

# The Saturn-Saturn Cycle: Life in Three Acts *Part One (of Two)*

by Bill Herbst

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Of all the longer term personal cycles in astrology, the one that is most familiar to people who know a little about astrology but not much (and often the only one) is the *Saturn-Saturn* cycle. Saturn-Saturn? Is that stuttering? No. It's a code, a naming convention in technical astrology that indicates the transit cycle between Saturn as a moving body in the heavens (the first Saturn in the code) and the zodiacal position of Saturn at birth in a natal chart (the second Saturn).

The reason that people who know only a little about astrology are aware of this cycle is because they've heard something about what's called the *Saturn Return*, which occurs at age 29 (and also again at 58 and 87, although many of the aforementioned people who know only a little astrology aren't aware of the second and third Saturn Returns, only the first one).

A "Return" in astrology is the event of a moving body "returning" to a defined point of reference after making one complete circuit of the ecliptic (the zodiac). Typically, the reference point is that body's zodiacal position in the natal/birth chart of a given person. All planets have Returns in our personal birth charts.

Among individuals, the most universally celebrated of all Returns is called the *Solar Return*, which commemorates a one-year period within a life and occurs each year on our birthday. As a technical note, because the calendar adds an extra day every four years, the exact moment of the Solar Return may occur on the calendar date of our birth, the day before, or the day after. That aside, almost everyone notes their birthdays, whether or not they celebrate them, and that landmark corresponds to the Solar Return in the Sun-Sun cycle. Many astrologers offer interpretations of personal Solar Return charts as a forecast for a person's next year. For a variety of reasons, mostly technical, I don't use Solar Return charts, nor do I offer sessions to clients that interpret them, but that's a topic for another commentary, not this one.

Each of the five outer planets has a cycle in our personal lives that measures its movement around the zodiac relative to the same planet's fixed and permanent position in our birth charts — Jupiter-Jupiter, Saturn-Saturn, Uranus-Uranus,

Neptune-Neptune, and Pluto-Pluto. To this, we could add a sixth cycle, that of the asteroid Chiron, which is called the Chiron-Chiron cycle. The most important points (and noteworthy times) within these cycles occur at the quarterly phase changes — the waxing square (90°), opposition (180°), waning square (270°), and conjunction (0°).

What distinguishes these particular transit cycles from all the other personal cycles in our charts is that their activations are age-related. That is to say, they occur at the same time for everyone who is the our age. Everyone in your high school graduating class went through their first Saturn Returns together, at the same time (age 29). The precise times of the alignments can vary from one person to another in your high school class, but not by much — in the case of the Saturn-Saturn cycle, the variation is never more than a year and a half at most.

Below are the six long-term cycles and their durations, both as complete cycles and as quarterly phases:

<b>Cycle</b>	<b>Total Duration</b>	<b>Quarterly Phases</b>
Jupiter-Jupiter	12 years	3 years
Saturn-Saturn	29 years	7 years
Chiron-Chiron	50 years	12-13 years
Uranus-Uranus	84 years	20-21 years
Neptune-Neptune	165 years	40-41 years
Pluto-Pluto	250 years	27-87 years

Notice that no human lives long enough to experience a Neptune or Pluto Return. We've shuffled off this mortal coil long before those Returns occur. But, if we survive far enough into old age (our early 80s), we will experience the opposition of Neptune-Neptune at the halfway point of that cycle.

Pluto-Pluto is a different story. Because of its extremely elliptical orbit, Pluto's apparent speed moving through the zodiac varies widely. How far we're likely to get in the Pluto-Pluto cycle depends of what part of the century we were born in. Someone born in 1900 had to live to be 101 to reach the halfway point in that cycle. Not likely. Similarly, a young Centennial born in 2000 has no chance at all of reaching the halfway point, since that will take 138 years. By contrast, however, someone born in 1950 will reach the halfway point in the Pluto-Pluto cycles at the age of 84, which is a possibility for many Boomers.

But I digress.

What I want to write about specifically in this commentary (as its title suggests) is the *Saturn-Saturn cycle*, with its three *Saturn Returns* (at ages 29, 58, and 87). The first two of these Returns divide life into a kind of Shakespearian three-act play, each act of which covers a span just shy of three decades.

So, what is the Saturn-Saturn cycle all about? What does it tell us about our lives? How does interpretation of the cycle differentiate each Act?

The Saturn-Saturn cycle is about living in our bodies in the “real” (i.e., material) world — the world of the physical. In other words, the reality-arena that is filled with concrete, tangible stuff — the earthly realm of things and people. That’s true across the board, for all of us. To focus more individually on how this takes shape and form, we look to Saturn’s condition in the natal chart, by sign, occupied/ruled houses, and interplanetary aspects. That gives us a more specific sense of the approaches to life (sign), arenas of experience and circumstance (houses), and other drives and motivations (aspects) that will be highlighted and most important as the cycle moves through a lifetime of quarterly transitions. (This three-pronged analysis of Saturn’s natal condition — sign, houses, and aspects — is basic interpretive technique in personal astrology that’s relevant to understanding *ALL* the many different Saturn cycles in our charts, not just Saturn-Saturn, but in that cycle it’s particularly meaningful.)

*Act One* is from birth through age 28. That’s *Childhood*. In childhood, we are introduced to our bodies and the world. As we move through childhood, we learn how our bodies work (and how they don’t). We also learn how the world works (and how it doesn’t). This learning comes partly from experience, but it also comes from imprinting on what other people tell us — our parents and families, our teachers, all authority figures and institutions (including religion), as well as the general massage of cultural norms and memes that are ubiquitous in society (advertising, expectations, assumptions, group norms, etc.).

All along the way of our first three decades, we are absorbing this information, both vicariously and from direct experience. Some of it is true and correct, some is false and mistaken, but all of it goes into the building of the neural pathways in our brains that will define, reinforce, and routinize our perceptions, thoughts, attitudes, and beliefs, all of which will determine characteristic patterns in our later decisions, choices, and behaviors (whether habitual or conscious, emotional or rational).

The four quarters of Act One begin at birth, age seven, age 15, and age 21. At birth, we are helpless. We must be nurtured and protected by our parents, older siblings, or other adults. We are also building an interior universe of personhood and world-view. That’s a full-time job. No wonder newborns sleep 18 hours a day. They’re exhausted from the effort and intense energy-expense of constructing a universe. Around age seven, we typically undergo the initial separation from our families by introducing a new social element — going to school and spending much of the day around other kids our own age. School is also the site of social indoctrination. At the halfway point of age 15, this immersion into society culminates with greater psychological separation from (and often rebellion against) parents, stronger identification with peers, and the onset of one-to-one intimacy through sex, either as an aroused interest or as

actual experiences. The fourth-quarter transition begins at age 21-22, and this is where culture diverges from astrology.

Society says that we are adults when we reach 21. Supposedly, we have graduated. We can drive cars, legally drink alcohol, vote, and go to war. We are expected to venture out into the world and begin fending for ourselves. Astrology, however, has a very different take on the decade of our 20s. Age 21 is not the beginning of Act Two, it's the three-quarter mark of Act One. Our childhoods still have another seven years to go. So, what do the 20s mean in astrology? They are the decade of gradually taking off our childhood clothes and trying on adult garb, which may or may not fit or suit us. Either way, we're not really adults yet. Even though we look like fully-grown people, we're still children, still imprinted on family and cultural beliefs, still acting out what we absorbed (and sometimes reacting against it).

When does this change? When do we shift from being fully-grown children to becoming baby adults? At age 29, with the passage of our first Saturn Return. All three Saturn Returns are less important as singular events than they are as markers or lines in the sands of time. They are the boundaries between the Three Acts, letting us know which phase of the drama our life is in.

*[This concludes Part One. In Part Two, I'll discuss some of the characteristic meanings of **Act Two** (Mid-Life) and **Act Three** (Elderhood) in the structural context of the Saturn-Saturn cycle.]*