

THE RE-ENCHANTED UNIVERSE

BY LOUISE DANIELLE PALMER

Philosopher Richard Tarnas asks us to step back and consider that the ancients, who looked to the night skies to make sense of their lives, were on to something — and that perhaps it is we who are lost in space. Here's a new case for astrology.

On a bitterly cold day in the middle of winter sometime in the late sixties, Richard Tarnas and his friend Chris Hunt, students at Harvard, were walking across a bridge spanning the Charles River. Halfway to the other side, Tarnas suddenly jumped up onto the curved hand-rail, frozen and slick with ice. Hunt remembers standing in awed silence as he watched his friend run the length of the rail, icy waters roiling and rippling below him, laughing the whole way.

This moment, enacted with flair and courage, may serve as the enduring metaphor for Tarnas' life. As a philosopher and cultural historian challenging the intellectual orthodoxies of his day, Tarnas has been not only crossing an impossible bridge, he's become its careful architect, its imaginative engineer, and its inexorable builder as well.

This bridge ushers us across a deep divide between two worldviews — the ancient and the modern, the spiritual



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and the scientific — and into an entirely new cosmology. It took Tarnas 30 years of sustained empirical and philosophical inquiry to shape the ideas and marshal the evidence for this reconciliation, outlined in his latest book, *Cosmos and Psyche* (Viking, 2006).

Tarnas asks us to step back and consider that the ancients, who looked to the night skies to find their way and make sense of their lives, were onto something — and that perhaps it is we, with our high-powered computers, big bang theories, and relativist notions, who are lost in space. Without discounting the implications of the Enlightenment, the Scientific Revolution, and the revolution in post-modern thought — and in spite of our successful efforts over the past 300 years to deconstruct meaning in the cosmos and dismantle our false gods in science, religion, and philosophy — Tarnas makes a compelling case for the idea that we are not an isolated oddity of consciousness floating in a meaningless, indifferent universe. And more: that we are participating in one that is conscious and exquisitely ordered, albeit mysteriously.

Tarnas supports this case by laying the philosophical ground for a radical shift in perspective, supported by a sweeping body of evidence that illustrates an uncanny correspondence between the movement of the planets and the timing and character of historical

events, from September 11th to the French Revolution, from the unfolding creative genius of Descartes and Darwin to Beethoven and the Beatles. These correspondences, numbering in the thousands, may give culture, biography, and history itself an elegant coherence. They also may be “intimations” that we are more deeply connected to the cosmos than we have ever imagined. Yes, Tarnas is talking about resurrecting ancient astrology (not the newspaper horoscope variety), knowing it’s a ludicrous notion to anyone with a good education. But he’s staked his reputation on it, and even to the most skeptical and critical inquirers — and I count myself among them — Tarnas’ brilliant scholarship is an invitation: Throw away your old glasses. Behold a new vision. Step into an enchanted universe.

Mysterious Patterns Emerge

In Tarnas’ universe, the planets that orbit the sun — such as Venus, and Mars, and Pluto — are not just a bunch of spinning rocks, ice, and gas. Rather, they correspond to specific archetypal principles that are dynamically present in our inner and outer lives. This universe is saturated with purpose and meaning, with freedom and responsibility, speaking to us in a poetic and symbolic language we can understand. In this universe, the human psyche and the cosmic psyche are entwined and expressed through patterns that are neither imagined nor conjured by us, but rather constellated by the mysterious force some call God.

“The evidence suggests that our universe is informed by a powerful, creative intelligence, and an ordering principle of truly astonishing power, complexity, and beauty,” Tarnas says. “Some scientists describe this intelligence as having an Einsteinian quality, but I think it’s Shakespearean as well. It’s richly multidimensional, requiring the moral, aesthetic, and spiritual imagination as well as the scientific and mathematical. Seeing the patterns emerging in life awakens us to the fact that meaning happens not only within the psyche but also within nature and the cosmos. It suggests that the whole universe is supporting our spiritual evolution.”

Tarnas’ journey into cosmology began in the seventies at the Esalen Institute, where he studied with Joseph Campbell, Huston Smith, Gregory Bateson,

and Stanislav Grof. Back then, Esalen was a kind of laboratory for new ideas and psycho-spiritual transformation. Tarnas and Grof were studying the timing and character of these transformational experiences when someone suggested astrology. The notion seemed ridiculous at first and yet, he says, “We found ourselves astonished at how the planetary alignments consistently and precisely correlated with human experience.”

Tarnas challenged his own skepticism over a 10-year period at Esalen while examining hundreds, and eventually thousands, of individual astrological charts and deepening his understanding of the archetypal principles associated with the planets. The correlations he uncovered were undeniable and uncanny in their subtlety and specificity. Extending his inquiry, he found that astrology also illuminated key moments in the lives of pivotal figures in the West, such as when they fell in love, went into a depression, or experienced an epiphany. Patterns began to appear.

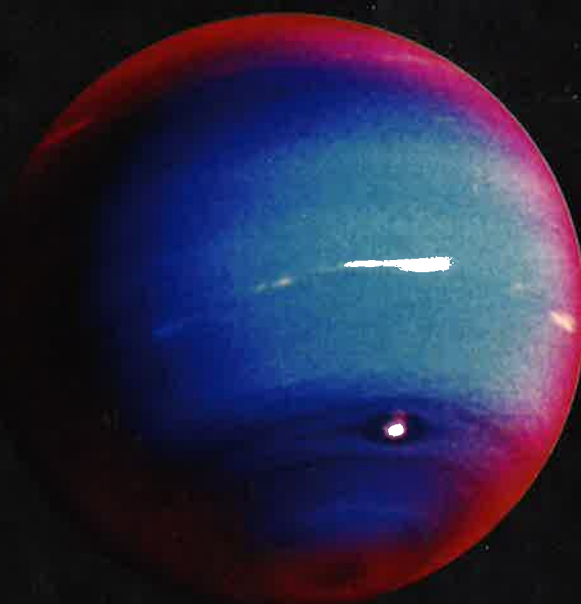
For example, Tarnas looked at Galileo’s chart when he first turned his telescope to the heavens and wrote *The Starry Messenger*, a defining moment in the birth of the modern era. At the time, Uranus, associated with revolutionary breakthroughs and awakenings, was in a particularly powerful one-time configuration

transiting his birth chart. It turned out that it was the exact same configuration, or transit, that René Descartes had in 1637 when he published his epoch-defining *Discourse on Method*, which became the foundation of modern philosophy. It was also the same configuration that Newton had in 1687 when he published the *Principia*, the foundational work of modern science. Amazingly, Freud’s psychoanalytic theory, Einstein’s theory of relativity, and Darwin’s theory of natural selection all emerged in coincidence with the same planetary cycle.

After his 10 years at Esalen, Tarnas retreated with his family to a small cabin in the Northern California redwoods, where he immersed himself in the history and evolution of Western thought in order to reconcile these astrological insights with a worldview that made it impossible to conceive of them as valid or real. What emerged was *The Passion of the Western Mind*, hailed by scholars as one of the finest histories of Western thought ever written. *Passion* sold more than a quarter of a million copies and was adopted as a philosophy text at universities around the world.

Tarnas began lecturing internationally, and established the Philosophy, Cosmology and Consciousness doctoral program at the California Institute of Integral Studies in San Francisco. Meanwhile, he continued the final phase of his research for *Cosmos and Psyche*, examining planetary alignments for major historical epochs, from modernity back to antiquity. The placement of the planets in relation to the Earth, he discovered, corresponded not only to events in the lives of individuals but also to clear shifts in the zeitgeist — expressed in the political, scientific, cultural, and artistic phenomena of every significant period in history.

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In the past two and a half centuries, Uranus—Pluto hard alignments coincided with the French Revolution (1787–98) and the counter-cultural revolution of the sixties.



Vinci, Raphael, and Michelangelo reinventing art, Columbus, Vasco da Gama, and Magellan exploring the globe, Martin Luther spurring the Reformation, and Copernicus hypothesizing that the earth circled the sun. The world opened to itself, ushering in the Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment.

But this birth, Tarnas explains, came at a price and carried a contradiction. Freed from the overwhelming forces of nature by science, and from the

“A great mystery was unfolding, and the more I devoted myself to it, the more it just kept opening up,” Tarnas says. “I felt like my mind was participating in a great revelation, as if the universe wanted to be recognized for its beauty and magnificence.”

A Return of the Oldest Science in the West

With the naked eye, the ancients of Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Greece gazed at the heavens and intuited which gods, or forces, related to certain planets, connecting the celestial and the human realms. Over the centuries, they refined their understanding of the archetypes, or essential qualities, associated with the planets, and

tested them against experience. They lived in a world permeated with soul, meaning, and purpose — and the language through which these purposes and meanings were conveyed was archetypal and mythological. Astrology flourished until the modern era, when anything seen as symbolic, mythic, superstitious, or inexplicable according to reason was jettisoned.

The birth of the modern self in the West took place over some 150 years — beginning with the Renaissance with Leonardo da

predestination of medieval theology by philosophy, the modern self was autonomous but now inhabited a disenchanted universe. In a sense, Tarnas says, we became strangers in a strange land.

“Modern science, from the time of Bacon and Descartes onward, required the self to be fundamentally different from and separate from the outer world in order to understand it,” Tarnas explains. “So, while humans had become the sole locus of consciousness, meaning, and purpose, they now inhabited a meaningless, purposeless universe that was indifferent to, and contradictory to, their innermost nature and their spiritual aspirations.”

It took hundreds of years for this perspective to evolve and come to its logical conclusion in the past century: a state of existential free fall that paralleled unprecedented technological prowess and a mastery of the material world. The development of depth psychology by Freud and Jung in the twentieth century restored meaning in the inner world, but even it could not fully resolve the fundamental contradiction of the modern mind-set: our human quest for meaning still had no cosmic ground outside the psyche.

Now, however, we have, through post-modern philosophy, both the desire and the tools to critically examine our beliefs — and belief systems — as well as the possibility, through advances in physics, to develop a new cosmology. Both contemporary science and philosophy have revealed the extent to which the human mind played a role in constructing its knowledge and understanding of the world itself. “People on the cutting edge of a new worldview realize that the modern mind’s particular interpretation of reality may not be as objective as it thinks it is,” Tarnas notes. “Perhaps we have been interpreting reality in this way to fulfill a certain evolutionary need. . . . But it isn’t the last word.”

It is in this context — and at a time when we are experiencing a crisis of morality, mortality, and meaning — that Tarnas asks us to embrace a more profoundly evolutionary view of ourselves. Isn’t it more likely, he asks, that our intelligence, creativity, and spiritual passions are actually the *universe’s* intelligence, creativity and passions, living in us and through us? Is it possible to reconsider the wisdom of the ancients with the benefit of a modern sensibility

that allows us to perceive the bigger picture without losing our hard-won autonomy?

Tarnas’ analysis itself is made possible by modern science: he focuses on the outer planets, which were discovered by telescope, and relies on sophisticated computer programs that can pinpoint the position/whirl of planets at any time in the distant past or the near future. But his approach isn’t strictly scientific as that term has come to be understood, for he believes the universe cannot be fully comprehended by reason alone. He’s applying an “archetypal eye” to history and the cosmos, which relies as much on the poetic imagination and spiritual intuition as on the rational intellect.

This isn’t a predictive or fatalistic kind of astrology — whatever the newspaper horoscopes may say, Tarnas says, planets don’t cause things to happen. Rather, they indicate the archetypal forces or energies simultaneously at work in the individual psyche, the collective psyche, and the cosmos itself. Knowing what universal forces are unfolding within and around us makes it possible to work with them to draw out their greatest “life-enhancing potential.” In fact, Tarnas believes it is our responsibility as well as an expression of our free will to do so. Adolph Hitler and Charlie Chaplin, born just days apart with similar charts, nicely illustrate this point. Both were artistically inclined and grew up in poverty, and both had dictatorial tendencies, a genius for communication and an ability to put on vast illusions — but, he points out, the moral vector of their lives couldn’t have been more distinct.

Connected by Meaning

Like most people, I wrestled with Tarnas’ claim that astrology was illuminating without being deterministic. In response to my confusion, he offered an analogy which I found helpful: the hands of the clock don’t cause it to be 1:20 p.m., he explained, they simply indicate the hour, expressing a larger reality rather than causing it. He also referred me to a late essay by Jung to explain not how, but why, astrology “works.” In the essay, Jung describes how a difficult patient of his began to transform and heal after experiencing a powerful synchronicity. The patient was recounting a dream in which she was given a golden scarab. As Jung explained to her that the scarab signi-

fied rebirth in ancient Egyptian mythology, he stood up to open the window behind him. An insect looking exactly like the one she described in her dream flew in. The telling of this dream didn’t cause the insect to fly in the window. No causal mechanism, in fact, could explain what happened. Instead, meaning resulted from some mysterious force at work.

Likewise, Tarnas says, astrology is the study of planetary and human coincidence, the only connection of which is meaning: “It’s not Mars making someone angry or courageous, it’s not some electromagnetic force at work, rather it’s a coherence of outer and inner events. Both kinds of coincidences suggest that the universe is up to something more than random processes of mechanical evolution.”

Tarnas takes Jung’s concept of synchronicity and applies it on a cosmic scale: he believes the “meaningful coincidences,” or synchronicities, illuminated by archetypal astrology have the potential to heal the split in the modern psyche by revealing “a fundamental underlying unity and correspondence between the two realms — macrocosm and microcosm, celestial and human — and thus the intelligent coherence of a living, fully animate cosmos.”

Looking back through his archetypal astrological lens, Tarnas shows us how human consciousness has evolved in concert with rhythmic patterns danced out by the planets as they move into various alignments in the heavens. This dance appears to be perfectly synchronized with human activity, from scientific discoveries, social movements, and war and peace, to the unfolding of personal biographies and intellectual and cultural life itself.



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The Basics of Astrology

Astrologers work by interpreting the significance of the geometric relationship of the planets to one another as they transit the solar system. There are three ways of observing these relationships: through the natal chart, which maps the pattern of planets at the time of birth; through personal transits, the positions of the planets at any given time in relation to the natal chart; and through world transits, the positions of the planets relative to the Earth at any given time.

Each planet is associated with an archetype. Archetypes can be thought of in mythic terms as gods and goddesses, or in Platonic terms as “numinous Ideas,” or in Aristotelian terms as “universal and dynamic indwelling forms.” They can also be thought of as primordial instincts (Freud), expressions of the collective unconscious (Jung), or the “roots of the soul” (Hillman).

Tarnas defines archetypal complexes as having an essential character that expresses itself in multiple forms — physical, emotional, cognitive. A complex

occurs when two or more planets come into alignment (for example, squaring, opposing, or conjoining with each other), mutually reinforcing and activating the archetypal forces embodied in each planet. Every complex is open to diverse human interpretation and action because each one has different “inflections,” with the potential for good and evil, the profound and the trivial. “Imagine the archetypal complexes are set out like the great

chordal structures of life,” Tarnas explains, “but what melodies we sing, what kind of dance we dance, whether we make jazz, classical, or rock ‘n’ roll, is up to us.”

Tarnas examines the following four “outer” planets for his analysis. Here are the

archetypal qualities or forces accorded them by the astrological community:

Saturn: associated with gravitas, tradition, discipline, authority, constriction, control, melancholy, conflict, suffering, defeat, limits, judgments, consequences, the hard line and the hard truth.

Uranus: associated with a Promethean (emancipatory) impulse and radical change, liberation, reform, rebellion, sudden revelations or awakenings, intellectual brilliance, creativity, experimentation.

Neptune: associated with water, fluidity, and dissolution, the impulse for transcendence, spirituality, and healing, all things invisible and formless, unity, idealism, illusion, the dissolving of boundaries.

Pluto: associated with a Dionysian (creative/destructive) impulse, birth and death, the god of the underworld; libidinal and instinctual, cathartic and transformative, titanic, intensifying all it touches.

Focusing on the West, Tarnas illustrates how each historical epoch has a specific character that correlates with particular planetary configurations and their archetypal complexes, a few of which I explore below. *Cosmos and Psyche* is encyclopedic in scope, delving deeply into thousands of examples of how these complexes manifest over the centuries. I’ve outlined political developments in each cycle because they are easy to identify, leaving out the scientific, artistic, and philosophical developments he explores. These examples suggest the nature of the correlations, but cannot convey the enormous range, richness, and nuance of Tarnas’ 560-page opus, any more than Cliffs Notes can convey the complex panorama of life presented in *War and Peace*.

Uranus-Pluto

Uranus and Pluto oppositions and conjunctions occur, at most, only once every century, and last roughly 12 years. What happens when these two impulses, Promethean and Dionysian, come together and act upon one another? Intense social unrest, a spirit of restless experimentation and creativity, an urge for freedom, revolt against repression, the embrace of new philosophies, the will to bring about a new world.

In the past two and a half centuries, for example, Uranus-Pluto alignments coincided with the French Revolution (1787–98) and the counter-cultural revo-

lution of the sixties (1960–72). Tarnas illustrates how the dominant qualities of these epochs correspond “exactly, even profoundly” to one another. Each brought about a tidal wave of revolt, marked by protests, strikes, riots, bloodshed, and the powerful urge for personal expression and social emancipation. The French Revolution, sounding the call for “Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité,” focused on freeing the individual from the oppressive yoke of the monarchy, while the counter-cultural revolution of the sixties embraced individual and collective freedom through civil rights, sexual liberation, and political revolution. During both eras, the libidinal Dionysian impulse amplified the Promethean urge toward liberation, while the Promethean liberated both the creative and the destructive Dionysian impulse, with bloody results.

The same pattern unfolded in Europe in the seventeenth century, when Pluto and Uranus opposed one another between 1643 and 1654. It was during this epoch that the English Revolution, known as “The Great Rebellion,” occurred, along with the sudden emergence of dozens of radical groups — Roundheads, Independents, Fifth Monarchy Men. Historians describe it as a “world turned upside down.” In the middle of the nineteenth century, these planets were in conjunction again, from 1845 to 1856. This period also was characterized by revolutionary upheaval as the entire continent of Europe suddenly erupted in revolt, with insurrections in almost every capital city, from Paris and Rome to Berlin and Budapest.

Tarnas suggests that planetary alignments and history unfold not only synchronically (events of a similar archetypal character occurring at the same time in different places), but also diachronically (archetypally similar events occurring in coincidence with successive alignments of the same planetary cycle, century after century). In his book, Tarnas shows how these two patterns manifest in sudden great leaps forward in social and political movements, as well as in intellectual and creative breakthroughs, particular to each archetypally defined epoch. Individuals (and movements) build upon the achievements of their predecessors during earlier cyclical alignments, so that history appears not only to repeat itself, but to progress according to coherent, wavelike patterns. Tarnas believes this illustrates that our evolution is governed by universal

principles, and grounded in a larger cosmic reality.

Saturn-Pluto

While Uranus-Pluto represents the impulse toward radical emancipation, Saturn-Pluto embodies the opposite: radical contraction. These alignments, lasting three to four years, are related to major historical crises. Such periods are often viewed as the end of an era or the “end of innocence,” a time when nations seemed compelled to go to war. This archetypal complex is characterized by the empowerment (Pluto) of conservative, reactionary, and totalitarian forces (Saturn), a Manichean battle between good and evil, and a retrenching impulse to be armored, psychologically or militarily. This complex also often reflects an acute sense of vulnerability, matched by a drive for power and domination. Its positive potential includes a display of personal and collective determination, moral courage and sacrifice, and the forging of new structures in the face of collapse.

Saturn and Pluto came into almost exact alignment on September 11, 2001. This same planetary cycle coincided with the eruption of World War One in August 1914, during the twentieth century’s first conjunction of Saturn and Pluto. This was followed by an opposition of the same planets from 1930 to 1933, a period of economic crisis that saw the rise of fascism in Europe, militarism in Japan, and totalitarianism under Stalin in Russia — culminating with Hitler’s invasion of Poland in September 1939 as Pluto and Saturn came into perfect square alignment. This cyclical pattern of related events continued in the twentieth century with the unfolding of the Cold War, beginning in 1946–48



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Saturn-Pluto alignments are related to major historical crises. They were in alignment when Hitler invaded Poland in 1939, and again on September 11, 2001.



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Astrology

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with the establishment of the Iron Curtain (two terms which precisely reflect the character of the Saturn-Pluto archetypal complex).

A similar alignment is coming up in 2008–2011, with Uranus joining the Saturn-Pluto archetypal complex. Judging by the past, expect liberating changes, protracted struggle, widespread turmoil, and a radical overturning of the socioeconomic and political order. This triple alignment last occurred during the social, political, and economic upheaval of 1929–33.

Saturn-Neptune

This archetypal complex is characterized by social and spiritual malaise, political uncertainty, conflicts between opposing perspectives, including religion and science, faith and skepticism, and the urge to see through deception and illusion. Its more positive aspect includes the tendency to directly engage the tragic gap between the ideal and the real, leading to compassionate action, the alleviation of injustice, and the resolution of conflict. This alignment began in 2004 and will last until 2008.

Listening to Tarnas describe this complex, dozens of examples popped into mind: Darwin vs. intelligent design, The End of Faith, Bono's "One" movement, pervasive disillusionment and scandals uncovered everywhere, from the highest levels of church and government to sports and media. Maybe my "archetypal eye" was beginning to open.

I also found myself thinking about Tarnas' association of the Neptune-Saturn complex with "death by water, the ocean as a source of suffering and loss," as I opened the paper on our third day of interviews. Recently reported were mass drownings, shipwrecks, and an entire Bangladeshi village wiped away by a mud slide following heavy rains. Over the past year,

there were the tsunami, of course, and New Orleans, buried under water. The headlines that morning told me Arizona was in its 141st day of the longest drought on record — and that water had just been found . . . on Saturn's fourth moon. Coincidence? Synchronicity? Enchantment?

Everything Breathes Together

Something strange happens when you read or listen to Tarnas: you can almost feel the nodules in your brain rearranging themselves. The elegance of his argument, the scope of his ideas, a deep, abiding love of knowledge, creativity, and language — all overwhelmed my skepticism and hard-boiled resistance to astrology, and I know I'm not the only one. I've heard Tarnas described as a cross between Jimi Hendrix and Einstein. A psychologist I met at a class Tarnas taught observed that "listening to him think is like watching Fred Astaire dance — it's absolutely exquisite, positively thrilling, and occasionally hard to believe." And a CBC radio show host told Tarnas during an on-air interview that sent *Cosmos and Psyche* to number one on Amazon Canada, "This is the closest my head has been to exploding while reading a book."

None of this means, however, that *Cosmos and Psyche* is likely to be embraced by the mainstream, culturally or academically, anytime soon. Not surprisingly, a reviewer for the *Wall Street Journal* panned the book, on the basis that astrology is deterministic, and the *New York Times* has not yet reviewed it. Meanwhile, on April 1, a website lampooned the establishment response to the entire enterprise:

"MIT President Susan Hockfield resigned last week after reading a newly published book by astrologer-historian Richard Tarnas, called *Cosmos and Psyche*. 'I cannot go on,' Hockfield said. 'Science is nothing more than a lie, a soulless farce on the divine majesty of the universe. . . . I must now devote my life to the unfolding paradigm shift.'"

Is *Cosmos and Psyche* the product of a highly active creative imagination projecting patterns on cultural and intellectual history? Or is it a glimmer into our past that will propel us forward? It's up to the reader to decide, but a lot may ride on the answer.

"Will the powerful utilitarian mindset that so values political power, financial profit, and technological prowess rule our day until there is literally nothing sacred in this world?" Tarnas asks. "In this world, trees are just lumber, mountains are mining sites, animals are harvestable commodities, and children's minds are marketing targets. This techno-consumerist mania cannibalizing the globe won't fill the spiritual void because you can't ever get enough of what you don't really need.

"Or will we adopt a view of the universe as ultimately integrated, ultimately unified, ultimately coordinated, such that what happens in the heavens, what happens on earth, what happens inside and outside a human being — all are part of a coherent field of meanings and purposes? We humans have the role of being self-reflective, conscious agents who can in some sense affect and shape how these energies will express themselves through us. We are not automatons. The more conscious we are, the more we can intelligently dance with these energies."

Tarnas is asking us to consider what it means to bring to life the words of Plotinus, considered the greatest philosopher of late antiquity:

"The stars are like letters which inscribe themselves at every moment in the sky. . . . Everything in the world is full of signs. . . . All events are coordinated. . . . All things depend on each other; as has been said, 'Everything breathes together.'"

Will we resist this message, ignoring what we knew from the beginning of time, because we can't see anymore? Do we no longer "read" the stories written across the sky because the heavenly map

above has been obliterated from below? Maybe we need to consider that what we have is not too much light, but rather not enough night.

Louise Danielle Palmer is editor of S&H.

Leadership

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salary freezes, and threats as punishments. This is the same system used to train animals. Think about what "breaking" a horse means. Often, it means breaking its spirit. This is the reigning mentality in the workplace. Now think about how a horse whisperer works. I met one in Arizona who, after working with a wild mustang for an hour, was able to ride it. No bribes, no beating, no punishment — nothing but a connection between the soul of the person who loves the horse and the soul of the horse. Connecting soul to soul — that's what we need to do with one another at work. We need to ask ourselves if we are lifting each others' hearts in our work and our lives. Are we guiding the brilliance around us, helping others grow and find fulfillment?

Step Seven

Inspire

This is the step missing from all the leadership literature. When the leader is down, blue, depressed, who inspires the leader? The answer, of course, is the follower. But as leaders we cannot demand inspiration. We must create the conditions that inspire us. The best way to do that is to allow people to believe in something bigger and better in their lives. That is the role of the leader — to inspire by forging hope. Lin Yutang said it best: "Hope is like a road in the country. There was no road, but when many people walk on it, the road comes into existence." ❖

Adapted from a presentation to the Global Mind Change Forum in Santa Barbara, California.