

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

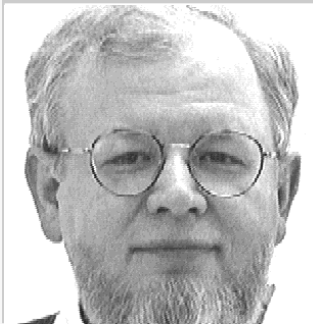
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THE HERBST NEWSLETTER



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,

Although I've begun a new theme—that of writing about significant events in America's chart, especially during the period between now and next June—I need to take a month off from that to address a different astrological event happening right around the corner, just days away.

Also, as an epilogue to previous newsletters over the past 15 months where I dealt with the Sun-Mars-Uranus alignment and its obvious relation to the war in Iraq, I want to remind my readers that we are still in the full phase of that configuration's unfolding. Many of the literally tens of millions of us around the world who opposed this invasion as wrong-headed, inhumane, and senseless violence are not in the least surprised at the escalating resistance of guerilla warfare now occurring in Iraq. Astrology makes it crystal clear that America is reaping the results of its own disturbed actions. Like Dr. Frankenstein, our government created this monster, but, as always, it is regular citizens—the common people of America and Iraq—who suffer the tragic results.

We will remain in this deadly harvest period until December 30th, 2003, when the Sun and Mars enter their last-quarter phase. From that point at the end of this year until September of 2004, when the current cycle ends, we can expect to see changes in American foreign policy influenced by the real politique of the upcoming Presidential elections. I hope those changes will be for the better, despite my deep skepticism about the worldviews, motives, and decisions of those who clutch the reins of power.

Before then, however, we can look forward to a more positive and optimistic event, which is the subject of this month's commentary.

—Bill Herbst

THE HARMONIC WHAT?

The Harmonic Concordance. Ah, the very words just reek with spiritual significance, don't they? This is the name given to the upcoming total lunar eclipse of November 8th or 9th, depending on where in the world you are when it occurs. For those of us here in the heartlands of America, this full moon eclipse will be most exact at 7:19 p.m. on Saturday, November 8th. And, since eclipses usually come in pairs, it will be followed by a total solar eclipse on November 23rd.

The first question we may reasonably ask ourselves is: "What makes this particular lunar eclipse so special as to deserve its own name?" The eclipse occurs during a sufficiently unusual alignment of planets that certain astrologers, especially those who espouse an overtly spiritual orientation, have been virtually drooling in anticipation of the event. This alignment, technically called a Grand Sextile in astrology, is admittedly quite rare. When viewed from the earth, six of the solar system's major bodies—the Sun, our Moon, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, and Chiron—will form a hexagonal pattern, like a Star of David.

Without going into a technical explanation of a Grand Sextile, suffice it to say that this aspect pattern is at the top of the list of most heralded sacred geometries among spiritually-minded astrologers. It has almost legendary status as an indication of great beneficence in balance, harmony, and integrity. And to have one occur during a total eclipse of the full moon, well jeez, that's worth some hype, isn't it?

Of course, we probably need to ignore that the orbs are really too wide to make this alignment a bonafide Grand Sextile, or that the Moon's involvement means that we're talking about an event that will pass away in a mere twelve hours, or that one of the six planets is Chiron, which is actually a tiny comet with a diameter of only about 100 miles. Such picky considerations are altogether too anal-retentive for our spiritual colleagues.

OK, caveats aside, why give it a name? Well, that has more to do with marketing and media hype than it does with spirituality. In our culture, if you want to publicize and promote anything—whether a commercial product, a military campaign, or an astronomical event—you give it a name, preferably one with catchy imagery. In modern America, image is way more important than reality.

Given that new age spirituality has waltzed down the aisle to marry the unbridled materialism of gonzo marketing, why stop at labeling this event with the arcane moniker of "Harmonic Concordance" (which is, after all, based on another similarly overhyped brief alignment from the late 1980s called "The Harmonic Convergence")? As long as we're praying at the altar of Madison Avenue, couldn't we give this coming eclipse even more marketing impact? Why not go all the way and call it "Stairway to Heaven" or even "The Big Kahuna"???

Although I've been aware of this upcoming eclipse and its unusual configuration since last spring, I had intended to let it pass without comment, preferring to use the public podium of my newsletters to discuss less glamorous and more serious ongoing events that I regard as having larger significance. What changed my mind was the increasing appearance in my email in-box of various articles on this event forwarded to me by clients and subscribers—an increase that, while not exactly a deluge, has accelerated as the date for the eclipse grows near. Apparently, the marketing is working, and word of this event is getting around. So here I am again in my role as craggy old curmudgeon, saying that this emperor has fewer, if any, clothes than you may have heard.

These recent articles and the 25-or-so others I've read in past months about November's lunar eclipse were all written by competent and well-meaning astrologers, who also seem to me extremely starry-eyed. With only one pointed exception (a terrific essay penned by astrologer John Townley), the general tone of most of the others resonates vibrantly with amazed excitement and unreserved enthusiasm at the supposedly profound implications and once-a-lifetime opportunities for spiritual enlightenment offered—like manna from heaven as a gift from the gods—during the eclipse itself and over the weeks or months to follow.

The extent of the enthusiasm varies, of course, from the more limited hope that certain individuals who are sufficiently prepared spiritually may benefit from this eclipse, to the altogether over-the-top prediction of a general paradigm shift in collective human consciousness toward peace, generosity, integrity, transcendence, whatever.

As much as these ideas appeal to me, I am very dubious. The possibility of sudden collective enlightenment seems to me so silly as to be undeserving of comment. That's sort of the new age version of the fundamentalist Christian belief in The Rapture, the rejuvenated popularity of which is among the sorrier shadow aspects of Pluto in Sagittarius. I'm sorry, folks, but religious extremists and spiritual fanatics of all stripes give me the willies.

On the other hand, the more conservative prediction may have some merit—that certain individuals may indeed receive a leg up on their path toward higher consciousness. Having agreed with that possibility, however, I have to admit that in my 30+ years of studying astrology, the numerous astronomical events I've lived through that were publicly touted by other astrologers as uniquely significant opportunities for collective spiritual growth resulted in no perceivable changes to anyone I knew, including myself.

The bottom line is that I have no more faith in miraculous transformations of consciousness than I have in winning the lottery. Both happen, but the odds are darned slim that they'll occur for any given person. On top of that, winning the lottery is not always a good thing, and miraculous transformations often prove temporary. I believe instead in the greater effectiveness of a slower, more difficult, and altogether more subtle path toward maturity. I trust people whose wisdom was hard-won. Instant gratification is like instant pudding—it simply doesn't taste like the real thing.

But just as some very reasonable people spend a buck or two each week on lottery tickets as a source of hope or a way to keep themselves vitally alive to life's mysterious opportunities, so some astrologers look to these occasional heavenly events with their unusually positive configurations as pristine moments of hopefulness for broader spiritual realization. Who am I to rain on their parade?

The delicate line I'm trying to walk in this newsletter is to suggest in fairly strong terms that the spiritual hype surrounding November's lunar eclipse is probably just that—hype. I think it's sound advice that we not get caught up in it. On the other hand, in these times, shot through as they are with real difficulty and even despair, any momentary respite or excuse for celebration is a good thing.

So, in that spirit, let me add my somewhat more restrained two cents of optimism.

On Saturday evening, break out a nice bottle of wine. Have a party. Or tell the people you love how much you really love them. Do whatever ritual of celebration seems appropriate in your own life. If possible, let that involve others. If not, perhaps just relaxing in a hot bath with a lit candle and nice music may help. Reconnect to gentler, more natural, and even more primitive times in human history, when people actually observed the heavens and were awed and humbled by the celestial spectacle of eclipses. Build a fire and watch the flames dance.

This is a Scorpio-Taurus full moon eclipse, so turn your attention toward the deep passion of care and the luxurious pleasures of the body. Who knows? Perhaps you'll win your own personal lottery.



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