
THE HERBST NEWSLETTER

astrological-cultural-spiritual-political views & opinions

--- Thoughts, dates, and reminders about our lives as members of the craziest species on this lovely planet. Like a message in a bottle washing up on the sandy shores of consciousness ---

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Dear friends,

This month's commentary concerns a problem that has lurked in the background in many of our lives for decades and will move toward center stage over the next seven years.

--Bill Herbst

Commentary: **Another Chance for Togetherness**

Let us put aside for a moment the various and increasing political and economic absurdities that grow ever more surreal with each passing month and instead talk amongst ourselves about a longing that emerges from a gentler part of our core humanity. I'm speaking of the need for *togetherness*, the experience of flowing in harmony with others and feeling like a member in good standing of the sharing club. Aloneness is the yang to the yin of togetherness, and it is an equally primary need. To feel whole and balanced, human beings need to be alone and together in alternation, flowing from one to the other and back again without restraint or coercion.

Just as aloneness is the antidote to enforced conformity, so togetherness is the antidote to the toxic experience of alienation, where we feel shut out, cut off, unseen, rejected, misunderstood, and imprisoned in isolation, trapped in solitary confinement without hope of parole. Alienation can occur when by oneself or in the midst of a crowd, since it is not about numbers or the mere presence of others. Rather, alienation is a feeling of invisibility and cold rejection (the opposites to feeling seen and warmly accepted).

If America is not the most alienated culture in the world, it is at least in the top tier. I haven't lived in other cultures, first-world or third-world, so America is the only country with which I have direct rather than vicarious experience. For my money, though, we are the quinessentially alienated post-modern society.

If one knows only the myths and ideals of a given culture, American

estrangement might seem odd, since our society has always placed great stock in home and family. The U.S. natal chart has a stellium in Cancer, emphasizing biological family over other groups or social bonds. Specifically, the U.S. chart has Sun, Mercury, Venus, and Jupiter in Cancer in either the 7th or 8th houses, depending on house system used and different approaches to placement of planets near house cusps. My view is that only Mars in Gemini occupies the 7th house of the U.S. chart, while all four Cancer planets are in the 8th. (For a thorough technical explanation of house placements, see Chapter Three of my textbook, *Houses of the Horoscope*.)

The 8th-house Sun is tightly squared by Saturn in Libra/10th. This critical aspect relationship complicates the picture, introducing many conflicting elements: Americans are defined here as a conservative people, not revolutionary at all, simultaneously hard-edged yet spoiled. We are ambitious, loving business as much as we love family, for it is our blood relations for whom our dutiful labor toils and to whom we confer the legacies of whatever riches we amass. Inherited wealth is at the very heart of America. Though Americans revel in the sentimental to an almost maudlin degree, marriage only begins as romance. In the end, most partnerships revert to business. "Who gets the money?" remains the primary question of American jurisprudence in death, divorce, or lawsuit.

Other shadow aspects abound from the Sun-Saturn square. Sometimes Americans love neither family nor business, but end up hating both, and too often for very reasons that are all too real, including social inequality, corruption of the law by those in power and authority, or harsh insensitivity from others' lack of emotional empathy.

A hallmark of the conservative movement of the past 40 years was an endless tirade from religious fundamentalists about preserving "family values." But along with those passionate demands came growing mountains of evidence from the social sciences that nuclear families could be horrible prisons shot through with abuse, incest, and violence, both physical and emotional. Turns out that our idealized Norman Rockwell images on the covers of the *Saturday Evening Post* of idyllic and peaceful small towns and loving families enjoying holiday meals were too often just that, idealized imagery.

Without question, the America of the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s was a fundamentally different country than the one we inhabit today. The massive economic hardship of the 1930s did produce a kind of practical togetherness among certain demographic groups. Discord existed *between* the social classes, not within them. World War II brought the great mission to rid the world of eugenic fascism, and the country pulled together more than at any other time in its history.

The horrors of that war were followed by a profound wish for normalcy and conformity in the 1950s. Young soldiers came home from Europe and the Pacific and said, "OK, we've done our bit to save humanity from Hitler and Tojo. Now we're finished. Just give us a good job, a modest home, two martinis after work, and leave us the hell alone." That's what the government gave them in the G.I. Bill: free education and good jobs. And it's what the designers of Levittown gave returning soldiers in housing: affordable 800-square-foot tract homes on 1/8 acre

lots in the newly-created suburbs. Despite the Cold War, life was good for white, middle-class Americans.

Conformity, however, is not the same as togetherness. Seeds of discontent sprouted throughout the Eisenhower decade and blossomed into full-blown social disobedience and radical cultural experimentation as America fractured kaleidoscopically in the 1960s, when the current Uranus-Pluto cycle began.

Experimental utopian communities have a long history in America, most recently in the The Back-to-the-Land movements of late-1960s subculture. Rural and urban communes sprouted overnight, but most didn't last long. We were young and callow, of course, usually not ready for a lifetime social commitment. One by one, the utopian experiments in alternative social living faded, failed outright, or went underground, kept alive only by the hardest of the hardcore idealists, who can still be found in unexpected small pockets throughout rural America, or what's left of it, since so many small towns have gone belly up.

Throughout the second half of the 20th century, television performed its insidious surgery on the heart of American culture, in each successive decade transplanting a more mechanical heart for the one previously installed. Television provided the perfect means to create a consumption-based economy.

One of my favorite questions is: *What is the product of the television industry?* The first (and incorrect) answer that most people come up with is TV shows. No, the content of television programming---TV shows, movies, news, etc.---is not the product---it's the bait on the hook. The actual, no-kidding product of television is **captive viewers**, who are then packaged into demographic groups and sold to advertisers for revenue. The fantasies of advertising are ideally suited to the hypnotic impact of television to implant consumers with desires for products.

Basically, television replaces reality with a hologram that appears to be reality but isn't. Everything on television is fiction. Everything.

Which brings us to corporations, the monsters of the midway. They sell the hammers that drive the nails into the coffin of alienation. Corporations don't like human beings, and they sure as hell have no use for human empathy and togetherness. They want obsequious worker bees and docile, compliant consumers.

Ah, but you know all of this already, and you probably agree (if you didn't, you wouldn't be reading this commentary). Even if you don't agree, however, I need not go off on a rant about the dehumanizing effects of corporate culture, since pointing fingers at what's wrong is not the point of this commentary. The point is to assert that we're about to get another opportunity to get it right.

Fulfillment in human togetherness---whether in intimacy, families, or communities---has always been dicey, to say the least. The nagging feeling of alienation, either when alone or with others, has been a hidden poison in civilization since its beginnings 10,000 years ago. There was no "golden age" of human affiliation we can look back to in history when we sat around the

metaphorical campfire singing Cumbaya, all warm and fuzzy with each other.

For us *homo sapiens*, the hard things are REALLY hard: living gracefully in bodies; loving another person with true affection; raising healthy, sane children; not callously taking advantage of those less fortunate than ourselves; and not killing each other. We much prefer to spend the great bulk of our time doing the easy stuff that we're naturally good at: exercising our cleverness, making tools and building stuff, and buying and selling (all of which are aspects of business and commerce). Along the way, however, each of us has numerous chances to address and improve the hard things, to work on getting them right.

And, every so often, an entire culture gets the chance to work on getting the hard things right, or at least, more right than we usually do. In fairness, these collective "opportunities" to do the difficult things better usually come veiled in the nasty cloaks of disaster and travail. That may initially seem perverse, but it's quite sensible. Human nature is stimulated by extreme chaos and suffering to express its best qualities, almost as a way of balancing out the terribleness of the events themselves. War does this, as do disaster and travail. They bring out the better angels of our nature by removing artificial distinctions between us and reaching all the way down into our psyches to connect with others through basic empathy in the human condition.

The decade ahead of the 2010s is certain be one of those special times.

Many visionaries are writing about the dawning of a new age. Some refer to it as an awakening to higher consciousness; others call it a spiritual transformation. Such terms are certainly acceptable, but for me personally they are unnecessary. I feel no need to invoke the metaphysical or the magical to describe the hoped-for change. It is already here, already in us, already part of the natural life of this planet. We need only to stop holding it down by approaching our day-to-day affairs with slightly more reverence to send out the invitation for more togetherness.

The change will be brought about by pragmatic necessity---eroding economic hardship will force us to rely on others for mutual help and support. As we power down in energy and scale down in size over the coming decade, re-localization of our businesses and social interactions will bring, if not always more intimacy, at least the sense of enlarged camaraderie with our neighbors and other townsfolk in our communities.

Living situations will gradually morph away from isolated singles and couples toward small group sharing in residences based not only on the common-sense efficiencies of minimizing living costs, but also because of new sympathies and unexpected friendships. Though we will band together in large part because we have to, we will also come together into group living arrangements because we'll discover that we *can* once again after the long 40-year drought of increasing alienation.

So take heart. However fearful we may be about loss of our habitual comforts and convenience, however anxious we may feel about the possibility of increased social disruption, or however terrified we may be of generalized cultural chaos,

we can look forward to certain compensations for whatever is sacrificed. To regain a significant measure of sanity, simplicity, and care will be more meaningful than we may appreciate today, before the change overtakes us.

Next month: More on the economic meltdown

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