

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

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[In Part One of this two-part Commentary, I discussed the 29-year Saturn-Saturn cycle as a three-act play — Childhood, Mid-Life, and Elderhood. I also wrote about the astrological symbolism of Act One (Childhood) as defined by that particular cycle. Now, in Part Two, I'll move on to Act Two (Mid-Life) and Act Three (Elderhood). Numerous other astrological cycles offer additional and different symbolic elements, but Saturn-Saturn is the backbone, the basic structure from which everything else hangs and through which meaning is enriched.]

Act Two is from 29 through 57. That's *Mid-Life*, the three-decade period of our greatest productivity in the beehive. That's when we've learned about our bodies, accounted for our social conditions, absorbed the rules as given to us by others, but also discovered our own rules for how we work and how the world works. It's when we're operating at full productive capacity, when we make our mark with families and careers of our own, when we see how our lives will unfold before our eyes. What did we dream about as children? Can we make that real? *Act Two* is when we find out by trying to do so.

The four quarters of *Act Two* begin at age 29, 36, 43, and 50. At age 29, we start our adulthoods, which is to say, we become externally more responsible for ourselves, especially in relation to the larger world. (Internal responsibility is symbolically linked with a different cycle, Saturn-Sun.) As our 30s begin, and with them the springtime of mid-life adulthood, we form plans, make decisions, take actions, and start building our adult lives in society. At age 36, in the summer season we forge ahead more assertively, pushing hard to manifest our intentions and drives. At age 43, we reach the harvest stage of autumn. For the next seven years, we enjoy the fruits of our labors or suffer the bitter results of crops that failed to produce what we'd hoped for and worked at, for whatever reason. Then at age 50 — the half-century mark — we move into the winter phase of detachment and experimentation, letting go of worn-out efforts and previous judgments, in preparation for *Act Three*.

Of the three Acts, Act Two (Mid-Life) is where we are least curious. We ask fewer profound questions than in the other two Acts. For instance, Act One (Childhood) is filled with practical how-does-the-world-work questions, such as, "Why is there air?" or "Where did I come from?" Act Three (Elderhood) is replete with questions of philosophical significance, such as, "What has it all meant?" In Act Two (Mid-Life), however, we're too busy building kingdoms and fighting to overcome obstacles in real life to ask many questions.

Act Three is from 58 through 86. That's *Elderhood*, when we move progressively away from the productivity of Mid-Life into the philosophical musings of Old Age. Act Three could be thought of as the phase of Legacy. *What have we done or learned or created that is worth passing on? How do we want our contribution to the collective to be shaped and considered? What shall we leave behind for future generations?* Obviously, some people are more self-centered in their orientation toward life. For them, Act Three represents the chance to finally do what they want, or however much of it their amassed resources, diminished vitality, or limiting circumstances will allow. However, even those people are likely to have thoughts and feelings about their impact on the world.

Technically, an *Act Four* is a possibility for about 10% of the population. My mother died peacefully at 96 years old, so she was already nine years into Act Four. In all honesty, however, I didn't see her do much of anything new or noteworthy in either Act Three or Act Four. At age 70, nearing the halfway point of Act Three, I still don't have a clue what Act Four might be about.

If we boil down this commentary to its simplest and most basic symbolism, the Three Acts of the Saturn-Saturn cycle are characterized by the changing relationship of vitality (Life) to mortality (Death). In Act One (Childhood), we are immortal. Biological vitality rules. Our bodily systems are cranking out growth hormone and getting stronger every day. This is why world-class gymnasts and ballerinas are typically children, and why teenagers can eat damn near anything they want. Even if their digestive systems can't handle what they eat, they'll pass it through without catastrophic repercussions. Bad diets may eventually contribute to a fall, but usually not early on. In Act One, death is something that happens only to other people.

Act Two (Mid-Life) is when we are introduced to mortality, both our own and that of others. The 25-year-old guy who plays basketball twice a week with his buddies can play hard for hours, go drinking afterwards, get only three hours sleep that night, and still perform at work the next day. When that same guy turns 30 (and throughout that first decade of adulthood), he gradually realizes that something has changed. He still plays hard, but he can't handle getting drunk afterwards. Plus, his body is sore as hell the next day, and not getting enough sleep makes him clearly less energized and much less effective at work. That's the inevitable result of growth hormone going to zilch. If we cranked out growth hormone forever, we'd stay younger and more vital, but we'd also remain immature. Wisdom requires awareness about death.

By the time our guy turns 60, he's slowed to a crawl. He's lucky to be able to play basketball once a month, and he no longer possesses the skills, stamina, and aggressive competitiveness of his youth. He's more likely to just shoot some hoops in the back yard for ten minutes. So, Act Two is slow down, get serious, and make every shot count.

Act Three (Elderhood) is when we confront the inevitability of our own and everyone else's mortality. From the late-50s on, most of us go through major physical changes. This happens from an acceleration of aging — we begin to resemble our grandparents, who seemed ancient to us in our childhoods — or we suffer the onset or deepening of chronic illnesses that limit our well-being, drain our energy, and impair our ability to function. Even if we don't suffer debilitation ourselves, we see people we've known our entire lives getting old, getting sick, and dying off in steadily increasing numbers. Mortality becomes a real thing — a *fact* — something we can no longer ignore. So, much of Act Three is about how we handle of our impending demise, gracefully or not, with acceptance or in denial. We begin to note (sometimes very unhappily) that our diminished capacities and falling apart are precursors to death.

The changes from one Act to the next are fascinating. In Act One, since we are immortal, we have infinite time and opportunity. Paradoxically, this means that nothing matters very much. I mean, who cares if we screw up? We'll get more chances down the road. The change from Act One to Act Two is that immortality ends, so we no longer have infinite time or endless chances. What we do matters in Act Two much more than in Act One because of the increasing awareness that we can't start over with impunity, that we have limited time and will get only so many chances. Thus, we become more careful in Mid-Life about not making mistakes. (At least we do if we're paying attention.)

The change from Act Two to Act Three is even more profound. Not only do we not get unlimited chances, but we're going to die, and quite probably suffer serious losses along that downward slope of the mountain. Losses, in all their forms, are more than mere painful events. They are, in fact, the road signs that tell us we're headed downhill. Basically, everyone we ever knew will die, and everything we ever possessed or achieved will pass away. Preparing for that may not be possible, but we are schooled in it over time. Of course, all of us suffer to some extent from denial of what is too unpleasant or frightening to face, and many people cling stubbornly to the past throughout their elderhoods, behaving as if nothing were different. But I'm not writing for them. I'm writing for folks who are at least willing, if not always able, to live in reality rather than fantasy.

I understand that this commentary presents frameworks that are not always reflected in individual lives. For instance, many people experience illness or disability as a significant part of their life-experience right from the start. This is not rare in astrological charts, nor in real life. Other people are personally healthy but encounter jarring evidence of mortality at an early age through the

deaths of loved ones — friends, relatives, or children. Entire generations may be exposed to mass death for a whole slew of reasons — war, pandemics, pogroms, natural disasters, etc. When that occurs, as it did for the generations who lived through World Wars I and II, and most directly for soldiers or civilians caught up in the maelstrom of battle, the results are often permanently traumatizing. Still, in terms of symbolic archetypes, the differences surrounding the experience of mortality in each of the three Acts holds as a general truism, if not a literal truth in all cases.

In the Dance of Life, vitality rules early, but mortality asserts itself over time. The three Acts of the Saturn-Saturn cycle provide insight into the structure of our chronology. There's much more to astrology (and more to us) than just that, of course, since structure is not the same as content, but knowing the basic meaning of how old we are provides an anchor to help ground us in our personal journeys.