

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

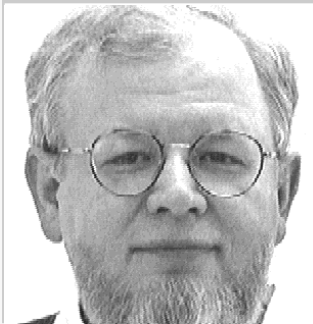
*Issue #67
June 2004*

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 last month's commentary, I discussed some of the darker implications of this summer's Saturn-Sun conjunctions in the charts of both President Bush and the USA. I want to take that further this month, adding both positive meanings and a cautionary warning. In the second commentary I'll discuss the upcoming Venus occultation and the hopeful opportunity it offers us.

MORE ON SATURN

A virtual firestorm has raged concerning the recent revelations of the abuse and humiliation of Iraqi civilian "detainees" by U.S. Army soldiers and paramilitary intelligence officers (some of whom are so-called "civilian contractors") at the now infamous Abu Ghraib prison outside Baghdad.

The individual who has been under fire at the center of the controversy is Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld. Calls for Rumsfeld's resignation or firing have been voiced by many editorials in newspapers across the country (including the normally staid and centrist New York Times). Even some U.S. Senators and Representatives are lobbying for Rumsfeld's removal.

Here again we see the handwriting of astrology at work in extraordinary ways.

Donald Rumsfeld was born on July 9th, 1932. The Sun in his birth chart is located at 18 Cancer, less than five degrees from the position of the Cancer Suns in the birth charts of George W. Bush and the USA. This means that—like the President and nation as a whole—Rumsfeld is also approaching the showdown of a once-every-29-years Saturn-Sun conjunction. In Bush's and the USA charts, this passage culminates in June. In Rumsfeld's chart, the conjunction occurs in July.

During the nine-month gestation of the Saturn-Sun cycle, we are forced to examine our understanding of our central life-purpose and ask why that purpose seems to have suddenly backfired or fallen apart. This pressure cuts right to the heart of who we are. We are shown what we need to see in order to reformulate

and better express our life-purpose. Whatever we understood in the past about the core meanings of who we are is questioned. Taken back to Square One, we have to start over from scratch.

Like a puppy that pees on the carpet because it hasn't yet learned the "house rules," we find our noses suddenly pushed into the smelly messes of our own karmic condition. Though our egos may feel that we are being unfairly punished, we are actually receiving very personal and specific instructions about the boundaries of our particular reality. And deep within that process are the hidden positive meanings of the Saturn-Sun conjunction.

The inevitable difficulties and even the abject failures we experience during this period are NOT an end in themselves. This painful time represents the "seeding" of a unique set of life-challenges to which we will have ample chances to respond later, over the nearly three decades to come after the birthing transit ends. Judged from the standpoint of our longer journey, Saturn's passage of our Suns sets each of us on a path toward correction of our inner misunderstandings, excesses, and denials. It is the key to the real achievement of spiritual maturity. With hard work and sustained humility, we *can* eventually turn defeats into victories, if only we will remember and pay attention to what reality tells us.

Getting that message, of course, is not a given. If we were to track a large group of people going through their Saturn-Sun cycles, we would see the full spectrum of human diversity. The bell curve applies here as elsewhere. Some human beings really do learn from hard experience, growing up and actually reaching fulfillment. Others evolve more slowly, struggling with the same recurring, frustrating lessons time and again. And some unfortunates among us remain trapped in personal delusions, stubbornly defending and rationalizing their continuing failures to the bitter end.

Life offers no guarantees (nor does astrology, for that matter) that one's core purpose will find successful expression. Free will and the mysteries of fate can intervene for good or ill in any human life. But the Saturn-Sun conjunction *always* points the way toward our positive "dis-illusionment," which is arguably the most important spiritual task we all face. Weaning ourselves from our toxic beliefs and childish fantasies allows us to mature into true adults. Self-awareness grows in the context of the larger world around us.

So yes, in the long run, we may overcome our vanity or hubris to achieve authentic spiritual growth, but seeing any positive results during the actual time-periods of Saturn-Sun transits is extremely unlikely, if not impossible. Those are the rare times when our spiritual homework is dumped right on our heads in the most blunt ways possible.

This is what half a billion people with Cancer Suns are up against during Saturn's two and one-half year passage through that sign—the extreme pressure of defining new forms for core purpose and power within the necessary restraints imposed by external reality. That group includes President Bush and America as a nation. It also happens to include Donald Rumsfeld.

As a peace activist, I have been no fan of the Secretary of Defense's arrogant, smirking sarcasm and curt impatience toward reporters and Congress over the past years. His demeanor too often has the look of arrogance. Still, the grilling he suffered in May during his testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee was surprisingly difficult to watch. Rumsfeld looked like a caged animal as he was bombarded by tough questions from various Senators. His impending Saturn-Sun conjunction was clearly putting the screws to Rumsfeld's ego, challenging the man with the heavy weight of sobering responsibilities gone dreadfully wrong.

Personally, I'm not at all shocked by the events at Abu Ghraib, for I have been aware since childhood of the struggle inside me between good and evil, like Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. Violence, cruelty, humiliation, and other twisted expressions of dominance and submission reside within my own psyche. They coexist alongside nobler impulses toward love, respect, and reverence. Over my lifetime, the raging conflicts I suffered from this push-pull have softened somewhat. Though I don't always succeed, I choose to express the light rather than the darkness. I strongly doubt, however, that the shadow aspects of my Scorpionic soul can ever be eradicated, only contained.

Modern American military training, especially for grunts in the Marines and Special Forces, involves psychological indoctrination that intertwines the light with the darkness in young men and women. Their best and worst impulses are intentionally fused: Loyalty, discipline, and love of country are annealed with xenophobia, insensitivity, and lust to kill. We manufacture these gladiators to do our dirty work for us, so as not to sully our own lily-white hands with blood. Meanwhile, too many of our soldiers' psyches are permanently scarred in the sacrifice.

This is not the spiritual path of the warrior, nor the exquisite code of the samurai. Sadly, our approach is more akin to the mafia and its hired thugs. Aggressive competition and selective dehumanization are part of the mythology of American life, from Camp Pendleton to NFL football to the business practices of Wal-Mart. Our increasing embrace of balls-to-the-wall, take-no-prisoners militarism in everything from politics to religion is nothing short of stunning.

Right now, as Saturn conjuncts the USA Sun, reality is forcing us to stop and ask ourselves: Who are we? What values do we embody as a nation and a people? And how must we reform ourselves and our institutions to ensure a renewed and humane expression of our collective purpose?

If the lofty ideals of "freedom and justice for all" are to represent anything other than empty rhetoric and cynical propaganda, then we need to take a long, hard look in the mirror. If America is to be more than simply the meanest, most powerful son of a bitch on the block, then we would do well to consider acting with a little more spiritual generosity and gentleness of heart than has been apparent of late.

VENUS ECLIPSES THE SUN

On Tuesday, June 8th, 2004, at 8:20 a.m. GMT, we will witness an extremely rare Venus occultation, during which that planet retrogrades into perfect alignment between the Sun and Earth (essentially forming an eclipse). From our vantage point, the visual disk of Venus will pass right over the disk of the Sun. The astronomy here is quite spectacular. These Venusian occultations occur in pairs almost exactly eight years apart, with each pair separated by more than a century. The last time such a pair occurred was in 1874 and 1882. The follow-up partner to the one this June 8th will occur on June 6th, 2012.

Such Venus occultations were carefully noted throughout the 25 centuries of the Mayan Calendar, which is a favorite pet timeline for many occultists and New Agers. The "ending" of the Mayan Calendar (about which there is ample discussion in many articles on the internet) roughly coincides with the second of this pair of Venus-Sun eclipses in 2012.

This particular occultation in 2004 features an impressive array of symbolic energies, lining up the Sun, Venus, Earth, and Pluto in an arrow pointing directly toward the Center of the Galaxy, which is impressive, to say the least. Therefore, this event is anticipated by some to hold great spiritual significance in a supremely positive way, as our solar power source is infused with Venusian vibrations of peace, love, and harmony, intensified by Pluto, and amplified by the unimaginable power of Galactic Central.

As usual, I have some reservations. Though I've worked in the spiritual realm for much of my life and am fluent in the various languages of metaphysics, my role is often that of "the loyal opposition." While I, too, long for a more graceful state of affairs within and between human beings, I remain skeptical of miraculous or magical transformations of mass consciousness. The illusions of Maya come in all forms, including the glamour of spirituality.

My personal observation is that authentic spiritual development is essentially quiet work and not glamorous at all, as in the Zen dictate to "chop wood and carry water." More importantly, this work is almost always individual and usually private. My earliest spiritual mentor was the Sufi mystic G.I. Gurdjieff, who admonished his students to avoid the passions of politics or movements for social progress. Most

human beings, Gurdjieff claimed, were merely “fodder for the earth,” and the effort toward acquiring the magnetic center of an immortal soul required one’s full attention.

Those teachings were a significant part of my adolescence, and they still resonate for me 40 years later. Even so, I could not wholly accept them then, nor can I now. Something about the idea that only the few are likely to achieve enlightenment just rubs me the wrong way, despite ample evidence that the “real world” remains pretty much insane. However unrealistic the sentiment may be, I would like all of us to reach nirvana together, and—fool that I am—I want that loving goodness to manifest on this earth, in these bodies, by treating ourselves, each other, and all life on the planet with more reverence, kindness, and respect. So the rare Venus occultation gives me another chance to try to reconcile the contradictions I feel between the gentle aspirations of spirituality and the harsher realities of the ordinary world.

If the imminent Venus eclipse does not, in fact, herald the dawn of a golden age of peace and harmony, as I suspect it doesn’t, what then might its spiritual meaning be? While this rare astronomical configuration certainly may function for some individuals as an instant doorway to higher consciousness, I think its collective function is more likely to be a reminder, like a telegram from Cosmic Central containing instructions for those who can decipher the message. This is a treasure map, pointing the way to essential values still too often buried within us.

Put very simply, it’s a perfect time to express the love and gratitude you feel toward those you care for and those who care for you. Tell these people how much they mean to you, and don’t mince words or shrink out of shyness. Open your heart and bathe your beloveds in that shimmering light. Sing it out, and sing it loud. The world is hard enough without love remaining hidden and unshared.

Make Tuesday, the 8th of June, a celebration of the love in your life. *Then repeat that every day for the next eight years.*



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