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Saturn:

Experiencing the Authority Within

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confronting our inner authority

Can you remember what it felt like to be a small child in a world of adults? Imagine that you are once again five years old. You're sitting at the dinner table with your parents, eating a typical American dinner of the 1950s, '60s, or even '70s: meat loaf, mashed potatoes with gravy, and canned peas. You've wolfed down your meat loaf, polished off your mashed potatoes, even dutifully drunk the mandatory glass of milk. All that remains are the peas. Yuk... Little green spheres with squishy centers, lots of them, sort of rolling around on your plate, like poison pellets. Double yuk.

You wouldn't eat them on a bet. It's not just that they're alien and strange-looking—the peas are almost frightening in some undefined way, and you're certain that if you eat them something bad will happen. You aren't sure exactly what will happen, but you know without a doubt in your five-year-old feelings that it won't be nice.

You ask to be excused from dinner, whereupon your father peruses the situation and off-handedly comments, *"I see you haven't eaten your peas."*

"No sir," you reply in that nasal whine five year-olds are so good at, *"they'll kill me if I eat them; they're poison."*

"Well," he says, *"they're not poison; they're good for you, and you'll probably learn to enjoy them if you try one or two bites."* Then, in the nonchalant way many fathers have with their five-year-olds, he informs you that *"you will sit at the table until you have eaten at least some of those peas, my young friend,"* adding at the end in a subtly veiled threat, *"and you'll like them, too."*

So you're stuck. Trapped like a rat at the dinner table. You hate those God-awful peas, there's no question, and momentarily you hate your father for imprisoning you in this horrid situation, preventing your escape.

But what do you really hate? What are you really afraid of? Certainly not your father; he's only doing his job, being your father. And how can you hate the peas? Yes, they look queer, and green might not be your favorite color, but how can you hate them without ever having tried them?

The feelings of revulsion are quite real to you, but where did they come from? It's almost as if you'd eaten peas before and gotten sick, almost as if you'd tried to experience them in some invisible dimension of reality, only to suffer awful experiences over and over and over—and now, even at the tender age of five, you remember the suffering of those awful experiences, the haunting pain of old wounds.

Each of us has a layer of oversensitivity existing at birth, analogous to a DNA-code of Gordian knots or Sisyphean labors that will find their way into the biochemical patterns of synapses, neurotransmitters, and hormones. When these patterns become associated with certain situations in real life, they will powerfully conjure up all the images

of entrapment, fear, inadequacy, humiliation, frustration, and failure contained within the collective experience of humankind.

We are not blank slates at birth, coming into life fresh. We are definitely not, as the Declaration of Independence so confidently states, "created equal." While our conceptions might reflect a certain cosmological equality, we are certainly not *born* equal. We are specialized, highly individual beings with a unique relation in time and space to everything around us, including all the history of the universe. From the metaphysical standpoint, we are fully-developed spirits, pre-programmed with intricate and elegant predicaments.

This is not to say that life is no more than mechanical deism, no more magical than a simple playing-out of fated roles. Consciousness is not mere machinery. Yes, there are limits: plant an acorn and you get an oak tree. Not a fir, not an elm, not a birch. Plant an acorn and you get an oak. That much is given. But part of the freedom and wonder of it all, part of the real magic of life, is in seeing what quality of oak will emerge from that particular acorn. What tree will grow from the seed? Will it be tall and straight and strong, or will it succumb to the myriad dangers of disease and debilitation in its environment that may lie in ambush? It is not destiny that persuades one tree to wither while another evolves. The mystery is far more complex.

The dance of life goes on all round us, but the song is contained within. And part of the song is fear and anxiety, however much we might wish it to be otherwise. Every single human being is born with his own particular melody of struggle, his own exceptional memory of tribulation. Fear has no perspective, and as we grow into our lives, any situation is capable of activating those memories, triggering an instant replay of our latent feelings of apprehension. It's the Catch-22, the Murphy's Law—if anything in an environment can scare you, it probably will. Even the innocuous experience of confrontation with a green vegetable can be terrifying.

enter saturn

In astrology these specialized memories are symbolized by the planet Saturn. On the surface of the symbolism, it could be and is too often considered a "negative" symbol, revealing patterns of fear, anxiety, delay, frustration, restraint, inhibition, and numerous other concepts unpleasant to contemplate.

But Saturn represents not only the fear and anxiety woven into life's tapestry, not only the feelings of restraint and inhibition, but also the mechanisms within for coping with those conditions. And that

addition is crucial. While we may talk of Saturn as the planet of fear and restriction, we are not condemning it to negative status in astrology. Saturn reveals both the problem of anxiety and the eventual revelation of a solution through maturity. It is the path toward transcendence of fear through gradual achievement, the long transmutation of the negative into the positive. It is the mundane condition of *attachment* and the spiritual power of *perseverance*.

Saturn's territory is specific. It pertains only to those anxieties we're somehow, almost perversely drawn toward, rather than the general categories of common sense avoidance, which might be termed disinterested fears. We don't throw ourselves off cliffs, because it would be stupid to do so. We walk through the mine-field of life constantly, stepping lightly around disaster at every turn, hardly giving the matter a thought. It is a wonder that we survive at all, but we do, and quite handily. We are unruffled by the presence of life's multitude of demons because we are disinterested in the vast majority of them. We are not attached to them, not sensitized to hysterical degrees. Most of life's routine difficulties lack the essential ingredient of a binder. They lack the power to compel our attention, to force our egos to recognize and feel the awesome anxiety they represent. Most dangers lack sufficient authority to really scare us. And that is one of the critical keys to fear: *authority*.

In our story, the authority is represented by the child's father, a man who has the size and power to command if not total respect, at least passive obedience. And in our individual lives the experience of Saturn is often connected to an external power figure, someone with whom we have a less-than-egalitarian relationship of impact and influence—someone who's got something over us, someone we allow to dominate us. This relationship could be with an older brother or sister whom we admire, or perhaps with a schoolteacher or principal. It could be with a policeman or a lover or even a stranger, and could be projected onto any number of people in life, in reality, anyone in a position to wield over us the power of restriction. It's someone who can imprison us.

But most truly, the Saturn experience deals with the authority inside each of us. While most of us spend our lives projecting this authority outward, looking for it in others, it is finally a quality within. This *authority-within* shows us our limits, defines our work for us, and teaches about achieving slowly, one step at a time.

As a five-year-old, you are concerned only with the new and momentary experience of eating your peas. You are not thinking beyond that. On the contrary, you are probably not thinking at all;

you are simply flowing with the current of instinct, feeling the urgency of the moment.

Your father, however, is thinking about the raising of his child. He's thinking that if he allows you to leave the table without eating any peas, he's setting up a habit pattern within his child that may have ramifications not only in the near future, but in the long run of adult life ahead. If he can convince you that peas are not poison, you may grow up to love vegetables rather than loathe them. In other words, he's considering the use of his authority over you in terms of your life as a whole, the richness of your experience through time. His actions are based on a broader perspective, an appreciation for longer-term ramifications.

This is not to suggest, however, that either father or child inevitably acts with intelligence and grace.

Being a child is difficult enough, but being an ideal parent is nearly Herculean. To always consider a child's ultimate welfare in rule-settings and enforcements is simply beyond the abilities of most parents. What father could honestly say that he has never once taken unfair advantage of the power he wields over his child? However well-loved they are, all children suffer occasionally from the fallibility of their parents.

Besides the issue of parental weakness, there is the question of how to impose discipline to best effect. Authority involves the creation of policy structures—rules, regulations, enforcement procedures, and the karma of specific, well-defined repercussions to any transgression of policy. The purpose of these structures is to both protect and guide those for whom one is responsible.

Although it can be argued that excessive permissiveness and lack of firm, consistent structures can be damaging to children, we have seen over the past century the tragic results of overly authoritarian approaches to parenting. Some fathers are simply not sensitive to their children's capacities to confront fear. Many a young child has been damaged by an introduction to water through the abrupt shock of a sink-or-swim technique. Authorities must balance the importance of learning a lesson against the intensity of immediate anxiety, and this is no simple matter.

Conversely, a five year-old is not a "miniature adult." Parents cannot deal with the child as they would a person of social, ethical, and psychological sophistication. Speaking in terms of metaphysics, a given child may be a highly-evolved spirit from whom we see

shining moments of great insight, wisdom, and maturity. But even the most exalted spiritual being would have trouble assimilating the awesome ego-forces routinely unleashed in human childhood, not to mention the fact that incarnating into a new human body requires an agony of remembering (re-learning). It is one thing to know the divine; it is quite another thing to go through toilet training. Can you imagine an enlightened spirit saying, *"If you make me eat those awful peas, I'll hold my breath until I turn blue—then you'll be sorry!"*

So it's a two-way street. While parents do have their inevitable failings, even the most loving, sensitive, and considerate of fathers may be defeated by a child quick to resent or defy the authority imposed. Children are notoriously irrational in their short-term resistance.

The situation is symbolically the same in the "family" of roles and personalities contained within a single psyche. Judged from the astrological perspective, a person's authority-within may be over-zealous to imprint correct teachings, or insensitive to the ability of the ego to withstand the shock of confrontation with what it fears. Likewise, the ego may be inordinately stubborn in refusing to accept its dharmic responsibilities. To a large extent, the condition of Saturn in the natal chart reveals the characteristic tendencies each person has for these and many more specific difficulties that surround adjustment to the limits of time and space. But even with the information from astrology, there are some levels of this predicament that defy analysis and judgment.

Let's sum up what we've established thus far. For each of us, the Saturn experience symbolizes mental, emotional, and physical involvement in certain fears, vulnerabilities, or inadequacies we sense in ourselves and our worlds. These fears are revealed situationally by an authority-within, a component of the psyche that has a longer perspective on what our developmental work must be in order for us to achieve the wholeness of personality necessary for authentic fulfillment.

For the child in our story, that means he simply can't leave the table until he eats his peas. And that's only one manifestation among many. For each of us in real life, it means sensing which of our fears we are drawn back to again and again—in spite of our ego-insecurity—by an inner voice that "orders" us to confront the problem. These confrontations may appear unimportant to an objective observer, but for us they are peak experiences that involve the conquest of our anxiety and trepidation.

escape strategies

So what do you do as a five-year-old, now that you're stuck at the dinner table? Why, you'd look for a way to get out of eating your peas, of course. And for that, kids have two main strategies.

The first could be called *Avoidance-of-the-Problem*. This boils down to our kid pretending that he isn't caught at the table, that he's not actually a prisoner, and that his peas don't really exist at all. Thus, he plays with his napkin or puts his fingers in his water glass or squirms in his chair. Perhaps he fantasizes that he's riding in a space ship and the peas are the alien target of his seek-and-destroy mission. Anything to escape, by blocking the problem completely. The old four-walls-do-not-a-prison-make gambit.

And with our own lives, we often do the same thing. What do you mean, I have a problem? Certainly not. What do you mean I'm afraid? Afraid of what? Why should I be afraid? I don't see anything to be afraid of. Me afraid? No way. What do you mean I'm inadequate? Me inadequate? Never.

But this is truly a ploy, and one that succeeds only temporarily if at all. The problem for our five-year-old is that his attention span is much shorter than his father's. The father watches, continues eating dinner, and waits patiently, ready to discipline any overly rowdy escape behaviors, knowing full well that his child will exhaust the whole repertoire of time/space fantasies in about two minutes.

Similarly, the authority-within can outwait our elaborately conceived escape plots. It knows that our "What-Me-Worry?" attitude is doomed to fail. Ultimately, reality wins out over fantasy. And the reality inside each of us is that we have certain areas of hard work awaiting us, certain pre-defined metaphysical paths of achievement, certain gradual transformations of fear into accomplishment. It's a complex and awesome alchemy of defeat into victory, one which is engineered by the slow processes of effort and exertion, rather than by the adrenaline rush of fight-or-flight.

So even if our child is able to muster the courage to play with the peas on his plate, to move them around like toy soldiers hoping to fool himself into believing that some change has taken place, he will have to return—eventually for him and rather quickly for his father—to the unpleasant reality staring up at him from his plate. He's trapped. There is no escape.

Many of us complain woefully and long—if not to others at least to ourselves—about the great tragedies in our lives. We complain that we have tried, oh how we have tried, but the obstacles placed in our path are too great. We can't stand it anymore. It is just too much for us (and much too unfair anyway). We doth protest too much, methinks, for often what we are protesting are not failures in true experience, but failures in fantasy and escapism. We are bemoaning the fact that we cannot get away. The failure of this first ploy is mainly self-deception, usually accompanied by complex rationalization and astonishingly selective perception. "*But Dad, you've made me sit here for hours!*" [Actually, it has been less than five minutes...] "*Eating those peas will make me barf!*" [Actually, they'll go right down without so much as a second of real pain...]

But if at first you don't succeed, try, try again. Which brings us to ploy number two, a cunning strategy we might call *Do-It-without-Experiencing-It*. If the first plan—pretending the problem doesn't exist—is typically more universal for children, then this second artifice is more common to adults.

Having exhausted his resources for mental escape, our child at the dinner table is faced with only two remaining options. Since he can't get away he can sit at the table and be miserable in his imprisonment—a fate too awful to contemplate—or he can eat his peas and be done with it, thus freeing himself. So he resolves to eat his peas. But not quite, not honestly.

Children are remarkably Machiavellian in their scheming, although their sophistication may be lacking, and what our five-year-old resolves to do is pile as many peas on his spoon as he can manage, and—carefully now, since the delicacy of balancing nineteen peas on a spoon is no easy trick for a five-year-old—cram them all into his mouth at once while holding his nose with the other hand so as not to have to taste them and then swallow without chewing. *Gulp*. This is a radical technique, but for a child in the fearful state of anxiety, much preferable to actually tasting those horrid little green balls. He hopes this will fool his father into thinking he's done the dirty deed.

Great numbers of us use this ploy in our adulthoods to deal with the rigors of the Saturn experience. We conform to the *letter* of the law while violating the *spirit* of the law.

It's hard to grow up for real. One measure of maturity involves transforming anxieties into achievements, building a deeper capacity for experience in those certain, special areas of our private inadequacies. While many of us make efforts in these directions, we

are often better at "talking the talk" than "walking the walk." Sophistication increases without maturity. We tend to substitute behavioral short-cuts, ways of just "getting through it." It's as if we have emotionally short-circuited ourselves in finding sometimes simple but more often elaborate scenarios for dealing with our fears and doubts. We succumb to Shakespeare's "tangled web" of deception.

But who are we short-sheeting in this deception? Sometimes others, but always ourselves. We rationalize our brains out, and if necessary, we lie our asses off. Our true role calls for conscious, full-hearted awareness; too often, we offer mostly bravado and bombast.

I am not lobbying here for a cynically negative view of human nature. I believe the bulk of humanity to be composed of people with essentially good hearts and the best of intentions. Sincere contrition and authentic remorse are not rare experiences for most of us. When we come around to realizing the damage we may have done to ourselves or others through denial, rationalization, deception, or any other form of personal irresponsibility, we can be quite noble in our desire to make things right. But that is usually well after the fact.

Day-in and day-out, human beings exhibit a near-pathological tendency to hide from the truth in moments of confrontation with our inner authorities, especially as these take shape in and are reflected by outer circumstances. Trapped between a rock and a hard place, we revert to the brain-stem cunning of our animal ancestry in a semi-conscious effort to protect our egos from being ripped away, and the magnificent, logical structures of our neocortexes are suddenly slaves to our terrified emotions.

We transform instantly into confidence artists running low-life scams, selling the Brooklyn Bridge, swamp land in Florida, Rolex knock-offs, and felthy French postcards to an unsuspecting world that had no intention of triggering our hysteria. But the world quickly senses that something is rotten in Denmark.

Everything in our vibration quivers, and the vibrational lie detector needles fly off the chart. You can fool some of the people some of the time, and all of the people some of the time, but you can't fool all the people all the time.

In this second strategy we are no longer trying to fool ourselves, although that often continues to occur, but we are trying to "get away with murder," attempting to deceive the authority-within into letting

us off the hook. With the first ploy, we endeavor to fool ourselves; with the second, we set out to fool the world. Neither works.

The child may enter into manipulative negotiations with his father: "*But Dad, you said I only had to eat half of them.*" [Actually, he has eaten a mere two spoonsful. The rest of the peas are hidden under the slice of Wonder Bread.] He may throw tantrums: "*You're a terrible father! If you loved me, you wouldn't do this! I hate you!*" [Actually, the child doesn't hate his father; he's just frustrated. And the father loves his child very much.]

Much of the time, the father sees right through these gambits. In that event, he is able to maintain both his composure and his firm resolve. The level of our psyche symbolized by Saturn is remarkably cool in the face of the most intense pressure from the frightened ego. We can beg, plead, and cajole to no avail. Saturn looks us straight in the eye and says, "*This is reality. Stop whining and accept it. Stop bitching and deal with it. Stop resisting and move through it. Stop denying and experience it.*"

But even the most patient father has a limit. He may lose his cool and slap the child, a tragedy for everyone involved. He may partially succumb and send the child to his room, a punishment that is only a pyrrhic victory, since the child escapes eating his peas and may regard the paradise of his room as a victory over his father. Or the father may cave in completely, throw up his hands, and give in to any of the ploys his child attempts, releasing him completely from the selected responsibility.

If, on the other hand, the child succeeds in deceiving his father into thinking that he ate his peas when in fact he didn't, then he achieves his immediate objective, freedom from the dinner table. But in so doing he sets up a lie that he will have to deal with later. There is the issue of false pride, often accompanied by unconscious guilt. There is additionally the damage to the father-child relationship. What the father doesn't know won't hurt him, but the memory of the lie persists in our five-year-old's conscience, creating a psychological distance from his father. Momentary descent into cunning creates the need for later, more complex rationalizations. What was intended to be felt as a loving interaction becomes gradually more an adversary relation, a competition to win.

In most of our lives, habit structures are developed for doing what we don't like without truly "tasting" it. We get around the authority-within by justifying to it and ourselves that we have indeed done what we had to do, what we were supposed to do. We don't grow,

we just get sophisticated. And as these structures deepen over the years, our relation to the authority-within disintegrates.

This inner authority is not separate. It is a part of ourselves—not something outside. We are spiritually entitled to love all our facets, which includes our inner authority. But most of us end up fighting ourselves. We have met the enemy and he is us. So what should we do to grow up, to love ourselves? How do we gracefully relax into ourselves—all our selves—including our inner father? Sometimes it's easier to finally start climbing our mountains than trying to make the damn things go away.

the mountain

The Saturn experience is like having a mountain in your backyard. Every time you go outside, there it is, looming up into the clouds, casting its inevitable shadow over your life, not only inviting you to climb, but challenging you to do so, finally admonishing you, chiding you with its brooding, silent presence. Why even consider climbing it when the risks are so formidable? To use the famous answer by British explorer Sir Edmund Hillary: "Because it's *there*."

The mountain is there within each of us, individual, idiosyncratic, in some shape or texture, in public or private form, emotional or physical or mental or rational or psychic or sexual. The challenge is not one of conquest, for being at the top is not the point of the Saturn experience, although it may be the lure that keeps us focused on the ambition, the carrot dangled in front of the donkey. The challenge is to climb the mountain, to experience the climb, and in that experience, to gain a sense of mastery over our fears. If there is any conquest, it is this conquest of fear, of inadequacy, and of the crippling sense of personal failure.

You cannot avoid or ignore the mountain, can't pretend it isn't there. It stands silent and haunting above you, reaching down from the super-conscious into the everyday self. Each time you go out of your secure little house, there it is. Each time you extend yourself into the world, there it is. You can put off the climb, postponing it indefinitely, but that course leads to a life unfulfilled and the existential bitterness that accompanies feelings of cowardice. You can cheat yourself by taking the cable-car to the top, boasting to yourself and the world of the breath-taking view from the summit, creating fish-stories of your climb and the rigors it entailed. But the hollow echo of emptiness will ring out inside you, the sound of your own voice bouncing back from across the chasm. Because in that case you won't truly be touching anything or anyone with real heart.

We don't need to look for our mountain. It will find us. The authority-within will see to that. We need only to recognize its existence, to pay homage to it (in the Oriental sense), or to love our divine enemy (as in the Christian ethos). This must occur over and over, during each significant phase of life (especially at the crucial seven-year-quarter gear shifts of major Saturn cycles), because the mountain will change shape and size as our lives develop. We may sincerely believe we have climbed it once and for all, that we have understood and deflated our oversensitivities and anxious obsessions, only to discover later that we were not at the summit, only a temporary ridge-top, and that our doubts and failure-imprints are renewed with each new evolutionary period in our lives. We may realize that the mountain doesn't have a peak at all, but continues to grow slightly beyond our accomplishments. That is very probably part of the human condition—as long as you're in a body, you're still working it out.

So you have a mountain in your backyard. It looms up 20,000 feet, blocking out the sun. If you're ever going to get a really good tan, you'll have to climb it.

I have a mountain in my backyard too. Mine is also 20,000 feet. But my mountain appears to you as little more than a foothill. Yours appears equally small to me. This is a critical point to understand. Our mountains are ours alone. No one else can climb them for us. No one else even recognizes them as mountains. In pragmatic terms, your fears and inadequacies are not immediately apparent to me, nor are mine to you. We may have to know each other for quite awhile before the unique patterns of anxiety or neurosis in each of us become apparent to the other. Once we do comprehend them in each other, we marvel that we ever could have missed them. Patterns of behavior, feeling, and communication that were previously incomprehensible become crystal-clear.

mountain-climbing strategies

To increase pure consciousness most effectively, the Saturn experience needs to be dealt with by path orientation rather than goal orientation. It's not how fast you get to the top that counts, nor how much you suffer along the way, but rather how you're able to assimilate as you go, deriving satisfaction from the climb itself, gaining spiritual certainty even as your physical resources are used up.

Can you feel the mountain with each step? Are you understanding why it's in your life? Each night when you make camp are you focused on how many more thousand feet you have yet to cover, or upon the experiences of that day's climbing? Do you linger with frustrated thoughts of the ravines and crevices that delayed you, of the rock slides that buried you, of the snowstorms that blinded you? Or do you see in the mind's eye the ingenuity with which you persevered, the inner stamina that developed, the increasing purity of the air you breathe at higher altitude?

Imagine the actual experience of mountain-climbing. The prospective climber does not gaze up at the awesome mountain one sunny afternoon and say, "*I think I'll climb this mountain today,*" as if it were an afternoon's lark, a quick jog around the block. No. The actual statement is more likely to be, "*I think I'd like to climb this mountain someday.*" That is the beginning of a long process of preparation. Resources must be acquired, plans must be made, a team must be assembled. While these preparations slowly take shape, training regimens must be followed. The discipline of fitness is crucial if the arduous climb is to be a success. The team may make numerous trial climbs of slopes on similar but smaller mountains.

Preparing to deal with our fears involves a similar sequence of experience. First, we realize that our progress through life is blocked at certain junctures. Then we discover that these various blocks are patterns that repeat in our lives. As we grow in awareness of our inner mountain and its external manifestations, we experience both fear and ambition. "*Why is this happening to me? Are the Gods against me? Oh yeah, well, I'll show them—someday.*" We begin to consider strategies and tactics for dealing with the obstacles that keep us away from fulfillment. We plan, develop resources, and look for help.

Beyond mere preparation is the challenge of actually climbing the mountain. One might presume mountain-climbing to be a fairly straightforward experience: start at the bottom and climb toward the top, with each day's ascent marking a gain over the previous heights achieved. In much the same logic, some people believe—naively—that dealing with their inner authority, their ambitions, and their fears will be a straightforward, linear progression. They expect each successive period in their lives to represent a higher plateau of achievement in the conquest of fear. Nothing could be further from the truth.

In climbing a mountain, the first phase of the expedition is to establish a base camp. This is the tail end of what will eventually become a line of supply, with base camp representing the supply

depot. The mountain itself will provide little if any sustenance along the way, and none at higher elevations, so everything the climbers need—food, shelter, and other gear—must be carried along with them. Outfitted with as many supplies from base camp as each climber can comfortably manage, the trek up the mountain can then begin in earnest.

The climbers face a number of double-edged swords: when they begin, they are well-stocked and secure, but the sheer weight of supplies they carry slows them down. They will consume part of their supplies as they go, and we might presume that the decreased weight would lead to an accelerated pace, but this is offset by progressive weariness from the effort of climbing. They may be lighter, but they are also more tired. In addition, the mountain becomes steeper, more challenging, more difficult to climb as they move higher up its slopes.

In the same way, dealing with the implications of our Saturns requires us to be well-outfitted at the start. Building the edifice of ambition in the world requires a start-up investment of energy and capital. No one is likely to initially face the demons of his or her worst fears without the ballast of extra confidence. Armed with this burst of confidence, we are also weighed down by its very bravado. At the start, we really don't know what we're getting into, and our tendency is to assault the mountain rather than to climb its first gentle slopes with deliberate pacing. We will soon discover, however, that our fears are not so easily conquered, and that carrying the sustenance of courage and confidence can tax the psyche, draining our strength by the amount of consciousness involved.

up and down the mountain

Early on, the mountain-climbers will reach a point where their physical energy, food, and fuel are, say, one-third used up. Technically, they could continue climbing, but inevitably they would reach a point where their supplies were completely exhausted, and then they would be in big trouble: caught part-way up the mountain, unable to move higher, yet without the supplies necessary to sustain their descent. So instead of continuing the climb with single-minded focus on the distant summit, they must now halt their upward journey to establish a *second* supply camp where they stash the bulk of their remaining supplies. At that point, the climbers have no alternative but to come back down the mountain. They must relinquish all the ground they gained, returning to base camp, sustained on the way down only by their slim remaining supplies, from which to re-stock with fresh resources.

Consider the climbers' psychological state as they descend the slopes. Having achieved perhaps only one-tenth of their ascent, here they are coming back down, returning to their starting point. Once they arrive at base camp, they will rest, re-stock, and turn to face the mountain again. When they renew their ascent, it won't be merely *like* starting over, it will be *literally* starting over. Can we conceive that they might be at least slightly despondent?

Most of us have experienced the seeming conquest of one or another of our fears, along with the elation and deepened confidence—not to mention the relief—that comes with such success. And most of us have also experienced the stinging shock of disillusionment that occurs when, sometimes years or even decades later, we discover that the fear we thought we'd banished for good returns to mock and humiliate us again. In those awful moments, our embarrassment is balanced with outrage: "Now hold on, I've already done this one! I sweated blood to beat that terror. It was gone. I know it was gone. How the hell can it be back, tormenting me again? This isn't fair." No, of course it isn't fair; it's physics. It's the way of things here on earth, living in the forms of these bodies, working with the psyches that structure our evolving consciousness.

Back to our climbers. They arrive again at the second supply camp. This time they move on, climbing higher until they reach the point where a third supply depot must be established. Now they come down once more, back to the second camp, to pick up fresh supplies and make the climb back up to stock the third camp.

You see where the scenario is headed. The entire slope of the mountain, from base to near-summit, will eventually be dotted with supply camps along the way, perhaps five or six such depots in all. During the ascent, the climbers must periodically reverse themselves to re-stock each depot in the chain. And so they go up and down the mountain in fits and spurts, periodically making new progress, but most of the time re-tracing their steps over and over along the ascent.

The logistics of re-supply are much more challenging than actually climbing the mountain. Climbing is tiring, but equally exhilarating. Each new plateau is another victory. Maintaining the supply line to insure survival, however, is the nightmare. Imagine what it would be like as a climber to reach the fifth supply camp, only to realize that in attaining that height, the intermediate supply camps have been exhausted. Consider the frustration of being forced to turn around and come back down the mountain, past camp four and three and two, all the way to the base camp at the bottom.

In order to climb the mountain and eventually reach the summit (psychologically: the summit of true maturity, with its understanding and acceptance of reality) we will have to go up and down the mountain many times, in small bites. This is necessary to avoid complete exhaustion of our confidence. It is a lesson in patience, in pacing, the alternation of sustained effort with careful rest. If we refuse to learn patience, racing up the mountain toward the summit, we will find ourselves stranded, lost, in danger of losing our souls. If, having already been up and down the mountain many times, we gaze up from the bottom and rail at the Gods, we harm only ourselves.

When we want to build a road or bridge a chasm in the non-Saturnian areas of our growth, we simply call in the highway department or the Army Corps of Engineers. We are permitted any and all the help we can find in arenas of personal circumstance that do not touch the symbolism of Saturn in our lives. But in those areas where Saturn applies, we will pointedly receive little or no help. Saturnian paths are created one step at a time, and they become pathways only because we walk over them, up and down, time and again. It is because we must re-trace our steps so often that the slopes become walkable. The jagged rocks are worn smooth because we will tread over them—back and forth—a thousand times.

the saturn challenge

Our challenge is to grow up, to keep the essence of child-like wonder while shedding our childish illusions. Our challenge is to stand as tall in mature dignity as our mountain is high in over-sensitivity. We need to become tough and resilient—not hardened, but tempered.

If Saturn in your natal chart touches on the experience of mentality, you feel utterly stupid, mentally damaged, incapable of learning or understanding or communicating, enraged that others are so much smarter. In school, you hide your humiliation in silence or become the class clown, mocking your own thickness but hating the role. You give up and drop out, only to discover that your life narrows to a dead end, so you swallow your pride and hit the books again. Finally, you educate yourself, and relax into your deep curiosity and will to learn. Eventually you feel more confident in your intelligence than those whose mentality is not limited by Saturn, for you know that you earned your smarts and savvy in the school of hard knocks.

If your Saturn is about sexuality, you feel completely unattractive, trapped in a world where everyone else seems beautiful and sensual

and fulfilled. No one would ever want you, you tell yourself. Like the old Groucho Marx joke, you wouldn't belong to any club that would have someone like you for a member. You hurl yourself from bed to bed, from lover to lover, and yet you loathe the experiences. You fake it out of fear. You retreat into the convent and swear celibacy, but that cynical escape leaves you feeling hollow and empty, and rings just as false. But you also have moments of certainty that you are the world's greatest lover, imbued with a special radiance of passion. If you mature, bravado and insecurity give way to seasoning and humility, and your blend of tough and tender attracts profound magic in touch.

And so it goes. Wherever Saturn is located in your natal chart, whatever growth processes, life experiences, and arenas of circumstance are symbolically indicated as part of your mountain, you are likely to log both the best and the worst of what this planet has to offer. You will earn the best, and you will feel condemned to the worst.

Along the mountain-climbing of the Saturn experience, we will have many moments of grandeur where our efforts are rewarded with a panoramic view from higher than we've ever been before. And we will also have many moments of coming back down the mountain, sometimes all the way to the bottom. In those sometimes lengthy phases we must fight depression, despondency, and cynicism, for we will feel as if our entire lives have been a waste, as if nothing we've ever achieved counted for anything, as if we had been sent back to kindergarten. The shame of these emotions can be debilitating, and we need to remind ourselves that we are not failures. Instead, we are courageous mountain-climbers who embody not only strength and skill, but also fortitude. We are people who can shoulder our burdens and bounce back from adversity. As the I Ching says, perseverance furthers.

Time is the great teacher... Time... Kronos... Saturn.

