

Questioning our Horaries

By Deborah Houlding

The Art of not Asking Foolish Questions

.. beware of those cases wherein the astrologer is subject to err and mistake when the querent is so silly he knows not how to ask or what he would have.

Bonatus, consideration 7.

All of the great horary authorities - ancient, traditional and modern - have stressed the need for deep thought and contemplation in the framing of the horary question. In 'The Considerations of Guido Bonatus', the 13th century Italian astrologer whose works have been so influential upon horary technique, the first consideration in the art of skilful practice requires the astrologer to reflect upon what has moved the querent to consult with the astrologer. [1]

Bonatus tells us that the mind must be sufficiently stirred to create the intent to enquire - and yet

"although the mind be moved to enquire, 'tis not enough unless the superior bodies sympathize therewith".

In this comment Bonatus explains that a question, even one that the querent fervently wants to ask, does not necessarily produce a horary capable of judgement. There has to be some sympathy from the "superior and celestial bodies; so that they at that time imprint on the thing enquired after, what shall become of it". Bonatus also says that the free will of the querent must be acknowledged. Free will gives the power to choose whether to ask the question in the first place, and it must be by the election of the querent's own free will that he or she volunteers to engage in conversation with the superior and celestial bodies.

In gaining the sympathy of the 'celestial bodies' we expect the question to produce a chart that, by its astrological factors, descriptively and reliably reflects the question. But in order to gain the true sympathy of the celestial bodies we must first gain the sympathy of the superior bodies, which moves us higher into the realm of divinity, the superior spheres relating more directly to the divine will of God and the angelic forces. If, and only if, both of these are in sympathy with our question, we, the inferiors, may benefit from their guidance. But we must willingly and freely participate - for even God and the planets together cannot give us an answer if we are not willing to listen, nor can they influence our actions against our will.

This is a mighty consideration for astrologers to reflect upon. Bonatus is explaining that the astrologer, as the interpreter of all this interaction, cannot expect a sacred revelation from the chart unless the consultation is conducted with an earnest approach. The querent must be willing to listen, but he or she must also be capable of gaining the sympathetic interest of 'the gods'.

Bonatus' second consideration exemplifies this. Before an astrologer may be capable of performing good work there is a responsibility to ensure that the querent approaches the enquiry in a manner that is sincere and deserving of such heavenly attention. Bonatus suggests that due preparation would involve prayer, adopting a devout spirit, giving focus to the problem so that the guidance revolves around a certain and particular matter of honest importance. The question should never be based upon "trifling occasions, or light sudden emotions, much less on matters base or unlawful". In his view, barring those occasions when the question is prompted by a sudden matter of great urgency, the querent ought to have tossed and turned over the matter for at least 24 hours before putting it to an astrologer. We can presume he would expect the querent to make all possible attempts to resolve the problem in this time, resorting to astrology only when such a committed attempt fails to ease the disturbance of the mind and spirit.

In recent times interest in horary astrology has swelled amongst astrologers who are keen to become reacquainted with traditional astrological knowledge, and strive to learn its techniques and understand its approach. But the traditional approach to horary is based upon the enquiry fulfilling the fundamental criteria set out in the considerations that Bonatus saw fit to put at the top of his list. The 17th century horary master William Lilly, who translated and published Bonatus' work, added an editorial note of agreement. He claims that those who take this sober course shall be rewarded with a true and reliable

judgement, but those who don't undermine the sincerity of astrology and bring scandal to its practitioners. Lilly states that the astrologer is not to blame for this, the fault lying with the "ignorant, silly Querent".

In my opinion, Lilly's footnote has detracted more from the thoughtful wisdom of Bonatti's message than it adds. The astrologer, as the orchestrator of the divinational process, should take accountability for the questions that are put to horary judgement and should be responsible for rejecting the questions that are in essence less than sincere. I believe this is the very reason why Bonatti included the issue as the first matter for the astrologer to contemplate. Of course, a modern astrological practitioner wouldn't send a client away with the suggestion that they come back when they can prove they've spent 24 hours in prayer or reflective meditation, but generally the nature of the question will reveal whether it is a matter that the superior bodies might 'sympathise' with.

I might add that of all the 'considerations before judgement' this is the only one that I believe is capable of negating the horary to result in an 'empty' chart, that is, one devoid of any valuable significance. Personally I'm not even interested if the planetary positions mirror the question - we all resonate to the planets at a general level and the energies of astrological movements constantly bring our concerns to the surface and draw our attention from this to that. This demonstrates celestial sympathy and the chart that results from a question provoked by the mood of the moment displays just that. It very often reflects the question that has surfaced, or the issues that colour our minds. We might make the case that these charts are descriptive of the question, but unless there is divine sympathy, they will not be descriptive of the answer.

This morning I received an all-too typical request for a horary judgement. A woman had just attended an interview for a new job and wanted to know whether the decision (which was made later in the day) would be in her favour. Money was not an object for her, but neither was it a persuasive factor for me to engage in a horary that offers no opportunity to affect the outcome or return astrological assistance. This question, and all its deviants: 'will the letter arrive today?', 'will I get the loan I have just applied for?', 'will the pregnancy test come up positive?' and more [2] - are all based on idle curiosity, self-indulgence and undisciplined impatience rather than a request for guidance on a matter of honest importance. My prospective client was very understanding of my reasons and I'm sure will be even more likely to call again when a matter more responsive to astrological investigation presents itself. When I see the technical discussions that revolve around questions of this nature published in our journals, books, online forums and magazines, I despair, but not of the querent. If there is an ignorant and silly attitude being expressed, which leads us to error and brings scandal upon our art, there is no one but the artist to blame.

Fellow astrologers may wish to argue against my views - they are welcome to make their case. As horary astrology re-emerges to absorb the serious interest of astrologers in a new era we are in danger of recreating the same destructive environment that saw it perish in every previous period of decline. Popularisation leads to trivialization which turns horary into an impotent and unreliable tool. Reflection upon Bonatti's words should stand as a portal of entry into horary study beyond which no one should venture without qualification.

A sincere astrologer doesn't seek to become a decision-making prop for those too gullible, too superficial or too idle to think their problems through for themselves. The study of astrology seeks to empower people from the inside out. Most astrologers appreciate that maturity and personal development are the result of facing problems and meeting challenges, and nowhere in any of our philosophy is the view endorsed that we can freely give away answers or reveal anything that is asked without requiring commitment from the querent or approaching the enquiry with the respectful attitude it deserves.

Astrologers always get the chance to probe the issues underlying the question. We too have free will and have every opportunity to use it when deciding whether or not our understanding of the question corresponds with the standards we set.

The Considerations of Guido Bonatus

1. The First, is to observe what it is that moves a person to propose or ask a question of an Astrologer; where we must take notice of three motions: the First, of the mind, when a man is stirred up in his thoughts and hath an intent to enquire; a Second, of the superior and celestial bodies; so that they at that time imprint on the thing enquired after, what shall become of it; the Third, of the free will which disposes him to the very act of enquiring; for although the mind be moved to enquire, 'tis not enough unless the superior bodies sympathize therewith; nor is such motion of the stars enough, unless by the election of his will the person does actually enquire.

2. The Second Consideration is (what we hinted at before) the method or manner everyone ought to observe that enquires of an Astrologer; which is, that when he intends to take an artist's judgment of things past, present, or to come, he should, first, with a devout spirit, pray unto the Lord, from whom proceeds the success of every lawful enterprise, that he would grant him the knowledge of those things of the truth of which he would be resolved; and then let him apply himself to the astrologer with a serious intent of being satisfied in some certain and particular doubt, and this not on trifling occasions, or light sudden emotions, much less on matters base or unlawful, as many ignorant people used to do; but in matters of honest importance, and such as have possessed and disturbed his mind for the space of a day and night or longer; unless in sudden accidents which admit not of delay.

Note by Lilly. - Those that take this sober course, shall find the truth in what they enquire after; but whosoever do otherwise, deceive both themselves and the artist; for a foolish Querent may cause a wise Respondent to err, which brings a scandal upon Art amongst inconsiderable people, whereas the Astrologer is not blameable, but the ignorant silly Querent.

The above reproduces the first two considerations of Guido Bonatus including Lilly's note as published on pages 1-2 of the Regulus facsimilie edition of: The Astrologer's Guide: Anima Astrologiae.

Some other examples of client horaries I have declined to judge:

Will our second home that we are having built abroad be a 'happy home'?

[Pointless]

I asked the querent what she would do if the horary suggested that it wouldn't - stop building? Have it pulled down? Since she had committed herself to the home by investing in it in the first place, it was up to her to make it a happy one.

Can you help me find the earring that dropped from my ear a few moments ago as I was hanging some new curtains?

[Idle]

I explained that I wouldn't attempt to do that by astrology, but offered to drive around and look for it if she paid me the equivalent. (This was asked by a local astrologer who had just heard me giving a talk about finding missing objects through horary).

Will I sell my house? I'm not sure if it's relevant but I don't want to move if my lover decides to come and live with me. He's married. But his wife is terminally ill with cancer.

[Dishonest question]

The querent started asking about a straightforward property matter but it soon became apparent that she really wanted to know how long she would have to wait to see if and when her married lover would commit, which hinged upon the question of how long his wife had left to live.

Will I get my prospective lover into bed tonight?

[Base]

I cannot count the number of times that requests for horary centre around the prospect of having sex at a particular time or with a certain person. Anyone who doesn't realise how trivial this question is should spend less time studying horary and more time creating the opportunity to get laid. (Take a look through William Lilly's relationship charts. The issues revolve around marriage, making genuine commitments, discovering duplicity, life-turning events and reconciliations that affect the practical prospects of everyday life.) The reason why there is so much confusion about which house rules sex is because ancient astrologers were never so impudent in the questions they sought heavenly guidance upon.

Will he/she call me?

[Undisciplined impatience]

If the call is important, have the presence of mind to make it yourself. If it isn't important, have the discretion to wait and let someone else reveal their commitment or lack of interest in the fullness of time.

Should I invest in this stock or that stock today?

[Trivial]

In my book, not knowing what to do with your money rarely qualifies as a problem. I have taken some questions on this theme but only when the querent has been able to demonstrate that they've made adequate investigations of their own and this is a major financial concern. There are a range of astrological techniques available to explore financial astrology; horary is only useful where there is a focussed attention upon a matter that seeks to avoid apprehension.

There are more, but I'm sure my point has been made.

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Deborah Houlding has been a practicing horary astrologer since gaining her diploma in Olivia Barclay's QHP course in 1990. She has in-depth experience of teaching horary directly to astrologers through correspondence courses, international seminars and residential workshops. Within the UK she has presented a master class on horary at the Astrological Association Annual Conference and workshops for the Faculty of Astrological Studies Residential Summer School at Oxford.

Her published work includes numerous articles on horary in astrological publications at home and abroad. She has acted as the Horary Editor for the Astrological Association's *Journal*, and Editor of the *Traditional Astrologer Magazine*. Books include *The Houses:Temples of the Sky* and a retyped, annotated version of William Lilly's *Christian Astrology*. Visit Deborah Houlding's website for articles, reviews and information on horary astrology at www.skyscript.co.uk