

*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,

The heavens continue to be active with twists and turns worthy of comment. As if the ongoing Fixed Grand Crosses weren't sufficient to keep us busy working on ourselves, up pops a very interesting Venus retrograde bringing additional homework.

In the words of Roseanne Roseannadanna (the Gilda Radner character from early Saturday Night Live), "It just goes to show ya, it's always something. If it's not one thing, it's another."

VENUS RETROGRADE

Venus goes retrograde approximately once every 18-20 months, moving into the setup phase roughly one month before its retrograde station, then appearing to back up in the zodiac for 41-42 days, or almost precisely six weeks. All told, the circuit takes about 10 weeks from setup to direct station.

The current Venus shadow period began on November 22nd, as Venus passed the point to which it will later return. On Christmas Eve, December 24th, Venus was stationary in the 2nd degree of Aquarius. It then appears to move backward in the zodiac until turning forward again in the 17th degree of Capricorn on February 3rd, 2006.

Venus retrograde periods are usually subtle events in the psychology of the heavens, not typically associated with dramatic or obvious changes in our circumstances and psyches. That varies, of course, from one retrograde period to the next, and from one individual to another within a given retrograde, but any major shocks are generally attributable to factors other than Venus.

Each Venus retrograde has its own particular significance, however.

The Symbolism of Venus

Venus is discussed in many astrology textbooks as representing “personal values,” but I must admit that term never made much sense to me. I think the phrase is vague and fails to communicate effective meanings. In clearer terms, Venus symbolizes interpersonal or romantic love, bodily enjoyment, social harmony, the aesthetics of beauty, and the promise of fertility. It is finally about what and who we love personally.

The Moon, Venus, and Neptune are all “feminine” symbols in astrology. Each is linked to a different level of expression in love: The Moon is maternal love—possessive, nurturing and protective; Neptune is universal love—compassionate, transcendent, and alluring in spirituality and imagery; Venus is interpersonal love—the beautiful ingenue or young woman in the prime of her ripe attractiveness to others.

Venus is associated with two signs of the zodiac, Taurus and Libra, and two houses, the 2nd and 7th. The linkage with Taurus/2nd is laid back and physical, implying love of possessions and creature comforts through the pleasure of bodily senses. Money is included as a means to satisfaction or ownership. This is the animal level of territoriality, good food, sensuality, etc. Venus’ rulership of Libra/7th is outgoing and social, indicating love of interpersonal contact with others and the wish for at least momentary balance or superficial harmony between partners.

Why is Venus linked with love and beauty? If we consider the Earth to represent the ego aspect of selfhood, then Venus is the first planet inward from the Earth and closer to the Sun (the soul center), while Mars is the first planet outward, away from the Earth and Sun. Thus, Mars symbolizes a push outwards, from the ego into the external environment. Venus, on the other hand, represents a pull inward, an invitation to enter the ego and move closer to the soul. Mars is centrifugal; Venus is centripetal.

As a result, Mars becomes the symbol for maleness, while Venus is the feminine principle. Both are about intimate union with others, but Mars is the desire for penetration, the hard phallic symbolism of pushing into another, while Venus is the magnetism of inviting another into ourselves in the soft receptivity of enfolding. In the intimate domain, Mars (the masculine) is associated with the sexual imperative and literally externalized organs; Venus (the feminine) is linked to romantic love and personal care in the pleasures of union, with correspondingly internal organs.

A major misunderstanding of gender symbolism lies in the assumption that Mars is “active” and Venus “passive.” Nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, both Mars and Venus are correctly active and powerful expressions of intimacy. Although Mars is more kinetic, involving as it does physical assertion and often aggressive behavior, Venus is no less active, just less obvious and more subtle in its action. In other words, both Mars and Venus are irresistible forces of nature.

Venus symbolizes the profound power of fertility and beauty, which is as potent as anything we know. A stand-up comic once quipped that “women are the most powerful magnets in the universe, and men are cheap metal.” That overstates the case, of course, since everyone has a masculine and feminine side to his or her psyche. Biology is not the whole of who we are. Men are not just “from Mars,” nor are women only “from Venus.” But the comedian’s joke is essentially true. Advertisers realized long ago that if they showcased their products next to an attractive woman, sales would soar. Most advertising invokes the glamour of feminine beauty. Studies done with both adults and babies have established that out of all the images in human experience, the single most attractive to us is that of a comely female face. Nothing else comes close in its ability to soothe and bring happiness.

When denied or repressed, both Mars and Venus can invert from active to passive. The Martian impulse can devolve into sullen defiance or aggressive-defensive behaviors, which can explode at any moment. Adolescent males (of all ages) often exhibit these traits. Venus turns passive when, for one reason or another, we lose either permission or confidence to express our beauty. Where a passive Mars may explode, a passive Venus implodes into bitter submissivity. In culture, Venus is sometimes forced into submission by masculine insecurities (men’s fears that they will lose control). So, in certain middle-eastern cultures, women are shrouded in burkhas, so as not to overly inflame men, and also to restrict their charms by defining them as private property. In western cultures, women were too often turned into

kewpie dolls, restrained by corsets or high heels, and lobotomized as well, accused of being too emotional and lacking reason, acceptable only when “seen and not heard.”

Beyond masculine repression, however, women have historically been unwitting, if not altogether willing, participants in their own subjugation. In this world, where we all emerge from the wombs of mothers, most of us—both men and women—are subliminally anxious about the mysteries of feminine power and their cosmic implications.

It’s not just that women “know” something men don’t (in fact, each sex knows things about which the other is only dimly aware. The truth is more frightening than that: Woman may embody qualities that men cannot conceive. That double-entendre—the inability to conceive—is both fundamental and obvious. And so, men insist on driving the bus while women are relegated to a seat in the back. More than anything else, this is simple revenge.

Men’s greater size and physical strength have always been played up to the hilt. In the demonstration of strength, weaponry and war are the ultimate expressions of Martian aggressiveness. But on battlefields throughout history, dying soldiers have whimpered for their mothers with their last breaths. In matriarchies, conflicts are resolved not by violence, but by negotiation. That’s not to say that matriarchy is the solution to war, but our rebalancing in that direction would certainly help.

When people say that beauty “comes from inside” or “from the soul,” they are speaking of the active power of feminine magnetism to draw others. That solace is frequently offered up to those of us who were not granted perfect cheekbones, long shapely legs, or whatever other superficial bodily features our fickle cultures define as physical comeliness. Qualities deemed beautiful change over time and are quite different from one culture to the next. Attractiveness, however, does not truly come “from the soul.” Instead, beauty is the calling card of our ego that announces our soul’s receptivity to union. In that sense, beauty—like desire—is indeed only skin deep.

Once past the courtship phase of romantic and sexual infatuation, both beauty (Venus) and desire (Mars) give way to something more profound. Sex may drive us together, and romance may intoxicate us, but true intimacy goes far past mere chemical or aesthetic attraction. Once brought into each other’s force fields, the actual hard work of intimacy takes over. Masculine and feminine roles wane toward irrelevance when we must inevitably confront the challenges of commitment, compassion, dignity, equality, acceptance, and understanding.

Interpreting this Venus Retrograde

Venus arrived at its retrograde station on December 24th, almost precisely conjunct Chiron in early Aquarius, half a day after the Moon’s last-quarter phase shift with the Sun, and during the ongoing Fixed Grand Cross involving Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, and Neptune. That’s a mouthful of technical astro-jargon, but it provides the context for analyzing the symbolic meanings of this particular Venus retrograde period.

The Grand Cross reveals the longer tone of these times in the revelation of secrets, the unmasking of illusory poses, and the aggressive efforts to identify which of our dreams are successfully cross-fertilizing with reality, thus improving it, and which have become toxic, thus harming it. This boils down to distinguishing truth from lies—seeing more clearly what is or has become true, versus what was or has become false.

The last-quarter Moon suggests a shorter period of cutting loose, reorienting ourselves by letting go of the past.

And at the heart of the meaning is the Venus-Chiron conjunction. Chiron represents the wounds we suffer from mistaken beliefs and wrong-headed assumptions held so deeply in our psyches that they programmed, habitual, and invisible to us, so that we fail to see how we inadvertently contribute to creating our own pain and loss. Not only does Chiron define these areas in each chart, it also reveals the process and timing of our re-awakening into awareness by reaching beyond the suffering to realize its causes in ourselves.

In Aquarius, this involves independence-dependence and the wrenching separations that result when we become too attached to illusions about love we may have held concerning ourselves or our beloveds. Friendship comes into play here (have you ever loved someone you didn't really like? most of us have) as does the idea of love (falling in love with love itself, or mistaking the other for an archetype rather than a living, breathing individual).

So love and suffering are fused during this Venus retrograde. We have reached a point in the collective flow where deceptions (especially self-delusions) may be revealed, where we can examine the past in our lives as it reaches into the present to see where our hearts went wrong. Then, as we come to awareness, we can let go of that past, heal the wounds by forgiving ourselves and others, and move on.

Have you ever broken a vow in love? Have you ever been abandoned by another or done so yourself? Have you ever given up your independence or integrity for the pleasures of sharing? Have you ever been seduced by extraordinary beauty or used your own beauty to seduce another? (Seduction always leads to betrayal.)

Both Venus and Chiron were in the 2nd degree of Aquarius at the moment Venus stopped in the heavens. The Sabian Symbol for that degree is quite revealing. Allow me to quote from my own book on the Sabian Symbols in intimacy, **The Oracle of Love**:

Aquarius 2: “An unexpected thunderstorm.”

Keynote phrase: Torrential downpour

Love can be slow and gradual in development, or its onset can be shockingly sudden. One moment, life is a sunny day of normal expectations. Then we meet that special someone, and the critical mass of chemical attraction shocks the system. Winds howl, and a bank of low clouds rolls in, obliterating the sun. Our mental atmosphere is charged as the barometer plunges. With little warning, our heart opens in a cloud break, a torrent of feeling that sweeps through the personality like a suddenly swollen river overflowing its banks. We are galvanized, impassioned, focused only on the raging tumult of emotion that washes away all considerations of ordinary living.

In your intimate life, you are now going through, are about to go through, or are looking for that unexpected thunderstorm, the flash flood of love. *So sandbag the levee, and be ready to move to higher ground.*

Over the next month, pull back from the effort of intimacy and let your past loves bubble up to the surface. Reflect on the effects of previous heart storms in your life: the shocks of upwelling, the turbulence, and the resulting damage as romantic passion struck, then receded. Remember what you felt and did, then move to the higher ground of perspective and detachment.

Forgive, heal, and prepare to love again.



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