

*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,

In the August-September issue of *The Mountain Astrologer* that hit the stands three weeks ago, I published a long article on Mars, which included material on the continuing Sun-Mars-Uranus configuration (about which I've written often in these newsletters over the past year) and the coming Mars Perihelion/Perigee that occurs during the long Mars retrograde. That's a mouthful of technical jargon, but what it boils down to is this: Very Big Stuff is going on with Mars in the heavens, and it's showing up in every dimension of our lives—personal, interpersonal, social, and collective.

In this month's newsletter, I'll discuss further some of the factors in these synchronous events that contribute to making 2003 such a volatile and difficult year, especially this summer. I'll also offer specific coping strategies for keeping our personal lives on track.

THE HEAT IS ON

In August of 2002, I sent out a newsletter entitled "The Cauldron of Heaven." In that newsletter, which is archived on my website, I discussed a rare and extraordinary alignment of planets—Mars, Uranus, and the Sun—that had the power to dramatically change our lives over the following two years. Now, exactly one year later, that configuration is coming to a head. The Cauldron of Heaven is boiling over.

Mars as Force

Mars is the God of War, the planet that symbolizes human conflict and the use of assertive energies in aggressive and even violent ways.

Mars is kinetic and physical action. It is force, sometimes the "irresistible force" that counters "immovable objects." This force can be directed to cut through a mountain for road-building, drive an internal-combustion engine, or invade another sovereign nation. How we use our explosive power up to us.

Though Martian energies have a spiritual component, they are enshrined in matter, specifically in the body. This is animal consciousness in its purest form, where muscle, sinew, and bone work together as

elegant machinery. The action-reaction laws of physics apply here, as energy is released in controlled, directed explosions that propel projectiles through space and time, usually aimed at the target of another object. Mars is a central component of Newton's "billiard-ball" universe, where everything is heated up and in motion, so that objects crash into each other.

In a very real way, Mars is the life-force of vitality, the hot and competitive energies that just want to make something—ANYTHING—happen. It is the antidote to entropy and nothingness, and its tone is both strikingly adolescent and fiercely competitive. Mars seeks to prove its own power by its palpable effect on others and the world at large. This is the ritual hunter-warrior who must conquer nature or die trying. Build it up, then knock it down. Bring home the bacon, conquer any resistance, and defeat all enemies.

Mars as Desire

Mars is also desire, the passion of wanting—wanting so bad your teeth hurt. Central to desire is the feeling of being incomplete, the sense of NOT having something essential, the sheer frustration of which makes us feel that we can't survive without it.

Mars is desire itself—the arrow, not the target. The objects of desire come from other parts of our psyches. Mars represents the good soldier who takes his marching orders with a crisp salute and goes after whatever has been decreed as the valuable objective.

Mars as Sex

Mars symbolizes the male side of sexuality (complemented by Venus, the feminine side). It's the essence of testosterone—the urgent, potent, and sometimes frantically impatient compulsion to penetrate, to break down barriers and achieve release through reunion. Whether we are biologically male or female, we all share this component; the difference between men and women is one of degree. In biochemical design and cultural conditioning, men are generally more Martian, women generally more Venusian. But such sweeping generalizations break down at the individual level, where the proportion of masculine and feminine is infinitely adjustable to different balances within each of us, regardless of our biological sex. Women are really women(men), and men are really men(women). We all feel desire, and we all feel receptivity. All of us are capable of brute force and loving compassion. We can be hard, and we can also be soft.

The feminine embodies the greater mystery of creation itself in giving birth to new beings that perpetuate the life of the species. Mars is relegated to the lesser mystery, that of erection and penetration—no small feat, and damned impressive (if I do say so myself), but more common and less profound than the resulting birth. This distinction is confirmed in numbers—in sex, a consummated, fertile union involves millions of sperm, but only one egg. And yet, masculine and feminine are finally equivalent in mutual necessity. However sacred the yin is, it requires balancing by the yang. Science may yet alter this fact, but that's how Mother Nature set things up originally.

Balance is difficult to maintain, however, especially at the level of culture. The feminine is so profound, so ultimately powerful that we all fear its majesty and mystery. Having been given dominion over birth and creation, the feminine is a source of awe for men and women alike. We are all afraid of feminine power. It's so "awe-ful" that we seek to control and restrict it. Men are particularly vulnerable here, challenged as they are by the immutable shadow of death on the one hand and, on the other, by the equally frightening trump card of feminine birth. Every human being in history thus far has emerged from the womb of the mother, not the father, and that physical link and emotional dependence leave an indelible mark.

At our most mature, we recognize and honor the balance between masculine and feminine. We know that women and men are "different but equal," that mothers and fathers are both necessary, and that cooperation is as essential as competition. Not only does maturity balance Mars and Venus, it elevates them as well. The adolescent Mars is destructive and violent, like a bull in a china shop. The adolescent Venus, while beautiful, is superficial in values and petulant in love. With maturity, however, Mars becomes more measured and respectful of others, while Venus evolves away from the material toward true grace and heartfelt compassion.

But we do not live at our most mature very often. We spend entire lifetimes struggling to achieve some modicum of enduring maturity that is more than just momentary insight. Too often, the "Ah-Ha!" of

transcendent understanding is here one instant but gone the next as we sink back into our chemical compulsions, habitual programming, and psychological fears. Immaturity is visible in adolescence, but it extends invisibly into adulthood. Time alone does not make us truly grown up. That requires sustained effort and inner work more than mere cumulative experience.

This is even more true of societies than of individuals. Culture tends to embrace the lowest common denominator rather than the highest wisdom. Men and women of extraordinary maturity, sensitivity, insight, and achievement may point the way and set the example, but society as a whole still largely reflects our collective immaturity. Especially in American culture, the rewards of money, prestige, and fame are often conferred on the most childish, crude, and ego-driven among us, while those who pursue the quieter paths of insight and humility may remain uncelebrated, laboring in relative obscurity.

For thousands of years, civilization has endeavored to reconcile and elevate the masculine and feminine sides of our natures. Our “solution” to the “problem of feminine superiority” (where we all suffer the deep, unexpressed fear that women are queens and men mere drones) has been to agree to the ludicrous pretense of male superiority. That presumption, which has shaped all the institutions of culture—property, marriage, religion, philosophy, law, suffrage, government, business, and education—is patently false, but so is the unconscious belief it was designed to balance, namely, that women are innately superior and therefore to be feared, held down, and punished. Two wrongs don’t make a right, however, and we have suffered all the dubious consequences, including the struggle to reform this disturbed and artificial equilibrium. The cures we’ve attempted are as painful as the disease.

The only viable solution I know to the conflicts between the masculine and feminine in ourselves is real maturity. Every other solution—whether conscious or unconscious, whether in philosophy, cultural mores, or social engineering—is, in my view, artificial and doomed to fail.

Why am I writing about this now? Because we are moving through a time in history where Mars has temporarily overwhelmed Venus, and where the imbalance between the masculine and feminine has reached dangerous proportions. Collectively, we are divided, not only from one another but within ourselves as well. Increasingly alienated from nature, we voraciously consume the world, pursuing our desires at any cost (Mars), but without finding harmony and satisfaction (Venus). Obviously, some people are more balanced than others, some handle the stress with more grace, but everyone can feel the ongoing struggle for possession of our souls.

Lacking the guidance of a mature Venus, Mars is now running amok. Collectively, we are obsessed with unreachable images of beauty combined with an insatiable quest for material wealth, both of which are hallmarks of an immature Venus. So Mars becomes the unquestioning servant of illusion and greed. Until our experience of Venus evolves into deeper empathy and care for each other, Mars will continue to manifest too often as violence. That’s especially true right now, in part because Mars is so dominant. Lust has overwhelmed love.

Mars Perihelion and Perigee

At some point during its 25 1/2 month orbit through the zodiac, Mars reaches its minimum distance to the Sun (called *perihelion*) and its closest approach to Earth (called *perigee*).

The average distance between Mars and Earth is 48 million miles. On August 27th, 2003, Mars will achieve its perigee only 34 million miles away from us, which is nearer to Earth than at any time in the past 60,000 years. Yes, you read that correctly—sixty thousand years! That’s long before the dawn of civilization and fully twice as far back as the birth of agriculture, when homo sapiens were still hunter-gatherers living on the grassland savannahs of Africa and in the caves of Europe.

This event qualifies as a Very Big Deal. After this month, Mars won’t get closer to Earth until the year 2287, nearly three centuries down the road. In fairness, Mars has been nearly this close to us a couple of times recently (in 1971 and 1988), but this year’s perigee is the Grand Champ Blue Ribbon Prize Winner for both diminished distance and expanded significance. It carries that distinction not only because of Mars’ closest approach to Earth, AND not only because of the infrequent perihelic opposition that will occur three days later, AND not only because Saturn achieved its once-every-29-years perihelion on July 26th, but ALSO because this perigee involves SIX major bodies—the Sun, our Moon, Venus, and Jupiter will line up in Virgo opposite Mars and Uranus in Pisces. Wow. Now THAT’s impressive, folks.

In addition—as if we needed more—the end of August begins the culmination (the halfway point) of the extraordinarily rare Sun-Mars-Uranus configuration that began in August of last year. It is the harvest of that radical, violent, revolutionary brew of energies, when relationships are breaking apart right and left, where people are bouncing off the walls from the invisible stress, and where headlong aggression has replaced patient diplomacy in human affairs.

If all that's not enough to get your attention, Mars has already begun its two-month retrograde (from July 29th until September 28th) and Mercury goes into the setup phase of another of its seven-week retrograde loops on August 8th (until September 20th). What does THAT mean? Well, it means that all bets are off. Interactions involving energy, desire, aggression, decisions, and communication are liable to be twisted around backwards, tossed upside down, then thrown into a cocked hat. And—to make this cosmic stew even thicker—August has longer total Moon Voids than any month I've ever seen: *197 hours of them!* Forward movement is grinding to a halt. Like swimming through jello.

If you're hoping that I'm going to make some sage prediction about what will happen with Iraq or George W. Bush or the economy or terrorism or any other world events, forget it. I wouldn't touch this one with a ten-foot pole. This is way too bizarre for sensible predictions. Nothing might happen, but whatever does occur will be extremely convoluted and won't play out as expected.

What I can assert with some confidence, however, is that we're heading into a couple of months—August and September—where the subtle energy fields that surround and course through us all are going to feel very weird. Normalcy is right out the window.

So don't push too hard or you'll get tangled up in your own feet and take a pratfall. If at all possible, sit on the sidelines quietly and just observe. Where life requires you to make decisions and take action, do so with the understanding that delays, backfiring, and unexpected outcomes will occur.

Turn your attention inward and take note of whatever bubbles up (or erupts) from your unconscious. You may freak out initially, but don't go off half-cocked. Running around like a chicken with its head cut off achieves nothing. Let those waves of deep feeling wash through, and remember what they tell you.

Don't rely much on anyone else for grounding or support. In general, people are too brittle, volatile, and uncentered right now. Curiously, new relationships are easier than existing ones, and renewing old associations that may have lain dormant for years is a distinct possibility. Make brief connections with high energy and sensitivity, then pull back as gracefully as you can. Engage others strongly, but only for a little while at a time.

If current friendships or romances either break or vanish (as they may), let those beloveds go in peace, to allow the option of returning later. Burning bridges is all too possible, so avoid that if you can. When new people show up in your life (and they will), greet them, but don't overwhelm them. Reinsert some space frequently between yourself and the outer world, for buffering is an essential protection from sharp, ragged edges that may cut very deeply and without much warning.

Nonattachment is really important this summer. Know in advance that you are liable to extremes. Don't take too seriously your own judgments of other people. If you find yourself getting all worked up over what others do or say, blow it off and cool out. Postpone working out disagreements. For now, let them lie fallow, then come back later in the fall to try to resolve them. When sharing is positive, allow that lovely energy to sink in and change you.

Mostly, stay within yourself. Tend to your own knitting. Work now to cleanse and heal *your* life. When the outer world is this unbalanced, maintaining inner balance becomes critical.



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