earth glories in this evenness.

Bringing balance to the elements in which we have the least amount of energy is important, however, this piece alone does not represent the entire story. We also can bring balance to the elements in which we have the most amount of energy. This way of thinking corresponds to the practice in Chinese medicine of working with excess and deficiency. Looking for balance in the expression of what is there as well as what is not there helps us live a vital, integrated life. Nightingale refers to this potential for fullness in the quote mentioned above.

Teaching the Elements

Inspired by Nightingale’s words, I developed a class on “Finding Balance with the Elements,” which I started teaching to nurses. These experiential classes contain five components, an educational piece, a relaxation phase, guided imagery, individual processing through journaling or drawing, and end with a group sharing.

Through this experiential process, nurses discover an intuitive recognition about elemental strengths and weaknesses, even if they had not ever heard of the elements as inner energies before the class. For instance, a person with the least amount of earth energy knows well her challenges with regular exercise and money management. Knowing her challenges in relation to earth energy, however, gives her a fresh perspective on finding resolution. Rather than regard the challenge as a chronic shortcoming, this person can learn to integrate qualities of earth energy by working with gifts of the earth. For instance, this nurse can symbolically keep a pretty stone or helpful crystal in her pocket or a small bowl of earth dirt, or salt, nearby a bed or desk as a visual and tactical reminder of the need to be practical, grounded and body conscious.

Knowledge about astrological elemental balance can apply in staff dynamics too. Consider the nurse who has primary energy in earth and a colleague who has primary energy in air. People with earth energy need to see to believe, they are concrete thinkers. People with air energy do not need to see to believe. In fact, for people with a primary

signature of air energy, the least concrete the better because they are at home with the abstract. The challenge for these two nurses is to bridge the communication gap between concrete thinking (earth) and abstract thinking (air). They bridge this divide by being vulnerable: by sharing beliefs (fire energy) and feelings (water energy) related to the position they each take. Sharing leads to understanding and from this platform, cooperation and collaboration can occur.

In her quote, Nightingale encourages people to bring all elements into balance before making a choice or taking a stand. In the nano-second speed of modern life, this is a tall order. There is almost a universal tendency to stay within the comfort level of the signature, or primary, elemental energy. Doing so calls for a plan – the integration of spiritual (fire), psychological (air), emotional (water) and physical (earth) qualities and capacities. Integrating this balance with the elements, beyond excess and deficiency, opens us to fullest potential.

Elemental Work Leads to Work with Time

Around the time that I found Nightingale's book, I worked as a clinical research nurse on a pediatric AIDS study at a major urban hospital in Boston, Massachusetts. Back then, men, women and children were dying rapidly from the disease of HIV. The clinical team that I was on suffered cumulative grief from these losses and the climate of research in HIV/AIDS was political and internationally competitive. In addition, I had an unpredictable commute to work, one that took one to two-hours depending on traffic, and a boss who wanted me to arrive at work on time.

These stresses got to me, and inner inspiration guided me to leave that position and build my own business. While I had the usual pressures that come with a starting a sole proprietorship, I did not have the stress of working in a politically charged setting, nor did I have the tension that comes from a difficult commute. I was also living in a bucolic setting, on a quiet lake surrounded by woods.

I became aware that there were times, when I felt as tired and out-of-sorts working on my own as I had felt while working in the urban hospital setting. This was a curious experience and it bewildered me. I began tracking the pattern of energy levels with my astrological chart.

I saw that I had little to no energy the three days before the angle of the Sun/Moon in the current sky was the same as the angle of the Sun/Moon at the time of my birth. Patterns rule, and much in our lives is based on geometry! The synchronicity between my energy level and this recurring cosmic pattern astounded me.

For two years, I tracked this cycle and found it to be a reliable predictor of energy. I named this cycle the "Personal Lunar Cycle" and used its pattern to plan and schedule my life. For instance, in the low energy time, called "the dark of the Moon in the personal cycle," I would make sure my refrigerator was stocked with nourishing food so that I did not have to endure the bright lights and loud noise at the supermarket. I would

also make sure that I had books from the library for pleasure reading; mysteries and fiction, and that I had Epsom salts on hand for long soaks in the tub. I would not schedule events, like giving a workshop, during that time. I would rest and then I would rest some more.³

Feeling that two years was a reasonable time to track this cycle, I started teaching “Your Energy & the Moon” workshops at nursing groups, day spas, bookstores, local libraries and the like. The people who came to these events had never had their charts done and they were not interested in astrology. They simply wanted to connect with the Moon.

The “Personal Lunar Cycle” class includes teaching, relaxation and guided imagery components. After the guided imagery, participants were asked to mark on a blank astrological wheel the phase of the Moon in which they intuited that they were born.

Everybody got it! It was astounding to me that everybody got it. I believe people intuited their own lunar phase because we carry this information on a cellular level. People may not know the language of astrology; however, it seems that people do know their own connection with the cosmic world. Astrophysicists tell us that we come from the stars and in my own work I witness, repeatedly, an active connection between intuition and the natural world. As an educator, this visceral experience of inner knowing has changed the way that I teach; I now use an experiential approach in almost everything I do.

The work with the Personal Lunar Cycle⁴ opened me up to deeper work with Time cycles. In addition to working with the patterns of the cycles of the Sun, Moon and planets, I also pay attention to the long-range cycles of the bodies of deep space. Black holes, quasars and pulsars all have cycles that relate with the human energy field on subtle levels.

Nursing Theory

One nursing theory that I reference in support of my work is Margaret Newman’s *Health as Expanding Consciousness*.⁵ Recognizing that the elements of the natural world are also inner qualities helps expand consciousness to a more complete sense of self, as Nightingale encouraged.

Pattern recognition is a main theme in Newman’s nursing theory. Recognizing the patterns of synchronicity between inner energy levels and outer, natural cycles expands consciousness by helping us experience time as an organic alignment with the natural world.

Rushing, always being on the go and feeling pressure that there is never enough time are all symptoms of time-sickness. These stresses have negative impact on heart and mental health and immunity. In this age, when intuition is a major tool for life, there

is benefit in slowing down and listening to inner wisdom. Using the elements, fire, air, water, and earth, to help people identify their unique elemental constitution is a first step. Once this recognition occurs, looking at one's relationship with Time becomes easier. The opportunity is to experience Time as an inner, organic experience – body as Timer – rather than an experience of Time as an external, controlling authority. This slow, gradual process of transformation represents an ultimate form of wellness, one in which talents, visions and dreams unfold and thrive.

References

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