

*astrological-cultural-spiritual-political
views & commentary...*

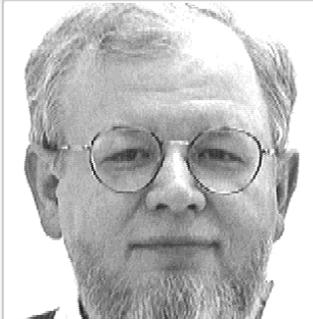
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THE HERBST NEWSLETTER



Thoughts, dates, & 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...

website www.billherbst.com
email bill@billherbst.com
voicemail 612.207.4486



Dear friends,

Astrology can be seen, and is by some people, as a random series of separate events—astronomical alignments within and beyond our solar system that are independent and unrelated to each other—monthly lunar cycles, planetary configurations, eclipses, etc. Because our lives are often busy and our memories often short, we may move from one to another of these events as if they were simply signs along the road, disconnected, mere markers of our passage through time.

I see astrology as an unfolding mythic story, where the meaning of each new chapter is related to what has come before and what will come after. In the heavens as in real life, current events emerge out of historical context. Understanding that context matters in interpreting the signposts along the way.

Since I began writing these newsletters again this past summer, I've been telling a story that we in America entered into in 2001 with the Saturn-Pluto alignment. Certainly that was not the true beginning of the tale, but that's where I chose to start telling the story. That momentous event—Saturn opposing Pluto—was a destructive culmination with an implicit warning. Oppositions in astrology mark the halfway point in cycles, which are analogous to the harvest, where we reap what was previously sown. That can mean the bounty of a wonderful crop, the pleasing results of all our good efforts, or it can mean the disappointments revealed after a period of unconsciousness, where we see the negative repercussions of our own folly.

For Americans especially, but for the rest of the world and all humanity as well, this Saturn-Pluto harvest has proven extremely painful—economically, politically, and socially. Turns out that we didn't plant such good seeds after all, nor did we tend our crops wisely or well. We counted on perfect weather, good luck, and the sheer momentum of our past successes to carry us through, and all three ran out simultaneously. So our sweet dreams of the new millennium have given way to harsher realities of bitter fruit—crashing markets and corporate scandals, constitutional crises in elections and government, the tragic attacks in New York and Washington, a war of retaliation in Afghanistan, with mistrust and paranoia everywhere. Grief may have brought us together, but it hasn't healed us.

In August, I wrote about the Sun-Mars-Uranus alignment, the cauldron of building pressures, aggressive passions, and their explosive potential for disrupting relationships, both personally and collectively. This was the beginning of a new chapter, one that will take a full year to come to a head and two years to play out completely. Then came September, with the unexpected pause of a third chapter, the Mercury retrograde pullback, a time for reflection. Now, in October, we come to the fourth chapter, with still newer possibilities.

In a time of unbalanced aggression, a throwback to our most primitive impulses, where the dogs of war foam at the mouth to release the furies, what could possibly renew our feelings of love and compassion, our wish for peace, our best hopes for the future of humanity?

DREAMS OF LOVE AND COMPASSION

Every year and a half, Venus goes retrograde in our earthly skies for a period of roughly six weeks. In 2002, this phenomenon occurs in the sign Scorpio between October 10th and November 21st.

During Venus' retrogradation, it will cross paths with the Sun, as it always does when moving backwards. When that conjunction happens this time—the exact date of which is Halloween, October 31st—both Venus and the Sun will be in square to Neptune, meaning a 90° arc or exactly one-quarter of the circle apart. That alignment of Sun-Venus-Neptune has great significance, given where we are and where we may be going.

This alignment is not nearly so rare as the Sun-Mars-Uranus configuration of July and August. For instance, a triple conjunction between Sun-Venus-Neptune occurred as recently as January of 1998, although the context of that event was quite different. Nor is this alignment as powerful as Sun-Mars-Uranus. In fact, it's not about power at all, but rather about love. In that sense, the coming Sun-Venus-Neptune configuration is the natural complement to the Sun-Mars-Uranus energies that are still in the early stages of their two-year cycle. The longing for love counterbalances the will to power. So now we add love and compassion to the unfolding mix of explosive and radical chemistry.

Love and Power

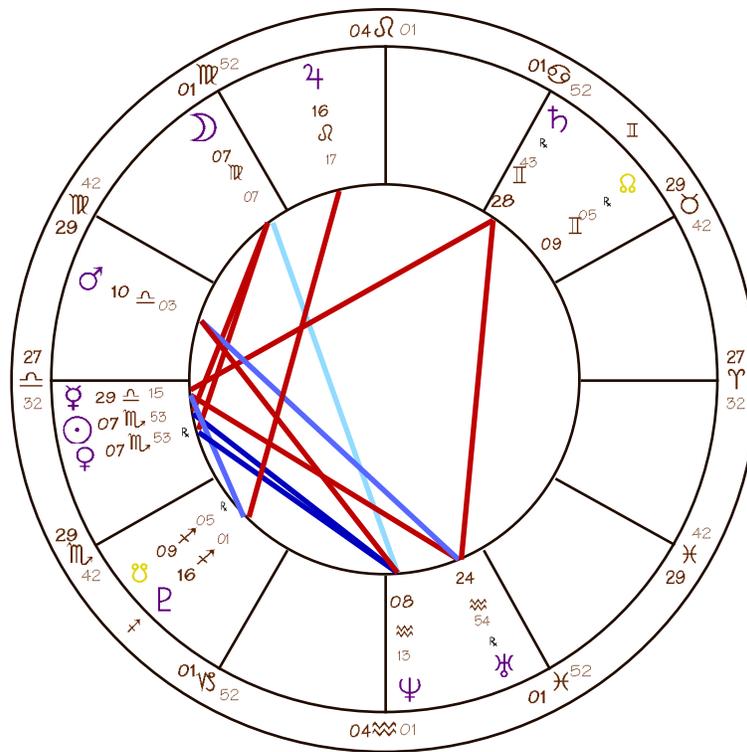
In a very pragmatic definition, power is the ability to change an environment. Power is the force that reshapes the world, hopefully to improve it. Love, on the other hand, does not change anything, for love sees in the object of its affection the perfect manifestation of the divine. That's what beauty is—our heart's perception of cosmic perfection, whether seen in a glorious sunset, a simple vase with flowers, or the face of one's beloved. Put simply, power is change, while love is acceptance. Both of them can transform our consciousness, for better or for worse.

When these complementary principles of love and power are in harmony, life sings joyously. Perfection comes closer to full realization. When they are out of balance, however, life goes badly awry.

Too much power without sufficient love results in an eruption of headlong change without an accompanying sense of perfection. Those who wield great power often do

so without knowing what they have wrought. They can change things, so they do, but their awareness of what to change things into is frequently short-sighted when unguided by love. The effect is disruptive. Destruction, breakdown, and chaos are the inevitable results of power without love. What we do fails to produce harmony.

In the other imbalance, love without power produces suffering. Love allows us see the inherent perfection in something, but without sufficient power we cannot reshape the environment to draw that perfection to us or to keep it safe. The object of our affection either remains distant or slips away, and our hearts suffer. This is the pain of lost or unrequited love, the allure of beauty without consummation. We may pursue the dream, but real fulfillment eludes us, whether in love, beauty, comfort, or happiness. Love without power is impotent, turning us into junkies—always longing, always needing more, but never having enough.



Sun-Venus-Neptune alignment

*31 October 2002, 6:00 a.m. CST
Minneapolis, Minnesota*

The judicious use of power guided by love is the antidote to suffering. We can make the world a paradise if only we use our power wisely, letting love show us the way to harmony and balance. Conversely, deep feelings of love enhanced by the right use of power are the antidote to chaos. If our hearts open to feel our connection to other human beings and all life on this planet,, and we use our power to reconcile differences and distance, then we move toward a reunion of order and meaning through equality and justice. We can bring heaven to earth.

I don't imagine these goals to be simple or easy to achieve. As a species, we have demonstrated a conspicuous lack of the necessary wisdom. No, humanity will always struggle, injustice and greed will always exist, and ideals will always be tempered by difficult realities. Such contradictions and paradoxes are inherent to our earthly lives on this spiritual playground. But profiting at the expense of others is finally a dead-end game that leads only to more suffering and chaos. The legacy of the 20th century and the portents of the 21st are showing us dramatically that we cannot mature as individuals nor survive as a civilization unless we love more universally and use our power more respectfully. Our time is running out.

Venus and Neptune

In astrology, Venus is the feminine principle—the magnetic ability of beauty to attract to us what we want. While the Moon represents mothering through nourishment and security, Venus represents womanhood in full flower, the radiant musk of ripe fertility.

Venus is personal love, the promise of fulfillment in the opening of one's heart to another. Venus is also the pleasure principle, whether in love, in the aesthetics of art and beauty, or in the delights of the senses, including the luxury of possessions that can be acquired with money.

Neptune is sometimes called the “higher octave” of Venus. Venus invokes the territoriality of personal love—selective attraction to and bonding with particular individuals. Neptune, on the other hand, is universal love—the opening of the heart through recognizing the essential oneness of all life. Venus is attraction; Neptune is immersion. Venus is affection; Neptune is compassion. Venus adores; Neptune forgives.

The shadow aspects of both planets come from the longing for love that overwhelms common sense. The dark side of Venus is coveting—possessiveness, greed, and sensuality run wild in the gluttonous pursuit of pleasure. The dark side of Neptune lies in escapism, in dreams that cannot become realities. Neptune can deceive and be deceived by seductions that lead inevitably to betrayals. Neptune can indicate victimization in the sacrifice of sainthood or martyrdom.

The charts of people drawn to metaphysics or spirituality are often dominated by Neptune, as are those of many healers and intuitive types. But Neptune is equally strong in the charts of drug users, especially alcoholics. This is because Neptune is the planet of hide-and-seek, of illusion playing peek-a-boo with reality in chemically altered consciousness. The hidden factors behind appearances are Neptunian, as are the images that mask them.

The great triumph of psychology in the last century occurred not in therapy, but in advertising, which is both Venusian and Neptunian. Look at the magazines that line the racks of every grocery store checkout line. What you will see on nearly every cover and in almost every ad are women's faces. Why? Because marketers realized long ago that the most magnetic image they could use (Neptune) to draw our attention to their products is the beauty of a woman's face (Venus).

Venus Retrograde

Over the six weeks that Venus is retrograde (October 10th through November 21st), we have a chance to reexamine the love in our lives.

Who do you love? What you do love? How do you express that love? Are you willing to share, or do you covet everything for yourself? With Venus retrograde in Scorpio, these become serious questions about our personal and collective values.

Neptune's involvement with Venus and the Sun extends this period beyond the six weeks. Venus' square to Neptune started on September 19th and lasts all the way to December 14th, with a spike right around Halloween when the Sun also conjoins Venus in Scorpio at right angles to Neptune in Aquarius. This adds profound questions about universal love and compassion to the necessary reassessment of personal values.

What are our ideals? What universal truths do we seek? How much of our spirituality is authentic, and how much mere image and deception? What lies do we tell ourselves? What lies do we tell others?

As individuals and as a society, how open are we to feel love, compassion, and forgiveness toward everyone, both within and beyond our personal social lives?

Are the people we fear as enemies really so different from us? Do we care about anyone but ourselves? Do we feel the suffering of others?

The deep passions of the Sun and Mars that began in August are continuing to build all through this time. Power wants to be expressed explosively (Mars-Uranus). That welling up is ongoing, and it seeks release. From now until mid-December, however, we have a chance to rebalance that power with love. We can temper force with compassion.

How we integrate these contrasts will subtly reshape our relationships with others, both in our personal lives and in the world.



In the November newsletter, I'll expand on these themes as we come to the first mini-crisis of this yearlong unfolding story, when the Sun squares Uranus just as Venus approaches its station and resumes direction motion.

Bill Herbst resides in Minneapolis, Minnesota. To schedule an astrological session, either in-person locally or long-distance via telephone, send an email to bill@billherbst.com, or call 612-207-4486 and leave a voicemail.

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