

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

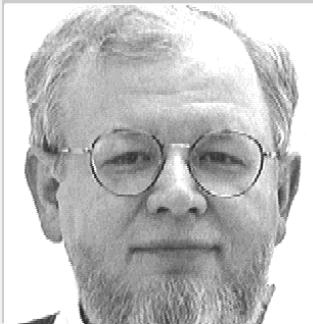
Issue #50
Feb 2003

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 chart for the February 1st New Moon [see the chart on page 2] contains many provocative implications relevant to our personal lives and our collective future. Two of those insights comprise this month's newsletter topics: truth and lies in human belief, and the unending problem of male violence.

1. TRUTH, LIES, AND BELIEF

[Note: This month's new moon occurs in Aquarius, right on the axis of the current Neptune-Jupiter opposition. In addition, Mercury is conjunct Chiron in Capricorn, with Saturn in Gemini making a last stand in its opposition to Pluto in Sagittarius. My first commentary addresses those positions...]

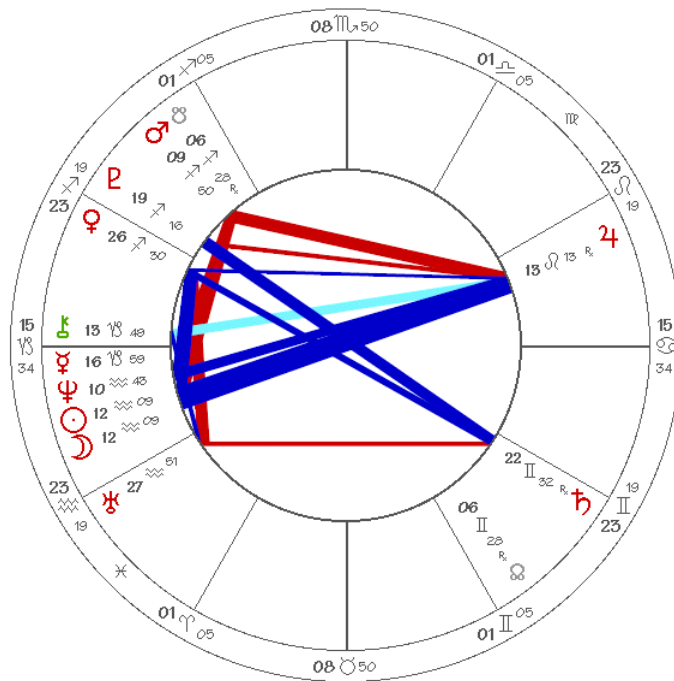
Although lies have always been an undeniable staple in every arena of human affairs—including politics, religion, law, intimacy, families, education, and (of course) the commercial marketplace of advertising—we live now in the culminating age of overwhelming disinformation, a virtual Tower of Babel. In culture, image and propaganda have replaced content and truth. In politics, innuendo and the dubious art of spin have made hard facts difficult to pin down. Doublespeak is everywhere. Common sense has given way to ideological dogma. Even sincere attempts to learn or speak the truth are often frustrated by the quagmire of uncertainty that surrounds our lives.

Too many Americans believe what the media tells them, a media now dominated by a mere handful of giant corporations and their vested interests. The very nature of such mass institutional systems produces slanted information and biased news; no one in particular is to blame. As I've asserted before, the great triumph of modern psychology has not occurred in therapy or in helping us to understand human nature, but instead in revealing ways to control people's minds that are now fully in place in this culture. We are assaulted by a kind of mass hypnosis aimed squarely at our fantasies and our fears. And it works.

By and large, people accept what they see and hear from supposedly objective and authoritative sources. None of us believes everything, but enough of us believe enough of what we're told to gain our collective support, or at least our acquiescence.

Should we obey the Wizard of Oz when he commands us to bring him the broomstick of the Wicked Witch? Or, like Toto, can we pull back the curtain to reveal that small man pulling the levers?

Behind issues about the questionable accuracy of our news sources lurks the deeper psychological problem of attitude. Are we better served by putting our faith in the lofty intangibles of spiritual optimism or the pragmatic but pessimistic lessons of human history? Can we trust the positive view of the glass being half-full (rather than half-empty) when the glass itself appears to be shattered? Some people embrace the metaphysical idea that this veil of tears we call life is merely an illusion, and yet those tears of human suffering seem to me very real indeed. Are we our brother's keeper, as Christianity teaches, or is this indeed a dog-eat-dog world where insatiable greed and heartless power trump every other more loving motivation?



February New Moon Chart

Saturday, February 1st, 2003, 5:49 a.m. EST
The White House, Washington, D.C.

How do we change the status quo and soften the tightly-held reins of those in power? In a world filled with hatred and fear, much of which is misinformed and misguided, how do we wean ourselves and others into the gentler mercies of reverence and forgiveness? What efforts are most effective to eradicate injustice and cruelty? How do we counter the territoriality and violence that divide our species into armed camps and keep so many governments (including ours) unresponsive to the basic needs of all their people?

Each of us finds our own place to stand in the pursuit of truth. It's a big world, and there's room enough for every one of us to honor the truth in our own way. To do so, however, we must first awaken from the stupor of lies that fill the airwaves.

Over the coming month, do not take any information for granted. Do not be fooled. Consider the source. Ask yourself: What are these people trying to sell me?

Question authority.

2. MALE VIOLENCE

[Note: February's New Moon chart has Mars in Sagittarius conjunct the Moon's South Node. In addition, Mars will conjunct Pluto and oppose Saturn later this month. My second commentary comes out of those dynamics.]

What are we to do about our violent nature as human beings?

We are among the most aggressive animals ever to draw breath on this planet. Our phenomenal success as a species is due in large part to the depth and vitality of our aggressive impulses, but that success contains the seeds of its own destruction. Despite the considerable achievements of civilization—extraordinary creations of art, music, literature, law, architecture, engineering, even our having left our footprints on the moon—we have not yet managed as a species to effectively channel our passions into socially peaceful pursuits.

The problem of maleness remains unresolved, especially its adolescent proclivity toward violence as an instinctive means of self-expression. From the recent epidemic of deadly assaults by alienated young men in high schools around the country to the continuing eagerness to wage war by older men who lead nations, too many men around the world are still enslaved to the destructive narcissism of adolescent impulses, like ticking time bombs waiting to explode.

From the fundamental biology of reproduction, where millions of sperm strive against one another to fertilize a single egg, we have taken male competition and acquisitiveness to absurd levels. Sperm do not intentionally kill each other to possess the golden egg, but human males routinely kill others for wealth, territory, control, power, or even spite. And human females, whether willing or passive, are often accomplices in this nightmare, as well as its too frequent victims.

We all embody both the masculine and the feminine in ourselves. When one side is damaged, the other side suffers also. And yet, while women certainly feel anger and express hostility, the sad fact is that men are responsible for actually committing most of the violence on this planet. We have not come nearly far enough in reuniting these two separate sides of our psyches.

Violence is still at the disturbed heart of who we are. Human beings, and especially Americans, remain obsessed with aggression, mired in a dysfunctional love affair with our own adolescent hostility. We have elevated our immature passions to the level of romantic myth and enshrined murder as everyday fare. For all our lip service to moral family values, we regard mayhem as entertainment and pay to experience it vicariously through movies and television. Some people hold that such fantasies are harmless or even necessary safeguards to vent our rage. Perhaps, but perhaps not. The numbing effects of constant exposure to such imagery are all too worrisome, especially for those under the spell of adolescent maleness, no matter what their chronological age.

I haven't seen Michael Moore's film, "Bowling for Columbine," but I don't need to see it to know that America continues to be a culture of aggression. Our entire society is geared to war. We are not only armed to the teeth, but the primary supplier of weapons to the whole world as well. The military budget of the United States—almost \$400 billion in 2003—is nearly equal to that of all other countries combined. I accept the need for self-defense, but \$400 billion is simply insane. President Eisenhower's warnings in the 1950s about the danger of a "military-industrial complex" have come true.

Conflict is inevitable between individuals and societies, but do we really need more tragic evidence of the bankrupt futility of violence as a means of conflict resolution? I would have thought the 100 million people killed in the 20th century through war and political purges sufficient to convince us. But here we are again, facing the unthinkable.

Any true spirituality must recognize the essence of who we are as human animals, and that includes our dark side, the shadow aspect of our being. We cannot wish away the violent part of ourselves. We cannot deny it. And I dare say we can't transcend our hostility without first dealing with it. To transform violence and achieve peace, we must find ways to understand, accept, and transform those energies within ourselves and society.

I trust that many subscribers to this newsletter have already done this inner work. In fact, I'm sure of it. I know some of you personally, and I count among my friends certain men and women of extraordinary maturity and gentleness. These individuals are no less powerful because they are loving and peaceful. In fact, their impact is far greater because of it.

Personally, I've spent a lifetime struggling with my own inner violence. The twin demons of fear and rage were part of my earliest awareness, and their presence warped my childhood and adolescence. They were my motivation to study psychology, since I was looking for a way to understand and handle those disturbed impulses. My jumping ship and becoming an astrologer in 1970 occurred precisely because my chart revealed my demons so plainly, in ways that undergraduate psychology had utterly failed to address.

That same year, during the height of the Vietnam War, I was drafted in the lottery. I applied for deferment as a Conscientious Objector and was down to my final appeal—literally one week away from fleeing to Canada—when a clerical error at my draft board let me off the hook for good. Besides my own deep wish not to be sacrificed in an immoral and stupid war, I couldn't put myself in a position where my own violence might emerge. Part of why I would not serve in the military was that I knew in my bones that I could kill, since I was intimately familiar with my own aggressive nature.

At 53, I am no longer at war with myself. I can't say that I've entirely reconciled or reclaimed my rage, however. At worst, I maintain a stable if uneasy truce between my peaceful intentions and my aggressive impulses. At best, I've discovered that my core is healthy. While still flawed, I've learned from real experience that my deepest passions come from love and reverence. Turns out that I'm not half as damaged as I once feared. I don't worry anymore as I did early on about the demons coming out and taking over my person. That may not be full spiritual maturity, but it's considerable, given where I started.

Over the coming month, examine the violence in your own life, past and present. Find the swaggering adolescent male inside yourself. Notice the ways you vent your hostility, as well as how you may provoke or draw others' aggression toward yourself. Be aware of violence in the world around you, in images and realities. Look past the obvious, though. Peel away the surface appearances and peer underneath. Watch for the linkage of hostility and fear. Check how often aggression is an ego response to loss of power or respect. Don't judge, and don't turn away. See yourself and others through your highest spiritual wisdom, with deep sympathy and tender compassion.

Find the heart of the beast, and gentle it.



Quote of the Month:

“The test of our progress is not whether we add more to the abundance of those who have much; it is whether we provide enough for those who have little.”

—Franklin D. Roosevelt

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