

Winter Solstice 2017

by Bill Herbst

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The Astrology of Seasons

In astrology, the recurring parade of seasonal change can be studied through charts and cycles to reveal symbolic correspondences for psychological, social, and spiritual experience within humanity. Astrologers analyze the equinox and solstice charts to reveal the core meanings of coming seasons. In my approach, this is NOT simple prediction of events. Instead, it is an assessment of where we are and where we're headed. Ideally, I'd like what I write to be a symbolic guide to conscious living through better understanding the nature of the times, what we can reasonably expect, and how we might more successfully navigate through the ever-changing archetype field.

This perspective diverges from the uniquely individual patterns of natal astrology in that it is collective rather than personal — the implications apply for all of us together. So, please bear in mind that what follows may or may not be relevant for the evolutionary path of your personal life and the highly individualized choices you consider.

The Meaning of Winter

For six consecutive months, from autumn through winter, nights are longer than days in the northern hemisphere. We live with greater darkness, less sun, colder temperatures. The sun's rays strike more obliquely, and though our minds may minimize the difference, our cells know, just as plants do, that this is not the best time for the concentrated exertion of sustained outward growth. As the final phase of nature's seasonal quartet, the winter season is a time to let go of our judgments about the previous nine months of spring, summer, and autumn.

Collectivity reaches its highest point at the winter solstice. Desire for togetherness, group identity, and the deep longing to be included dominate our psychic landscape, along with their darker shadow aspects — loneliness, alienation, and ostracism.

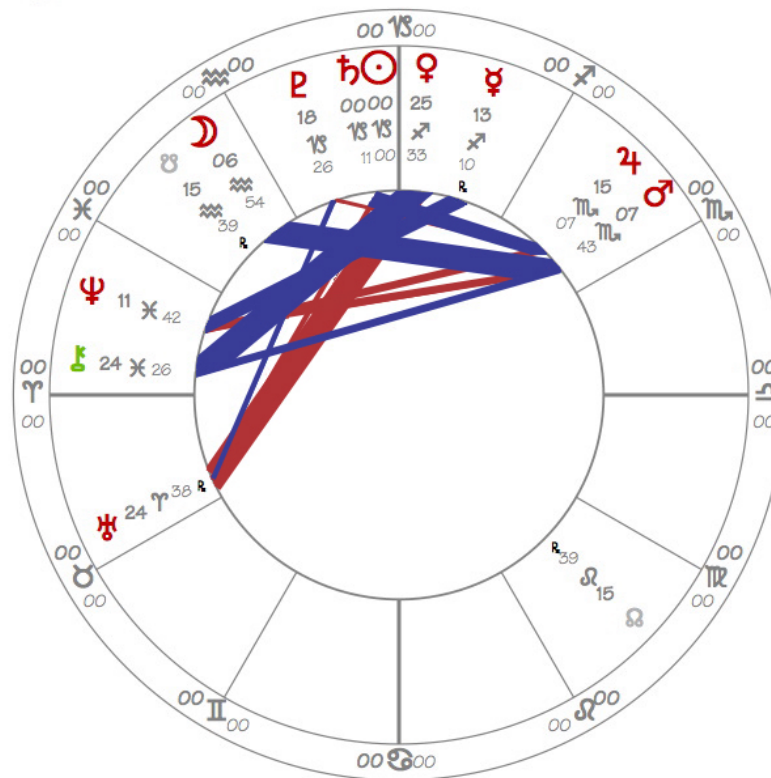
During the three months of winter, the individuating dimension of self lies fallow, recharging its seeds in the common ground. The natural focus is on the gradual release of old patterns of personal striving that have become clogged with attachment or frustration. Winter represents the perfect time to cleanse and purify ourselves in preparation for the rebirth that will come with spring.

The 2017 Winter Solstice occurs on **Thursday, 21 December 2017, at 11:28 a.m. EST.**

Some occultists and metaphysicians hold that the precise moments of Equinoxes and Solstices offer a special doorway into higher consciousness. For individuals who are sufficiently prepared and ready, being attuned to the cosmos at these moments might possibly accelerate the realization of consciousness. While I understand the reasoning behind such presumptions, I'm skeptical. Living, as we do, in modern civilization, which has (to a greater or lesser extent) disconnected most of us from the ebb and flow of natural change in seasonal rhythms, I wonder if anyone I know is sufficiently sensitized to make such a Great Leap. Nonetheless, I think it's a good idea to stop for a bit on the days of equinoxes and solstices and quietly consider our place in the grand scheme of things. If nothing else, just reflecting one one's own life and the meanings of the upcoming season might be worthwhile.

2017 Winter Solstice

Thursday, December 21, 2017
4:28:00 PM GMT
Greenwich, England
Tropical Natural True Node



The Sun and Saturn

This year's Winter Solstice chart contains a number of striking configurations, including a tight square between the Moon in Aquarius and Mars in Scorpio, plus another square from Mercury (nearing the end of its retrograde phase) to Neptune. Venus chimes in with two equally close alignments — a trine to Uranus

and a square to Chiron. All of these are significant, and each contributes specific tonalities to the chart's overall meaning.

However, one additional alignment trumps all of them by a mile and effectively dominates the chart — a very nearly exact conjunction between the Sun and Saturn in the first degree of Capricorn. The moment of the Sun's entrance into Capricorn in the tropical zodiac each year **is** the literal definition of the Winter Solstice, so that degree has particular symbolic significance. What makes it even more emphatic here is the presence of Saturn in *exactly* that same first degree of Capricorn, a mere 11' of arc in front of the Sun.

Saturn and its natural sign, Capricorn, are both symbols in astrology for the experience of real life — not dreams or fantasies or hopes or wishes or desires or needs — but hard-core material REALITY: carbon-based, rock-solid, matter-of-fact, sometimes harsh, and usually unyielding. This isn't Mother Nature in her soft nurturing mode. Saturn isn't flowers and fields of lush grasses, it's granite mountains covered with snow and scorched deserts blazing in the heat.

Saturn and Capricorn are archetypes for ambition and authority — the strong, stern father figure. Saturn is also the symbol for time, meaning the slow journey through insecurity or fear of inadequacy where we must overcome obstacles one by one and learn from our setbacks — typically failure or rejection — in order to achieve eventual maturation, full adulthood, and (we hope) the satisfactions of success. Delayed gratification is a central Saturnian principle.

Put the Sun and Saturn together in Capricorn, and all those qualities are fused into the core of the chart, becoming central to its overall meaning. So, this Winter Solstice chart isn't what we'd call light-hearted. It's serious and somber.

The focus of the chart is on government, and especially on people driven by ambition to seek and wield power in that realm. We're not talking about "public servants," but Leaders who want to dictate policy (dictators? I hope not...). The sheer emphasis on ambition in this chart is stunning, but the path is strewn with obstacles. The chart is driven to achieve success, but it's also cursed by failure.

I read an article online about the astrological meanings of this Winter Solstice published by the British newspaper *Daily Mail*, which had interviewed an astrologer. The headline of the article (which was, I presume, written to entertain, with a tongue-in-cheek attitude toward astrology) screamed an over-the-top warning:

"The Worst is yet to come! Astrologers warn that the Winter Solstice will be the most AWFUL day of 2017, thanks to a rare cosmic occurrence that hasn't happened in 350 years."

In case you haven't already surmised, I regard that headline as sheer poppycock.

The reference to 350 years is approximately the last time that the Sun and Saturn were conjoined in the first degree of Capricorn — at the moment of the Winter Solstice. Technically, that year was 1664.

OK, that's interesting, but how big a deal is it? Well, not quite as big as one might think.

Saturn takes about two and a half years to move through a sign of the zodiac. That means that roughly every seven years Saturn enters one of the Cardinal signs — Aries, Cancer, Libra, or Capricorn. Whenever Saturn initially enters a Cardinal sign, there's a reasonably good chance that it may align (by conjunction, square, or opposition) with the Sun as it passes through one of the 0° equinox or solstice points, or at least be reasonably close. *[Note: Astrology uses "allowable orbs," meaning that planets don't have to be precisely aligned together (0°), perpendicularly (90°), or opposite (180°) to be considered "in aspect." The closer they are to the exact angle, the more potent the connection, but if they're a little off, the alignment is still effective.]*

Over the past 31 years, Saturn and the Sun have been in major aspect in an equinox or solstice chart 18 times. That's hardly what we'd call a "rare occurrence." For those of my readers who are students of technical astrology, the table below shows each of those events at their seven-year intervals:

Eq/Sol	date	aspect	orb	Sun	Saturn
Vernal Equinox	20 Mar 1988	square	2° 10'	0 Aries	2 Cap 10
Summer Solstice	20 Jun 1988	opposition	0° 48'	0 Cancer	29 Sag 12
Autumal Equinox	22 Sep 1988	square	3° 38'	0 Libra	26 Sag 22
Winter Solstice	21 Dec 1988	conjunction	4° 22'	0 Capricorn	4 Cap 22
Vernal Equinox	20 Mar 1996	conjunction	2° 13'	0 Aries	27 Pis 47
Summer Solstice	20 Jun 1996	square	6° 45'	0 Cancer	6 Can 45
Autumal Equinox	22 Sep 1996	opposition	4° 17'	0 Libra	4 Ari 17
Winter Solstice	21 Dec 1996	square	0° 54'	0 Capricorn	0 Ari 54
Vernal Equinox	20 Mar 2003	square	7° 12'	0 Aries	22 Gem 48
Summer Solstice	21 Jun 2003	conjunction	2° 17'	0 Cancer	2 Can 17
Vernal Equinox	20 Mar 2010	opposition	1° 23'	0 Aries	1 Lib 23
Summer Solstice	21 Jun 2010	square	1° 46'	0 Cancer	28 Vir 14
Autumal Equinox	22 Sep 2010	conjunction	6° 46'	0 Libra	6 Lib 46
Vernal Equinox	20 Mar 2017	square	2° 26'	0 Aries	27 Sag 34
Summer Solstice	20 Jun 2017	opposition	5° 55'	0 Cancer	24 Sag 05
Winter Solstice	21 Dec 2017	conjunction	0° 11'	0 Capricorn	0 Cap 11
Summer Solstice	21 Jun 2018	opposition	6° 18'	0 Cancer	6 Cap 18
Autumal Equinox	22 Sep 2018	square	2° 46'	0 Libra	2 Cap 46

Half of those 18 events have fairly wide orbs, but the other half have orbs of less than 3°, which is quite potent. Two of them are even within a 1° orb. Yes, the Sun-Saturn conjunction in this year's Winter Solstice chart is a conjunction, with both planetary symbols in the same sign (Capricorn), and it does have the tightest orb (11', or one-fifth of a degree), so it wins the prize. But the headline of the article, with its tabloid teaser "350 year rare cosmic occurrence" is like Chicken Little shouting that the sky is falling.

Even more egregiously, the headline states that December 21st will be **“the most AWFUL day of 2017”** (according to astrologers, supposedly). Well, friends, that’s ridiculous. The Solstice chart is not about a single day, but an entire season. It’s like the birth chart for the next three months. So, focusing only on Thursday, December 21st, is just plain stupid. Beyond that, equinox and solstice charts are used not only to reveal the meaning and possible correspondences for a particular season, but, more subtly, by considering successive seasonal charts in sequence and in tandem, to reveal repetitive patterns that identify trends over a longer time frame measured in years.

For instance, the Sun-Saturn symbolism occurs in five of the eight equinox and solstice charts for 2017-2018. This means that it’s a recurring theme, a period of two years that we’re passing through where those who rule have gone bonkers. In America, the institution of government is now analogous to the Titanic after it hit the iceberg, and the majority of the public is akin to third-class passengers in steerage. The lifeboats are all reserved for the rich people in first-class.

Here’s a short bullet list of a few of the “instructions” I see in the Solstice Chart for the next three months:

- *Work hard toward your goals, but keep expectations as low as possible. This isn’t a time of victory, but rather of perseverance and survival.*
- *Discipline and effort are good, but not 24/7. Be sure to make an occasional space for joyful passion. Then get back to work.*
- *Don’t allow defeats or failures to discourage you. This is a season of massive screw-ups — one after another — so don’t take setbacks personally. Conserve your patience and gumption.*
- *Going too fast is dangerous. If the urge for speed overtakes you, apply the brakes. Pace yourself. Slow and steady works, so be the tortoise, not the hare.*
- *Don’t put too much stock in what other people say. Lies and deceptions abound. Even sincere and well-meaning people are often confused. Instead, watch what people actually do.*
- *Practicality is more important now than idealism. Keep hopes and dreams on the shelf. Decide what’s immediately required and do it. Then also be attentive to what’s necessary in the longer perspective, for the future, and build a solid foundation for it.*
- *Find time to study something you’d get pleasure from learning.*