

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

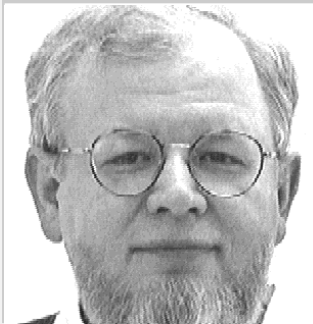
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THE HERBST NEWSLETTER



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...

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Dear friends,

The astrological alignments that have occurred since August, and about which I've written in past newsletters, set the stage for an unfolding drama that's now playing out on both collective and individual levels.

While the various alignments are still gathering momentum in their cycles, this month adds an intensifier: a total solar eclipse on December 4th, when our moon passes directly between the earth and sun. This month's commentary concerns the meanings of that event for us all.

THE ECLIPSE WILD-CARD

Early humans in ancient hunter-gatherer tribes must have been awestruck and terrified by eclipses, with their mysterious "blacking out" of our two significant sources of light—the sun and, by reflection, the moon. In the modern world, where congested cities and industrial pollution have reduced the night sky to a dim background, where science has demystified such phenomena, and where so many of us are cut off from the natural world, eclipses have lost much of their power to astonish and confound. And yet, eclipses remain among the most spectacular events in the heavens, and they continue to command profound and powerful significance in astrology.

While the precise manifestations of effect and duration are still unclear and open to debate among astrologers, most of us agree that eclipses operate as symbolic wild-cards, indicating either a dramatic change of direction or the deepening of an existing direction. The best metaphor I can offer to explain how eclipses manifest is that of rivers and floods. During heavy spring rains, creeks and tributaries gradually dump millions of gallons of ground and runoff water into larger rivers. These major arteries steadily swell, eventually overflowing their banks in flooding that spreads out in all directions. Currents that were previously channeled become raging torrents that overwhelm barriers and sweep away everything in their path. In similar fashion, eclipses represent a welling-up from the collective unconscious, revealing the psychological qualities that are flooding into our awareness, often obliterating other more subtle concerns as we are swept along by the emerging maelstrom.

Eclipses are not usually "flash floods." They aren't sudden, and the particular day of the eclipse is insignificant in itself. Like spring floods, they build slowly and their effects are long-lasting.

The meanings of eclipses build for months before the actual event and take many more months afterward to play out. In addition, eclipses are not associated with any single event. Rather, they reveal a psychological or social tone for a period that stretches over multiple seasons.

The total solar eclipse at 7:35 a.m. GMT on December 4th is the second of three successive solar eclipses occurring in Sagittarius late in 2001, 2002, and 2003. All three eclipse charts are disturbing in their implications.

The central issue here is extremism. The three eclipses, and especially this one in 2002, punctuate the peak of Pluto's passage through Sagittarius from 1995-2008, which has seen the collapse of moderation. Center stage has been taken over by radical social views that would have been shocking four decades ago. Pragmatic compromise has fallen in favor of theoretical dogma. This is occurring around the world, and in ways that may seem disconnected but are actually interwoven in a matrix of causes and effects.

A Brief Look Back

Something happened to America after World War II. Our role in that conflagration represented the very best of our idealism, generosity, and basic decency. Despite many unresolved inner conflicts, America was loved around the world, and rightly so.

We emerged from that war nearly unscathed as a world power, and, over the next 25 years, we struggled to wear the mantle. Throughout the Cold War and Vietnam, The American Dream was torn between reactionary isolationism and progressive populism.

In the late 1970s, the uneasy equilibrium of that struggle began to shift. The fundamentalist Christian movement first made its presence felt politically at the end of that decade, along with a neo-conservative economic ideology that harkened back to the Gilded Age of the Robber Barons. Spurred on by the rude gurus of Talk Radio and the unprecedented infusion of Big Money into politics, these forces had a potent effect on government, dismantling regulatory agencies and social safety-net protections that had taken more than half a century to put in place. The results included windfall profits for huge corporations, the need for two-income families, and an increasing concentration of wealth in the hands of the privileged.

The unexpected collapse of the Soviet Union left America alone at the top, and capitalism celebrated its victory with an orgy of greed. Having already witnessed the malling of suburban America and the takeover of rural communities by Wal-Marts, we embraced consumerism with a frenzy. For awhile, the rising tide of corporate profits seemed to lift enough boats that we could ignore the increasing problems of homelessness, growing poverty, crisis in health care, and major financial scandals at public expense, all telltale symptoms of a democracy under siege from within. The rich wanted what they've always wanted—namely, EVERYTHING—and their lawyers and lobbyists slowly but surely got it for them.

As our economic and military power grew into a juggernaut at the end of the 1980s, our foreign policy became more insulated and self-serving. Media complicity sanitized the Gulf War into a video game. We kicked butt, and no one could stop us now. Corporate money increasingly controlled both major political parties (Republicans AND Democrats), resulting in sweetheart legislation and pork-barrel deals that sent stocks on a ten-year binge. The free-market ideologues, now enshrined in power, envisioned a "New World Order," where multinational corporations rather than countries or cultures called the shots, with America at the pinnacle of wealth and power.

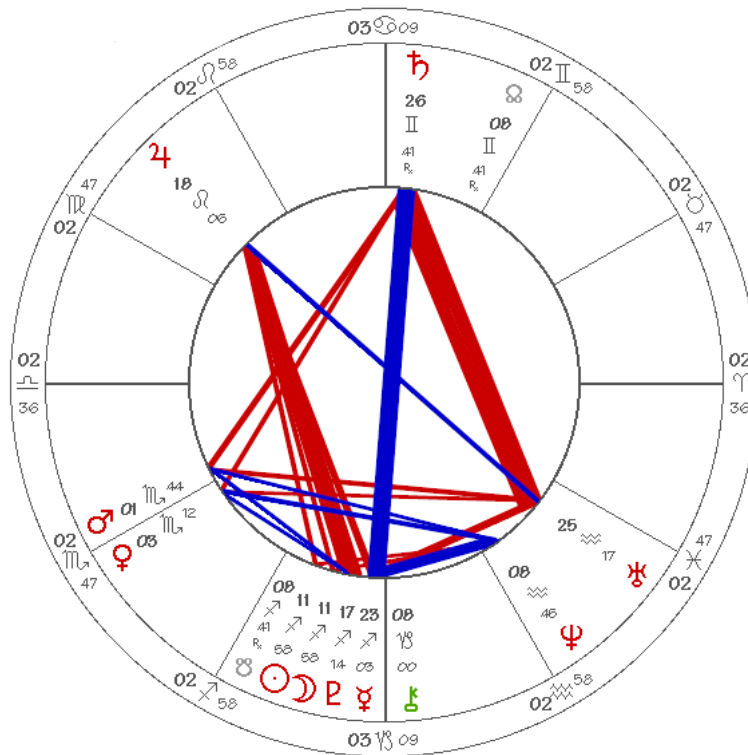
Meanwhile, unseen by most Americans, radical extremism was increasing around the world. Fundamentalist factions took root in every major religion, especially Islamic, Zionist, and Hindu. Life around the globe was changing at a dizzying pace, with centuries of slow-building cultures uprooted in a frenzy of western modernization that caused not only confusion and dislodged identities, but an increasing, worldwide disparity between the rich and the poor.

American generosity and fair play remained a central theme of our self-image, but too often our vision did not extend beyond feathering our own nest. We exported our business culture, but not the social ideals that had made us great. Had we shared more of our riches rather than just exploiting new markets, the world would have applauded. But the sheer magnitude of our power worked against us. Our very wealth made others envious.

Had we undertaken a serious effort to showcase democratic ideals, we could have stood as a shining beacon of hope. Too often, however, our insistence on protecting the bottom line of American profits and security through military might and support of brutal dictatorships made the concepts of equality and justice for all ring hollow, further squandering our bounty of goodwill around the world.

By the mid-1990s, when Pluto entered Sagittarius, these radical religious, economic, and social factions were set on a collision course, and the new century saw the crash. The bubble of economic euphoria burst, terrorism exploded, and American democracy reeled, assaulted from both without and within. Extremism has since accelerated into overt polarization—“us” versus “them”—and the whole world is retreating again into armed camps. Paranoia has replaced trust, propaganda has buried truth, and people everywhere are frightened, with good reason. (In past newsletters, I attributed all these developments to an imbalance where power overwhelmed love in human affairs. I continue to believe that.)

The past two years have seen a shocking change in American society. So what now? What does this total solar eclipse in Sagittarius tell us about our own future?



Total Solar Eclipse
4 December 2002, 7:35 a.m. GMT
Minneapolis, Minnesota

The Eclipse Chart

The positive traits of Sagittarius include optimism, high energy, quick responsiveness, enthusiastic idealism, team allegiance, plain-spoken honesty, refreshing openness, and heartfelt sincerity. The shadow aspects, however, are hypocrisy, superficiality, tactlessness, arrogance, self-righteousness, and ridicule toward those who do not share the “right” beliefs. At its best, Sagittarius inspires everyone toward higher aspirations and shared efforts in pursuit of truthful principles. At worst, it settles for dimstore truisms and allows the few to bully the many into submission through false appeals and bludgeoning conformity.

Every chart contains both sides of its possibilities, good and bad. To interpret any chart as “negative” is a disservice to the consciousness of the person living through that vehicle. Still, considered from the standpoint of collective meaning, some charts are obviously more problematic than others, and that is the case here. The chart for the solar eclipse of December 4th accentuates the shadow dimensions all too clearly:

- *extremism dominates the chart*
- *self-interest is exaggerated, raising the specter of even more greed*
- *lack of concern for others is indicated, especially where disagreement exists*
- *self-righteousness is likely through moral smugness and presumed superiority*
- *communication is difficult, often harsh, and decisions tend to be crude and expedient*
- *actions are undertaken in secrecy, deception, or confusion, and results may backfire*
- *the lure of a comfortable past is seductive*
- *images and realities are very much at odds*

In other words, as a symbol for American society and where we're headed, the eclipse chart suggests that we are still traveling down a very unconscious road, the same shortsighted path that got us to this point.

The key to the chart, in my opinion, is Chiron, which sits in Capricorn exactly at the midpoint of a perfect sextile between Neptune and the South Node. Ordinarily, that would be considered a minor configuration, but here it is quite major. I've looked at few charts that are so impersonal in their overall symbolism, and Chiron's position screams about our deep woundedness and the need for healing. As a culture, we're still not ready to face the music and assume adult responsibilities. Our visions remain immature and adolescent, and our humanity is obscured, even from ourselves.

If a rainbow is to be found here, then simple, common-sense spirituality is the pot of gold. Not high-falutin', not self-righteous, not artificially profound, but something of such essential goodness that it cuts across all attitudes and beliefs, all prejudices and biases, and goes right to the core. Especially now, during the holiday season, we need to focus on love, not to the exclusion of other parts of our lives, but as the basic source of meaning that underlies everything else.

We are frequently urged to be more loving, to give of ourselves to others. But how often are we reminded to receive the love that others want to give us?

The spiritual effort at this point is not to be more loving to others, but to use our power to make ourselves more easily lovable, thus allowing others the grace of loving us. This includes our partners, our families, our friends, and our neighbors. I could suggest that this also includes other nations and cultures, but that possibility seems remote right now. This is necessarily a grass-roots level of transformation, for positive change will not happen from the top down, only from the bottom up.

The need to love is still very much alive in the world, in spite of everything. To fulfill that need in sharing requires both giving AND receiving. Let others give what they have to offer, and make it as easy as possible for them to do so by being gracious in receptivity.

Our working to become more lovable may not be the antidote to all the ills of humanity, but it's a good start.



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