

Saturn in Synastry

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Synastry is the practice of comparing two charts in any of numerous ways to reveal information about how they naturally interact. The most common application is to explore intimate or social relationships by comparing the birth charts of two individuals — lovers, marriage partners, family members, co-workers, friends, etc. The relationships may be between equals (lovers, marriage, friends) or hierarchical (parents/children, employers/employees).

The relationships can be actual, which is to say that they already exist and are ongoing, or they might be just possible relationships between two people who may or may not have met, but who are not in a relationship. Any two charts can be compared. I could do Synastry between my chart and Abraham Lincoln's. If I were writing a biography of Lincoln, I'd definitely do that, because it would give me insight about how I tend react to Lincoln's character and life.

Synastry doesn't have to be about interactions only between people. We could analyze the relationship between two countries (using their national birth charts), or between a country and a person. As a professional working astrologer who does sessions with clients, however, I can attest that in the 50 years of my practice, no one has ever asked me to do a chart comparison with a country.

Two main techniques are used in Synastry. The first is "objective," meaning the technical comparison of positions in the two charts, and it's the one I'll discuss in this essay. The second technique is "subjective." Interpret one chart and get a feeling for the overall meaning of the life. Do the same with the second chart, and then consider how the two lives might (or might not) fit together. Are the stories sensible together? That's not "scientific," but astrology is much more art than science. I like the second method, but it's not the subject of this essay.

In mainstream astrology, the public expectation is that Synastry can (or should be able to) assess "compatibility" between two people. Even many astrologers approach the technique from that perspective. I don't. While I know the "rules" in traditional Synastry that indicate flow or conflict between two charts, I'm skeptical of any formulaic approach to intimate success or fulfillment.

That's true also of "strengths and weaknesses." I put that orientation into the same dubious category as "good or bad." People want astrology to speak in the ego's language, but it doesn't. They also want astrology to be straightforward and simple, but it's not. Astrology is complex, multi-faceted, and nuanced, just like life. Simple, easy judgments are not only elusive, but often wrong. I'd be

thrilled if clients would stop asking me if what I tell them about their charts is "good or bad." But they won't...

"Compatibility" is much more complicated than people would like it to be. That said, here are two of my basic presumptions, both gleaned from long experience: One is that more connections are preferable to less, and the other is that a balance of smooth versus stimulating contacts is better. This is partially about aspects. Many people assume that trines or sextiles (smooth) are "good," while squares or oppositions (stimulating/conflicting) are "bad." That's dead wrong. Too much harmony is boring. Nothing happens. Too much conflict wears people out and makes them crazy. We need both hot and cool, passion and agape, but there's no formula for the perfect blend.

As a technique, how is Synastry done? We compare all the symbolic positions in one chart (planets, angles, etc.) with all of those in the other chart, using a mathematical (actually, geometric) scale. The frame of reference is almost always the ecliptic — the Zodiac of signs. We could use the Houses, but that's much harder to do with precision, although it's sometimes even more revealing. Two people with the same emphasized Houses often have much in common, but that doesn't necessarily mean that they'll get along or like each other.

In practice, the zodiac is the most common frame of reference for Synastry. We look for symbols in each chart that are in the same place in the zodiac (conjunct) or some major fraction apart of that circle — 180° (halfway or opposite), 90° (one-quarter or square), 120° (one-third or trine), and so on. The closer to exact the angle, the more potent the connection. If two symbols are exactly 180° apart, that's a more powerful contact than 175°. In this essay, I'll omit orbs entirely and limit my discussion to "hard angles" — conjunctions, squares, and oppositions — since those are the most dynamic connections. All contacts are potentially meaningful, but the hard angles stand out as correspondences to the most dynamic qualities of the relationship.

Calculating the connections can be done with a computer (using astrological software) or manually, by eye. Software is the quickest and most thorough method. Professional astrology programs can instantly calculate and list every connection between two charts. Great, huh? Well, not as much as it may seem. The lists or graphs of all that information are often just overkill. We have to sift through a mountain of data to find the most important connections, and that's a pain in the ass. I'm not interested in 114 contacts between two charts. All I want to know are the top five most important ones. So, my strong preference is to compare two charts manually, by looking at them. Sure, that runs the risk that I might miss an important connection, but I already know before I start how to limit what I'm looking for to reveal only those connections I may want be aware of for the conversation that will ensue.

See, not everything has the same weight in astrological interpretation. There are natural hierarchies of importance, and each astrologer selects his own hierarchy. In my case, what I look for in Synastry is relatively simple, so I do it by eye.

Comparing planetary pairs is a quick and simple approach to reveal meaningful connectedness. If the Suns in both charts are in contact, then each person's understanding of the other's basic nature becomes more relevant. That can be easy or hard, harmonious or in conflict, depending on the angle of the contact. When the Moons are connected, that refers to temperamental involvement. Want to know if you can comfortably live with someone in cohabitation? Look to the Moons. Mercury contacts are about how each person thinks and speaks. Is communication an important factor in the relationship? The Mercuries show that. Mars-Venus connections are about the sexual chemistry. Decades ago, I developed a system of 28 different categories of sexual connection that can be assessed visually, on the fly, just by looking at the charts for a minute or two.

In general, however, Synastry notes connectedness between any two positions in the charts, not just between identical pairs of symbols. The two Suns don't have to be in contact with each other as long as each connects to something in the other chart. If one Sun doesn't integrate into the other chart, that's a problem. More connections indicate greater meaning and a stronger bond.

All of that is preface. What I want to write about for the rest of this essay is basically one thing — the ways that Saturn in one chart connects to any symbolic points in another chart. To me, that's the single most revealing and important factor in Synastry. Do the respective Saturns have connections to planetary positions or angles in the other person's chart?

So, here's Revelation #1: *Any two charts without at least one or two significant Saturnian connections between them are just ships passing in the night.* Without Saturn integration, the relationship will almost certainly prove insignificant. This insight flies in the face of "popular" astrology, which typically regards any Saturn connections as "bad," and even perhaps the kiss of death for a relationship. Well, friends, that's wrong. My experience over 12,000 sessions and a boatload of chart comparisons is as clear as a bell: Saturn connections from one chart to the other are essential for a meaningful and enduring long-term relationship.

Are Saturn contacts easy? No, they're not. They're difficult, troublesome, messy, and often aggravating for the two people involved (always both, by the way, even if it's only one person's Saturn that connects strongly to the other's chart). If my natal Saturn is on your natal Sun or Venus, we don't experience that the same way. How it feels to you will be quite different from how it feels to me, but both of our experiences are important in the context of the relationship. How we handle our respective reactions and reconcile the differences are critical to our fulfillment and shared happiness as a couple — or, if things go south, to our conspicuous lack of fulfillment and happiness together.

If my natal Saturn is connected to your natal Mars (through conjunction or opposition), then every time you express desire in attitude or behavior, my Saturn gets activated by "harmonic resonance." If your Saturn is square my Mars, however, then they're mutually exclusive. Activating one shuts down the other. With this pair of planets, either type of contact is difficult.

When you express your Mars as desire, urgency, or sharpness, I experience fear and resistance. Conversely, when I express my Saturn — as worry, anxiety, hesitation, practical caution, ambition, or even authority — that affects your Mars. You get hot, and you want to penetrate or challenge me. Now, if you are fully conscious, mature, and loving, your Martian reaction is to push me forward, to help me get over my fear, climb my mountain, and achieve my goals. And you may do that frequently. Keep in mind, though, that in any ongoing, day-to-day relationship, such as lovers or marriage partners, this Saturn-Mars chemistry will trigger thousands of times in a given month. No one is conscious enough to be loving through all that. The bulk of those triggerings will express themselves unconsciously. When they do, there will be a lot of aggravation on both sides. Neither may intend to provoke frustration or anger, but that's the chemistry.

So, you may feel that I am constantly pouring cold water on your desires, essentially criticizing or blocking them. And I may feel that you are constantly threatening me, challenging my ambitions, or undercutting my authority. No, it's not really "constant," but it feels like it is. And yes, I get it — that sucks.

Why would any two people want to be in a relationship like that, where the downside is so obvious? I mean, where's the upside? Well, the "positive" meaning of a Mars-Saturn connection between two people is that it fosters and promotes the inner work within them both that, at least potentially, leads to maturity. Ego-based humans want everything to be easy, but life doesn't work that way. Much of life is damned hard, but hard is not the same as worthless. What we earn by diligent work and sustained effort is inherently more valuable to us than what we're given for free.

This is the fundamental meaning of every different Saturn connection in Synastry — Saturn-Sun, Saturn-Moon, Saturn-Mercury, Saturn-Venus, whatever. Each of those types of connections indicates characteristic experiences in sharing that invoke conflict, but all of them are aimed down the same spiritual road. That road says, *"This isn't easy, but it might be really important."*

The other factor I want to mention about Saturn connections in Synastry is that they act like glue. That's Revelation #2. Important Saturn contacts keep two people together, working on themselves and their relationship, when they might otherwise drift apart or give up. Admittedly, people sometimes feel trapped in relationships that never produce any goodness and remain miserable until they end, but that's not Saturn's fault. That just means that the people involved are unable, for one reason or another, to do the inner work that Saturn reveals.

What I tell clients when I see significant Saturn contacts in their Synastry is this: *If you don't want to be hitched to the plow, don't get into the relationship in the first place. Walk away before you're committed, because once you're really in it, getting out will be extremely difficult and very costly.* The situation I like least is when I see serious Saturn connections between two people who have recently met and asked me to compare their charts to assess the future possibilities for

what is typically a budding romance. I am duty-bound to tell them some version of what I just wrote, but no one ever listens to me. Literally, no one.

Why not? In part, I think it's because early on in a relationship with potent Saturn connections, the Saturn people are often very enthused. Their fears may have held them down for a long time, but suddenly they feel supercharged about moving through and past their anxieties, as if meeting this new person provided a magical injection of courage. It's as if they're running up their mountain, and it's exciting. Meanwhile, the other people have not yet experienced the full frustration of running headlong into Saturn's brick walls a thousand times. They think they can handle what's coming, and they're often fooled by the Saturn partner's early exhilaration. But that excitement won't last.

We can't run up our mountains. It's not a sprint, it's a long-distance climb. We have to plan and pace ourselves. We may have to wait for favorable conditions that others don't have to wait for. That's the thing about Saturn. We see other people not struggling at all with what gives us fits, and we wonder why it's so easy for them and so hard for us. The answer is that they're not us. And yet, we all have Saturn somewhere in our charts, and thus each of us has our own personal mountain — somewhere in our lives that's daunting and scary.

This reveals, in many ways, the spiritual teaching of Saturn: to live in our own reality, to not compare ourselves to others, and to evolve over time. For each of us, Saturn shows in our charts where and how we will need to grow slowly, through sustained and often repeated effort, by gradually addressing our doubts and fears, and by reducing our crippling over-sensitivity. Saturn reveals where gumption and perseverance can pay off in the long run. It shows how and where we will inevitably fail — probably multiple times and in different ways — but we start again nonetheless. It's the symbol in our charts where failure can literally lead to success. What is hard for us may never become easy, but we can still achieve many of our ambitions while learning to appreciate, honor, and accept our inherent limitations. Doing the inner work laid out by our Saturns leads to true humility, while refusing that work results in spiritual bankruptcy and chronic immaturity.

We can do this kind of analysis with every planet in Synastry. I choose to write about Saturn because it is the Great Teacher. Beyond the Sun and Saturn (and maybe the Moon), everything else in astrology pales in comparison. Some people are obsessed with the supposedly "spiritual" implications of the Moon's Nodes. Well, friends, everything in the chart is spiritual, and compared to the Sun and Saturn, the Moon's Nodes are little more than a mere footnote.

This is really very basic astrology. It's a little like baseball. Getting good at baseball requires mastery of four basic skills — hit, run, throw, and catch. Practice those endlessly, and you'll become a good baseball player. You may not achieve stardom, but you'll earn respect. In the same way, getting good at astrology is achieved through studying and thinking about the basics, over and over, and thus coming to understand the fundamentals so well, so deeply, and so thoroughly that the nuances reveal themselves.