

The Saturn Return

by Bill Herbst

*Version 1.3 (posted on 28 March 2018)
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[In my most recent commentary, I wrote about the Saturn-Sun cycle that will begin, sometime in the nearly three years between 2018 and 2021, in the charts and lives of every person born with the Sun in the sign Capricorn. Now, I want to write about another transit — the Saturn Return — that is a significant event in a different personal cycle of Saturn.]

Many people who have studied astrology a little, or perhaps only superficially, have heard of what's called "the Saturn Return." That event is linked with the *Saturn-Saturn* cycle (meaning the cycle of Saturn as a moving body in the heavens relative to its "fixed" position in the birth chart of any individual).

All the major bodies in the solar system used as archetypal symbols in astrology go through Returns. Of these, the most important astrologically are the Sun, our Moon, and planets — Mercury, Venus, Mars, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune, and Pluto. The Sun's Return (usually called a Solar Return) is determined by the earth's path around the Sun, termed the ecliptic, which is the basis for the tropical zodiac — the zodiac of seasons rather than constellations. That period is one year. In fact, that's what defines a year. The Lunar Return is based on the Moon's orbit around the earth. That period is a month. All the other bodies' Returns are based on their orbits around the Sun, as viewed from the earth. Below are the approximate periods of the various Returns:

Moon	1 month	Jupiter	12 years
Sun	1 year	Saturn.....	29 years
Mercury	1 year	Uranus	84 years
Venus	1 year	Neptune	165 years
Mars	2 years	Pluto	250 years

As a planetary archetype in astrology, Saturn's keywords include: concentration, limitation, denial, repression, structure, authority, discipline, boundaries, ambition, fear, conservatism, stability, and gradual achievement. "*Limitation, repression, denial, and fear*" don't sound very positive, and, indeed, the ego's reaction to Saturn is typically negative. Saturn was the Roman God that the Greeks called Kronos (as in chronology). He is the Lord of Time, the great teacher of learned patience through strong discipline, pacing, and gradual achievement. Egos are not patient, however, so they don't like Saturn at all.

On the other hand, *structure* is obviously positive, as are *boundaries*. The traditional view of Saturn as a negative symbol (still held by many people today) is incorrect. Saturn is more akin to a Yoga Teacher or Drill Instructor — a strict

and demanding taskmaster who puts us through our paces, so that we become more disciplined and gain the chance to do better in understanding and dealing with the long-term realities of life.

Saturn also symbolizes the external-link parent, typically the Father, as well as all social authority figures. Psychologically, Saturn represents the psyche's inner authority or superego.

For a more complete exploration of Saturn, read my essay (archived on my web site) linked here: <http://www.billherbst.com/Saturn.pdf>

Many different Saturn cycles are ongoing in our charts — Saturn-Sun, Saturn-Moon, Saturn-Mercury, Saturn-Venus, etc. The total number of Saturn cycles varies from one astrologer to the next, depending on the number of symbols used in the natal chart and how the astrologer organizes them. In my work with clients, I track 12 different Saturn cycles.

All Saturn cycles are about living in the real world, and each has its own symbolic meaning. In any given period, such as a year, numerous personal Saturn cycles may activate in a particular natal chart. Some of these Saturn transits will be more important than others, but the overall pattern of active Saturn cycles is revealing. What's critical to note here is that Saturn Returns have nothing to do with any other personal Saturn cycle. So please don't confuse a Saturn Return, which is a specific transit in the Saturn-Saturn cycle, with any other Saturn cycle or transit.

The Saturn-Saturn cycle concerns life in a body, living as a person in the real world of other people and society, and how we navigate through all that. The popular notion of "things we learned in kindergarten — for instance, *please* and *thank-you* — are linked with the Saturn-Saturn cycle, although what it teaches us is not limited to early childhood. The teaching stretches over our entire lives.

By definition, the Saturn-Saturn cycle starts at birth for everyone and moves through its various phases — of which the quarterly transitions every seven years are most important: birth, age 7, 14-15, 21-22, 28-29, 35-36, 43-44, and so on. Saturn Returns occur when Saturn "returns" to the same sign and degree of the zodiac it occupied at birth. In a long life, three Saturn Returns are possible: the first at age 28-29, representing the end of childhood and beginning of true adulthood, the second at age 57-58, announcing the end of mid-life and start of seniorhood, and finally again at 86-87, where we turn to face the inevitable fact of our death.

On the following two pages is a listing of the ages and meanings of each quarterly phase shift in the Saturn-Saturn cycle from birth through age 87:

Age in years	Cycle Phase	Seasonal Correspondence
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- **Age 0 Birth/Infancy (Spring)**

beginning of autonomous life in a physical body within the material world; start of Act I or Childhood; initial interpersonal bonding and development of a personal ego.

Humans are born unfinished, incomplete, vulnerable, and dependent (this reproductive strategy is called "K-selection" — we make few offspring, then nurture and protect them over a long period). After birth, we build a structure for interpreting reality and adopt an ego-identity. Opinions vary widely about how critical the initial seven years of life are, but the ripple effects of infancy and early childhood clearly cascade throughout the entire life.

- **Age 7 1st-quarter square (Summer)**

initial separation from parents and introduction to society through school; assumption of greater responsibilities, discipline, and self-reliance

Around the age of seven, most cultures introduce socialization through schooling. Children in this phase of later childhood spend some time with family and some time with peers in organized social structures of the community. Autonomy increases, as do our responsibilities to others. Our experience of time becomes more urgent as the pace of life quickens.

- **Age 14-15 opposition (Autumn)**

halfway point (fulfillment) of Act 1 (Childhood); adolescent identity crisis and bodily transformation; integration with or rebellion against peers and parents

Adolescence is the halfway point between childhood and adulthood, the "harvest" of our early lives in bodies, a time of extreme biochemical change and accompanying social conflicts surrounding affiliation and fealty — with whom do we identify and against whom do we rebel? Our allegiance to family and parents often comes into conflict with our increasing wish to be part of a peer group. This seven years is the long crossroads between who we have been and who we may become.

- **Age 21-22 last-quarter square (Winter)**

3/4 mark of Act 1 (Childhood); practice for adulthood

Society dictates that age 21 is the onset of adulthood. Astrology disagrees, asserting that our early 20s represent not adulthood, but rather the 3/4 mark of childhood. At this point, we begin a seven-year transition away from the imprints and experience of early life and toward the fuller independence and autonomy that await in mid-life.

- **Age 29 1st Saturn Return (Spring)**

end of Act 1 (Childhood) and beginning of Act II (Mid-life); start of real adulthood; formation of adult plans and goals

This is the true beginning of adulthood, with corresponding changes in time and intention. People in their 20s feel immortal, as if they will live forever; thus, they have infinite chances, and success or failure are relatively less important. People turning 30 start to experience the limits of biology (human bodies stop producing growth hormones around age 30); they begin to recognize that life in bodies is finite. As a result, planning and decision-making become more serious and careful, since future choices will be limited and

repercussions increasingly real. For some people, the first Saturn Return brings abrupt endings to early marriages and careers, especially if those were chosen based on childhood imprints that have waned or were ill-suited to who we are. For others, the initial Saturn Return opens a welcoming doorway into the powers and permissions of adulthood.

● **Age 36-37..... 1st-quarter square..... (Summer)**

pushing ahead with plans and goals of adulthood; fullest manifestation of adult family and career advancement; active participation in society

The second half of the 30s brings the realities of adulthood into bold relief. The intentions and decisions we made at the end of our 20s and into our early 30s must now become tangible and real if we are to continue moving forward toward fulfillment. Course corrections can and do occur, along with successes and setbacks, but we hope that life will be full steam ahead into more complete manifestation.

● **Age 43-45.....opposition (Autumn)**

halfway point (fulfillment) of Act 2 (Mid-life); manifesting adult intentions and dreams, but also recognizing that youth will not last forever; second identity crisis (re-living adolescence)

This period in the mid-40s represents the second adolescent crisis. We arrive at a crossroads again, halfway through Act II (Mid-life). Rather than being overwhelmed with surging hormonal biology, however, as occurred in adolescence, we experience the beginnings of doubt about our future because of dissipating vitality. Some people yearn to return to earlier glory days, clinging to and often re-living their youth. Others make the transitional compromise of accepting some loss of vitality for increased maturity.

● **Age 50-52.....last-quarter square (Winter)**

3/4 mark of Act 2 (Mid-life); bridge between adulthood and seniorhood; previous emphasis on outward manifestation and achievement is countered with new emphasis on distilled experience, wisdom, and maturity

The half-century mark brings us to the 3/4 point in mid-life. We set out at 30 into adulthood, and fulfilled our intentions as well as we could in our 40s. Now we begin to let go of the raw push to achieve or conquer and consider the longer-term outlook. Although we may still feel the fullness of mid-life, seniorhood appears on the distant horizon. For some of us, the 50s can be glorious in marking full appreciation for our talents, skills, and maturity — a time to let go of striving and embrace satisfaction. For others, it may be a long downward slide into regret and uncertainty. This is also the time of the Chiron Return, where we gain the chance to become aware of and reassess previously unconscious or unexamined beliefs we've held that influenced our decisions and may have affected results in our lives.

● **Age 58-59.. 2nd Saturn Return (Spring)**

end of Act 2 (Mid-life) and beginning of Act 3 (Seniorhood)

The second Saturn Return is usually not as dramatic a line in the sand as the first Saturn Return was, but its greater subtlety may be, in some ways, more significant. It marks the end of mid-life in productive adulthood and the beginning of wise eldership in seniorhood. Not that everyone retires at the end of their 50s; this isn't about whether or not we continue working. It's about how we approach our work and our lives. The second Saturn return brings the dawning awareness that the legacy we leave behind will matter increasingly over the coming years.

● **Age 65-66..... 1st-quarter square..... (Summer)**

*pushing ahead with plans and goals of seniorhood;
beginnings of concern with contribution and legacy*

The first quarter-square of our third Saturn-Saturn cycle and the seven years that follow tend to manifest in either of two very different and typically contradictory ways. If life has worked out for us, we may settle into a groove of contentment, enjoying the fruits of our lives and offering whatever we can to the world. For these individuals, this time is truly the golden years. On the other hand, life can and does assault some of us — health problems and other conspicuous losses often increase, in which case we may struggle against grief and fear. Either way, we move further down the road of Act 3, accepting that we are now past the summit and on the far side of the mountain.

● **Age 72-73.....opposition (Autumn)**

halfway point (fulfillment) of Act 3 (Seniorhood); recognition that physical vitality will not last forever; third identity crisis (am I my body?)

This passage in our early-70s represents the halfway point in Act 3, our Seniorhoods. For some people, it is the fulfillment of their life-journeys in a kind of gorgeous setting sun. For others, it brings the experience of increasing disintegration, debility, and approaching death. Much depends on health, finances, socialization, and kinship. Alienation and isolation are the enemy. Social sharing, either with families or friends (of all ages, from peers to children) keeps life meaningful. Legacy becomes a primary concern.

● **Age 79-80.....last-quarter square (Winter)**

*3/4 mark of Act 3 (Seniorhood);
bridge between seniorhood and transcendence/death*

The final quarter of Act 3 in Seniorhood represents a release — letting go of involvement in the world. Life belongs to the young and strong, and we are no longer in that cohort. We see and feel the closing of our life-journeys, and transcendence becomes palpable. Depending on our personal and social circumstances, our physical health, and our economic well-being, we may cherish each additional day as a creative adventure or curse every sunrise for the suffering it brings.

● **Age 873rd Saturn Return (Spring)**

*moving into the final phase of transcendence and personal legacy
or confronting the inevitability of impending death*

Most people do not survive long enough to reach their third Saturn Return. Some do and may live well into their 90s. A very few make it to the century mark and beyond. I don't pretend to know the meaning of this fourth Saturn-Saturn cycle. Both literally and symbolically, it is beyond my comprehension. If I get there (which I doubt), I'll report back.