

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

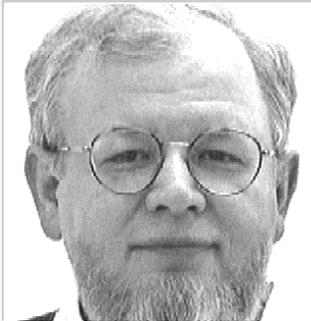
Issue #78  
July 2005

# 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...

website ..... [www.billherbst.com](http://www.billherbst.com)  
email ..... [bill@billherbst.com](mailto:bill@billherbst.com)  
voicemail ..... 612.207.4486



Dear friends,

July brings another Mercury retrograde (What? So soon, you ask? Didn't we just finish one? Well, yes, about three months ago). This time, Mercury appears to back up through the middle of the sign Leo.

The two-week setup phase began on July 4th, with the actual three-week retrograde kicking in from July 23rd to August 16th. So prepare for slowdowns and reversals, especially in the area of creative self-expression. Examine your personal mythology for cracks, self-deceptions, or outmoded roles.

For the next six weeks, humility should work better than bravado for most of us. This may be an especially propitious time to surrender ego, vanity, and pride.

## COLLECTIVE VERSUS PERSONAL ASTROLOGY

Not a month has gone by over the past three decades of my career as an astrologer without someone asking me, "*Bill, what's going on in the heavens?*" Usually, the person asking has a vaguely collective orientation. The implication (and the hope in asking) is that, as an astrologer, I have my finger on the pulse of the heavens at all times and will instantly know the meanings that are affecting us all (which is not true, of course; I hardly ever know the general shape of the heavens or where certain planets are, but more about that later...).

More often, however, the questioner is really asking about his or her individual reality. "*What's going on in the heavens?*" might translate as: "*Something's happening in my life that I don't understand, and I want to know what's causing it.*" Often there's a social acceptability issue: "*Are other people feeling this too, or am I just weird?*" Or it might be a reality check: "*Am I making this up, or is it real?*" The point is that very few people care what's going on in the heavens unless it relates directly to their own personal lives.

In the search for meaning through correspondence—“as above, so below”—astrology moves in two divergent but connected perspectives of meaning: the **collective** or the **individual**. One way that astrology deciphers meaning concerns patterns of experience that are shared commonly by everyone, while the other dimension focuses on the meanings of personal experiences that are custom-tailored to the lives of particular individuals.

These two modes are not mutually exclusive. Our individual experience is affected and to some extent shaped by the collective assumptions and attitudes of the families, communities, and cultures in which we live. Conversely, our collective experience is composed in part by the cumulative statistical assemblage of many individuals. Like a soup or colloidal stew, mass consciousness is flavored by the particulate elements that exist within. So the collective morphs into the individual and back again in an endless, spiraling dance.

An example of the collective dimension of astrology, one that the majority of the population tunes into, is the monthly soli-lunar cycle from new moon through first quarter to full and last quarter. Of the four transitions, people are generally most aware of the full moon, if only because that phase is visually spectacular.

Another collective manifestation occurs in seasonal change. The equinoxes and solstices mark passages from one season to the next, and these events are relevant to nearly everyone on the planet. Even in mild or tropical climates, winter feels different than summer.

Many astrologers write about the specific meanings implied for monthly soli-lunar cycles (especially eclipses) and quarterly seasonal changes. Such forecasts are necessarily collective, since they apply to all of us together. Some of us send out “alerts”—reminders about astrological events of collective relevance. Typical examples include the aforementioned eclipses, Mercury retrogrades, or Moon Voids. I did so myself in the forward to this commentary.

Nearly every major astrological magazine publishes general forecasts. For instance, *The Mountain Astrologer*—for which I am an Associate Editor and contributing author—devotes nearly ten pages in every issue to an astrological forecast of the upcoming month. In *TMA*, these take the form of a day-by-day analysis of planetary ebb and flow, with information about the nature of the changes and how particular days may be useful or not for a given purpose.

Far and away the most common method of writing about collective astrology occurs in daily or monthly Sun sign columns. In their most classic form, such articles start with a general forecast applicable to everyone, then follow with a breakdown of the twelve zodiacal archetypes by birth sign or ascendant. Since each Sun sign includes more than half a billion people, the specificity of the information is necessarily limited to a poetic or psychological tone.

On the other side of the scale is the realm of personal astrology, which addresses the reality of a particular human being—through a birth chart and the many moving cycles that activate in that chart over time. Although most astrologers study the charts of individuals, only a tiny percentage of all the astrologers in the world actually make their livings doing “readings” or “sessions” with a private clientele. I’ve been in that club for the past 32 years.

Between these two perspectives—the collective and the individual—I am much more comfortable with the personal form of astrology. Although our collective life (as a nation, and as a species on this planet) is a subject of considerable interest to me, I don’t write any day-to-day or monthly forecasts for the general public, and I am extremely unlikely to ever write a Sun-sign column.

On rare occasions, something from the realm of collective astrology grabs my attention, and I do write about those. Back in the summer of 2002, I was keenly aware of the stunningly unusual Sun-Mars-Uranus configuration, to the point of literal upset. I could feel the shift in the collective vibration. That experience

alone provided me with enough material to write numerous articles and newsletters in the run-up to the Iraq war.

I can also feel the coming Pluto passage into Capricorn in 2008, as well as the first-quarter Pluto-Uranus square in 2012-2014 that will push forward the radical energies of the middle 1960s in extremely dramatic ways. I intend to write at some length about those changes as they approach.

Mostly, however, I don't write the kind of general forecasts many people expect from astrologers. I try from time to time, but I'm usually disappointed with the results. Apparently I can't write about levels of astrology that don't move me personally.

I got into astrology because I was deeply interested in my own inner reality and the inner realities of others. Under the facade of normalcy—the bell curves and standard deviations of mammalian herd instinct—nearly seven billion very separate and unique human worlds are percolating. The existence of all these invisible worlds, which appear so similar but are in fact vastly different, is extremely compelling to me.

Astrology unlocked the doorways into individual realities better than any other system I found. Within weeks after drawing up my first charts back in 1970, I began doing astrological sessions with friends. Three years later, quite to my surprise, I had a modest career as a counseling astrologer. That has been the center of my life ever since.

Natal charts and transits reveal with amazing insight the invisible biopsychic machinery that runs inside each of us. That machinery produces our initial consciousness (whether we're bacteria, trees, dogs, whales, or human beings). At many points in our lives, we are merely the machine running, with precious little awareness of ourselves beyond animal levels of survival, social coexistence, and coping with the demands of immediate needs, desires, and duties. Then, at other moments, consciousness hits critical mass. The machinery is still humming along, driving us, but suddenly we are awake, aware of our existence separate from machine itself. When that occurs often enough over time, the cumulative power of self-awareness can allow us to change the hard-wiring of our machines' basic circuitry in ways that allow us to rebalance and heal ourselves.

Only when we separate our consciousness from our machinery, however, do we begin to have the chance to become spiritually mature and responsible for our lives. Much of the time we're not even aware that our inner machinery exists, much less that we're operating automatically rather than from consciousness. So making the machinery visible is a critical step.

If your car breaks down on the highway, you don't get out, open the hood, and begin randomly pulling out wires. If you don't understand how the engine is designed, your chances of fixing it are nil. In the same fashion, momentary self-awareness is of very little use in healing our lives. Individual consciousness needs a lot of time to understand the underlying machinery that produced it, and only after long and patient self-observation can we become qualified as "mechanics of the psyche." Personal astrology can be an invaluable tool in that process.

11,000 sessions with clients have taught me that many of the difficult issues that beset us as individuals are connected to paradoxes built into the wiring of our machinery. The personal problems that result come and go and come again, but they are not usually overcome by simply hammering away at them. That's the metaphorical equivalent of getting caught and shredded in the gears of the machine. As Carl Jung noted, we don't solve most of our problems, we outgrow them.

Astrology (and my clients) have helped me to see that problems are often like messengers, manifesting in our worlds to ask us to remember who we are, to clarify or redefine why we're here, and to stop smashing our heads against walls that either do not give way or morph into new and more vexing difficulties even after the original symptoms appear to have been resolved.

That's why I focus on individual life-purpose, because of the sublime and graceful power of self-awareness to lift us out of the sucking quicksand of day-to-day illusion. Too often, the regular world is a dreadful place of endless repetition and banal suffering, much of which remains unexpressed, as if kept private by a conspiracy of silence. That world is not going away. It's Maya, it's the Matrix, it's the Wheel of Sang Sara or whatever we wish to call it, but it's where many of us spend so much of our precious time, like prisoners in the gulag. Even the most mature and joyous spirits among us are well aware of the toxic waters in which humanity swims.

We can, however, shine into that shadow world the light of who we truly are, cutting through the fog with the warming radiance of heart and soul. Finally, that loving presence is all we really have—all we ever will have, probably—but thankfully it is more than enough to make the garden bloom.



Bill Herbst resides in Olympia, Washington. To schedule an astrological session, either in-person locally or long-distance via telephone, send an email to [bill@billherbst.com](mailto:bill@billherbst.com), or call 612-207-4486 and leave a voicemail.

*© 2005, by Bill Herbst, all rights reserved.  
Permission is granted by the author to copy and  
distribute or forward this PDF file via email.*

Subscriptions to receive The Herbst Newsletter monthly via email are free and can be requested by sending an email to: [newsletter@billherbst.com](mailto:newsletter@billherbst.com)  
Or go to Bill's website at [www.billherbst.com](http://www.billherbst.com) and sign up there.  
Donations are accepted with the author's gratitude.