

Chapter One



Intimacy with the Moon

People often ask why I've devoted so much study to Moon phases. Initially it was an act of insecurity. I figured Moon phases were something every astrologer knew about, except me. As a child I'd been told if I saw the Crescent Moon, it was wise to make a wish. A neighbor who gardened told me that the Moon guided her planting and pruning. Television taught me that when the Moon was Full people could go crazy. But my astrology classes hadn't taught me much beyond that.

I reviewed my collection of astrology texts. Across six shelves, I couldn't find more than a dozen pages about the phases of the Moon. I visited my favorite metaphysical bookstore. There was an entire aisle of astrology books, but not one was about the Moon. After four trips to other bookstores, I finally discovered *The Lunation Cycle* by Dane Rudhyar. I later learned this is *the* modern bible of lunar phases. Just

about any astrologer working with the phases today draws heavily from this book.

But at the time, I found it a tough read. Three chapters into it, I was just turning pages, not digesting a single word. Rudhyar had an elegant conceptual understanding of the Moon, but his ideas seemed as remote from my personal experience as that tight-lipped, distant orb herself. Enter serendipity. A friend invited me to a Full Moon ceremony with a group of spiritual women. At last I would be initiated into the lunar mysteries!

On the night of the Full Moon, we drove to a small apartment behind a gas station and above a used rug shop. We entered to find a medicine wheel of stones and crystals on the floor of a windowless room. So much for my fantasy of dancing naked in a shaft of moonlight! Instead we smudged with sage and sweet grass and positioned ourselves around the wheel. We chanted, meditated, took personal visionary journeys and shared. It was a lovely evening. But later that night, looking up at the glowing round Moon overhead, I felt no closer to her than before.

Maybe it would take time. I was eager for the next Moon ceremony until I learned there wouldn't be one. What I'd assumed was a monthly ritual had been a novel event. Over the past year, the women in the circle had tried keeping up with the Moon, but life kept getting in their way. Kids got sick, somebody had a class, it was the holidays, cars broke down, relatives came from out of town. The Full Moon emerged as an ever lower priority.

It was another dead end in my quest for Moon knowledge. Disappointed, I began to question whether my goal had any real value. Given the paucity of written material, and the difficulty of real-time commitment to the lunar rhythms, perhaps the Moon's phases signified nothing at all!

It was time for science, where we eventually turn to verify if something is real or not. I checked Gauquelin's *The Cosmic Clocks* and other books, looking for statistical proof of Moon phase influence. I learned that earthworms, oysters, carrots, salamanders and other organisms move in rhythm to the Moon. But what about people? Folklore has it that the number of births, suicides, homicides, arsons, and incidents of domestic violence rise at certain phases of the Moon. Yet scientific evidence of this is remarkably hard to come by. Given the persistent popularity of beliefs about the Moon, you'd think the empiricists would have resolved this issue long ago. But formal scientific inquiries are few. And for every study claiming human behavior is Luna linked, another swears that it's not.

Statistics are tricky (or, science isn't always scientific). An example is a study which seemed to prove that traffic accidents increase during New and Full Moons. It was later observed that during the course of this study the lunar events fell on weekends, a time also correlated with greater accidents. When statistical controls for holidays and weekends were added by the researchers, the relationship between Moon phase and car wrecks disappeared. Another study showed that homicides were disproportionately high during the 24 hours before and after Full Moons. However, to get to this finding the data was run through such a myriad of statistical tests, discarding all negative results until the desired positive one was achieved, that the conclusion was virtually meaningless.¹

Most Moon lovers believe the studies that prove their faith and most scientists believe the ones that disprove it. Beyond that, I'm not sure what I learned from empirical investigations. Actually, one of my favorite studies is an informal one I've conducted myself over the years. I'll ask people, singly or in groups, whether they believe Moon phases have an influence. The majority will usually say yes. Yet when I ask the same people if they can tell me what phase the Moon is in now, remarkably few have any idea.

This fact never ceases to amaze me. People believe in the Moon's power enough to say so, but not enough to actually look up and keep track. By now it was my fascination with the whole Moon problem that glued me to it more than anything else. I was perpetually edgy about the Moon, trying to narrow the gap between folklore and fact, between lunar legends and my own experience, between my desire to touch the Moon's secrets and my fear that maybe there weren't any.

About this time Dane Rudhyar started looking really good to me. And so I pursued Moon phase knowledge within his conceptual framework. I was as rewarded by his perspective as I've been by any good astrological technique. Rudhyar likens the eight phases of the Moon cycle to an unfolding organic process.

In Rudhyar's model, there's a gestation at the *New Moon*, a gradual growth and laying down of roots at the *Crescent*, a crisis of commitment at the *First Quarter*, adjustments and struggle for survival at the *Gibbous* phase. An illumination or flowering comes at the *Full Moon*; a pollinating or dispersal of knowledge is facilitated at the *Disseminating* phase. During the *Last Quarter* Moon, there's a crisis in belief as the fruit, or seed capsule for the next cycle, is prepared. The *Balsamic* Moon brings decay and letting go, releasing the seed for the wheel's next turn.

Rudhyar's framework is sound and remarkably versatile. It works for understanding the monthly lunation cycle (from one New Moon to the next). It works for describing life purpose and personality types based on the Moon phase one was born under. It works remarkably well with more advanced techniques like secondary progressions; in fact, charting the progressing Moon phases over a 30-year period reveals a powerful life blueprint. Looking first at this technique in my own chart brought one of those spine-tingling moments as an astrologer: "My god, this really works!"

What Rudhyar teaches about the Moon also works for planets in aspect. A good grasp of the First Quarter phase, for example, can bring new understanding to any pair of natal planets in waxing square; or, from a transiting planet in opening square to a natal. Rudhyar's framework makes new sense not just of the Moon, it opens the whole chart, giving new meaning to Buddhist Shunryu Suzuki's sentiment, "When you understand one thing through and through, you can understand everything."

At last I knew more about the Moon than I did as a girl. As an astrologer I'd grown using Rudhyar's insights. I brought them into my readings. I gave talks about the lunation cycle at conferences. I was inspired to start designing my Moonprints report from this foundation. And I continued to explore Rudhyar's framework in the first version of this "MoonWatching" series, published in *TMA* nine years ago. You'd think then, I would have finally found happiness in my quest for Moon knowledge.

But it wasn't so. Many nights, the Moon still seemed like a stranger to me. And, like the grit of sand-in-the-shoes after a walk on the beach, discomforting thoughts persisted. Rudhyar was good, but why did most astrologers, myself included, tend to simply parrot Rudhyar's phrases, rather than build upon, *evolve* them? And why did the expectations for certain Moon phases fall flat at times? Some Quarter Moons, for example, were just as Rudhyar said, remarkably crisis-ridden; others were calm.

Sometimes we have to live with a question for years, which is what happened with my wondering about the Moon. Sometimes it can't be answered it's the wrong question. Such was the case with my Moon puzzle. As with most of my astrology studies, I had been looking for information, the kind of knowledge that would make me expert in the ways of the sky. Yet information alone does not make a good astrologer.

Over time I've learned there's a big difference between acquiring concepts about charts and developing an active relationship with a living cosmos.

I've often pondered what Thomas Moore said in *The Living Planets*. He suggested that with the arrival of science and astronomy came something less fortunate: the steady loss of intimacy with the sky. Our analytical and mathematical intelligence resulted in a kind of technological wipeout of the Moon, culminating on July 20, 1969, when, says Moore, "through the omniscient eye of television we could all see the dust of Luna, the imprint of a human foot, wellheeled of course, and later a golf club teeing off on the body of what once was a daimon, a god, a celestial governor or archon." It was then, Moore argues, that "deeply felt ties with the planets were severed."²

To measure how much we've lost in our relationship with the Moon, we might imagine what it was like before written records, when the Moon was our calendar, making agriculture and migration, and ultimately, civilization, possible. Timing then was serious business. Fail to plant at the right time and the food supply would be destroyed by frost. Success could come, however, from counting five Moons after the winter solstice, an easier measure than 148 days. The Moon also helped in the business of tracking game, providing a measure of distance traveled, timing when a tribe should start moving again. She was a partner, intimately bound up in life's course.

Before electricity, our friend Moon helped to differentiate the weeks, with certain activities emerging as more phase-appropriate than others. During the waxing Moon, for example, each night brought an increase of evening light. We don't have to be too mystical to see why the waxing Moon was associated with a building time, for bringing projects to fruition during its greater bounty of useful hours. It's perfectly logical why the Full Moon was associated with lively times. Under its light communities could gather and celebrate after sundown, lovers could

sneak into the forest for Moonlit trysts. Women's hormones may actually entrain to other women's more than they do to the Moon, but it makes sense that a village of women would ovulate together when the Moon was made for lovers.

Even as the practical need for moonlight diminished, poets and musicians and artists were still fascinated with her mystery. When the Eagle landed and Neil Armstrong took his one giant leap for mankind, the intimacy of this relationship may have reached its final limit. Mysterious Luna was undressed. That delicious enticement to the imaginations of lovers, sailors and gardeners, and the poet within us all, was literalized into gray rock and dust. So rudely exposed as that airless orb, that soundless satellite, the Moon fell off our imaginative landscape.

What happens when a revered body is grounded? Perhaps its divinity splinters in our psyches, hanging on as superstition or a kind of nostalgic fascination. Fanciful pictures of the Moon appear everywhere, in advertisements, on note cards, necklaces, earrings, wrapping paper, bed sheets, kitchen towels. We haven't fully let go of her. Yet our reverence and longing have been consumerized, intimate imaginings relinquished to borrowed imagery that we know is not exactly "real."

Lunar folklore and superstitions also rely on borrowed imagination. Belief may persist, but genuine awareness is lost. When things get crazy and someone wonders whether the Moon is Full, many will nod, but few will turn a confirming glance skyward. Game four of the 1993 World Series, for example, was so wild and unpredictable, the television commentator exclaimed "It must be a Full Moon!" The Moon was in her First Quarter phase, something anyone could have seen. Of course this didn't go into the annals of television history as much of a gaff.³

We might be forgiven. No one needs to know whether the Moon is full or not. And cognitive laziness is a fact of our species. We tend only to

notice what confirms our beliefs; refuting evidence often escapes our attention. This is not, however, a good practice for astrologers in the details of their profession. Observing life events against the phases of the Moon, I found that many Moon beliefs and astrology interpretations simply didn't hold. Was the information nonsense? Or did it mean that lunar influence just doesn't work with the mechanical regularity of a clock? Or was something further implied?

I think back to Moore's comment on intimacy. What if, as so many spiritual traditions affirm, the cosmos is indeed alive? If we take this as true, then our way is obvious: we need to approach the Moon as a living being. This is certainly easier said than done, given the modern tendency to see everything (including ourselves) as a machine, composed of parts that either work, require fixing, or discarding. The alternative is to read Luna as an influence that is neither controlling nor controllable, rather, predictable and capricious, alternately speaking and demurring, reaching toward us and turning away, knowable, but never completely, a being capable, in fact, of change. To relate this way requires a willingness to go beyond astrological information into the skill sets of receptivity and intuition, emptiness and imagination. It means renewed respect for her mystery, a word Moore defined as not an unsolvable puzzle, but "in the religious sense: unfathomable, beyond manipulation, showing traces of the finger of God at work."⁴

In all my wanderings I'd come back to where I began, with the Moon as mystery, although I had stripped away a significant veil. It wasn't the Moon's veil. It was my own. My approach had been wrong, as an astrologer, as a goddess-worshiper dancing in a ceremonial circle, as an empiricist, a historian, as a would-be crone looking for herbal Moon secrets and cures. I had forgotten the most critical element of lunar expertise: the aspect of relationship. It had to be personal. And it had to be something much more dynamic than acquiring concepts. To be in relationship with the Moon suggests something as challenging and

rewarding as any relationship, full of passion, gradual learning and delights, increasing comfort and frustrations, friction, boredom and surprise.

Relationship has never been my strong suit. It's fitting, however, that I should come to this aspect of the Moon now. I've recently moved, from California to Oregon. For the third time in my life, I'm embarking on the adventure of a committed relationship. I've sold the house I loved, quit the job I had for 16 years, uprooted my son—to marry a man I've known and cherished for 31 years. Most days I feel blessed beyond measure. Some days I wonder what I've done. I wonder if I'm any readier to have a relationship with a man, than I am to have one with the Moon.

Intimacy, whether with a person or the sky, requires acceptance of many mysteries, including, perhaps especially, our own. It requires an alertness to the interactive dance that draws us all. In the end we may have to acknowledge that the Moon, or our lover, is less the cause of things and rather more our collaborator. We may have to accept a greater unpredictability in our endeavors and that we are as much implicated in our outcomes as any human or celestial “other.” Such a perspective may seem at first to make us less secure. But it also brings new energy into the situation, opens up more room. It is a way to update our beliefs over time, a gift that can keep any relationship, including our astrological ones, fresh.

Yesterday was the Cancer New Moon. Days before I printed out and studied the chart. I considered the Cancer themes of nurture and mothering, of security and holding on, of this sign's element base, miraculous, life-giving water. I wondered about the oppositions of Pluto/Mars and Venus/Saturn, and on the day of the New Moon, I headed into the mystery of it all. At sundown I went out to the front yard. I started to gather stones into a ceremonial circle above our underground well, which along with others in the valley may be running dry. From

nowhere my son appeared and we completed it together. We thought about the small dead frog we'd found that morning and placed it in the wheel. I was deeply moved by our impromptu ritual, though I was less an expert astrologer or ceremonial artist than I was simply the New Moon's playmate. Perhaps all that occurred was that the day was now a position against which the coming weeks' unfolding could be measured. And perhaps something unfathomable, beyond manipulation, full of divinity was also at play.

Moon watching means loving mystery and being sensitive to the aliveness all around, on earth and in the sky. As the phases unfold each Moon cycle, there will be moments when we can indeed be the sage, like Rudhyar and others, working from our intellects. Other times we may need to be the lover, feeling the time's moods with our hearts. And there may be moments in between when we are the hunter, hungry for nourishment, in pursuit of lunar secrets.

I look forward to writing this MoonWatching series again, endeavoring more consciously to take the ways of hunter, lover and sage, sharing astrology knowledge and a certain romantic imagination. In the coming eight installments, one for each Moon phase, we can collect the old concepts and deconstruct them when necessary. Let's listen to the cycle's rhythm. Let's take ourselves all the way to the Moon.

Chapter Notes:

¹ See I.W. Kelly, James Rotton, and Roger Culver, "The Moon Was Full and Nothing Happened," *The Outer Edge, Classic Investigations of the Paranormal*, edited by Joe Nickell, Barry Karr and Tom Genoni, CSICOP (NY: 1996).

² Thomas Moore, *The Planets Within*, Lindisfarne Press (NY: 1990), p. 17-18.

³ See Kelly, Rotton, Culver, *op cit*, p. 27-28.

⁴ Thomas Moore, *Soul Mates*, HarperCollins (NY, 1994), p.xi.

Monthly Moon Phase Planner:

New Moon: Discover—who you can be and what you want to develop in the new cycle.

Crescent: Commit to your vision for the future.

First Quarter: Notice what you need to do and **do it!**

Gibbous: You're called on to **improve** something.

Full Moon: Relax and **allow realizations** to come to you.

Disseminating: Express what you **know** and **feel** to be true.

Last Quarter: Choose the **seeds** for your next cycle.

Balsamic: Come to **stillness**.