

THE SATURN CYCLES

Forging the “Diamond Soul”

by Anne Whitaker

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“Just as water flows downhill, the tendency in all of nature is to take the easiest path. That direction, however, is not the path of personal growth.”¹

“... Saturn’s heat and pressure are needed in order that we can develop what Buddhists call the ‘diamond soul.’”²

Ilike both of these quotes very much. The first conveys a basic realization about life that needs to dawn by the first Saturn return, so that in terms of personal growth, we can gain real benefit from the unfolding of Saturn’s second cycle. The second quote contains a marvelous image of what the rewards can be during the second Saturn cycle as we grapple with the stern demands of the Saturn archetype.

During the first cycle, the major task is to find a place to *stand* in our lives and perceive a few reliable landmarks from which to take bearings, so that we can face life more than retreat from it. Then from age 29–30 onward, we can begin to extend and deepen the various possibilities that our lives contain — a process culminating in the second Saturn return at the age of 58–59. After this point of stocktaking, the third and final cycle begins. However, before being able to define clearly what the psychological changes and challenges of the three cycles are, it is necessary to define the *essence* of what the Saturn archetype brings into our personal lives.

I find it beautifully symbolic that the cycle of the progressed Moon runs closely with the Saturn cycle. The progressed Moon talks about our inextricable connection with the rhythms of life — its cycles and its limits. It describes the necessity of separating out and moving on from one period of experience to another, if we are to develop texture and complexity. But it also explains our drive to be safe and secure and to keep ourselves in familiar territory. The progressed Sun challenges the latter need, pushing us to differentiate, to take risks, to “follow our bliss.”

The Saturn archetype, however, contains *both* dimensions of this inner soli-lunar dynamic described by the progressed Sun and Moon, and it can be seen as their external worldly agent. Saturn, as life’s challenging, defining, and shaping principle, clearly says to each newly born individual, “Anything you can achieve in your life is confined by the inevitability of your mortality and by the givens described in your birth chart. In terms of complete Saturn cycles, you have three to work with at the most. Now get on with it — see how far you can go!”

At the start of life, all is potential. As the Saturn cycles unfold, they describe how that potential gradually crystallizes, concretizes, until by the end there is nothing left to develop in this lifetime. The challenges presented by Saturn have at their core the demand that we become who *we are* and who *we can be* as fully as possible, by separating from that which *we are not* and *could never be*.

There are important differences in the developmental demands of the stages symbolized by the three major cycles of Saturn. The first, from birth to age 29–30, is the *thesis* stage. It is the most intensely physical and energetic and the least conscious cycle. It is about building the platform on which to

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stand in life. The second cycle, from 29–30 to 58–59, is the *antithesis* stage. The initial structure is tested and challenged to grow; awareness and consciousness are more fully developed; life’s goals are pursued and hopefully achieved to a sufficient degree in order to bring at least a tolerable level of satisfaction. In the *synthesis* stage, culminating at age 87–88, ideally there is a bringing together and summing-up of what

one's life has meant, and a shifting of emphasis from worldly achievement to reflection and spiritual maturing. There is an acceptance of, and preparation for, the inevitable physical decline that ends in the death of the physical body.

I find the Saturn archetype profoundly paradoxical. On the one hand, Saturn represents that which nails us to the cross of matter and holds us in the world of form. On the other hand, when Saturn's challenges have been patiently and honestly worked with, and a mature realism arrived at, the sense of freedom of spirit that can then be released is immense — full of the potential for satisfaction and joy. This sense of freedom is unconfined, because it does not relate to matter at all. I am sure this is what the Buddhists mean when they talk about the “diamond soul.”

First Saturn Return Cycle

We all arrive at the first Saturn return at the age of 29–30. Whether we know we're having one or not, the broad determinants are the same. My metaphor for this return is the recollection I have of a science class, where I was fascinated to observe the growth of a copper sulfate crystal which, over a period of weeks, emerged from clear blue water into a highly defined, beautiful, crystalline shape. At the first Saturn return, the crystalline shape that must emerge is that of *realism*. In a developmentally healthy person, the purity of that crystal of realism isn't overly tainted by bitterness, cynicism, or disillusionment, all of which corrode the soul and limit the potential for further growth. As the crystal of realism emerges, it may well carry with it some pain, grief, and depression. This is healthy and normal enough as part of the process of getting through the 27- to 30-year period. We know from observation of the lives of others, and our own, that this period is critical.

To an astrologer's perception, this age range's critical nature is emphasized by the knowledge that ages 27 to 30 bring four major symbolic patterns that are all about differentiation, individuation, and the facing and purging of illusions that hold us back from realising our full potential. These patterns are: the second transit of the North Node to the natal South Node's position at age 27; the progressed Moon's return around age 27; transiting Pluto to natal Neptune between ages 27 and 29;³ and, of course, the Saturn return at age 29–30, which seems to focus the three other patterns.

Letting go of the illusions and defenses that buffer us from the poundings of life, but which also limit our becoming what we may most fully be, can be desperately painful. During this period, I was forced to give up my long-cherished illusion of being a writer. It gave me a secret sense of superiority over the rest of the world and met my profound need to be special and different. When put to the test between ages 27 and 30, this illusion crumbled. I realised that I had writing talent, for which I received some public recognition, but I also discovered that I lacked the single-minded drive that keeps one at it full-time. Without shedding my illusion and moving on, I would never have been able to develop my other gifts and talents, which began to take shape from my Saturn return onward.

The development of an internal “locus of evaluation” — a sound sense of one's own worth that isn't overly dependent on the approval of parents, colleagues, partners, or peers — is another psychological change that should be happen-

ing to a reasonably substantial degree by the first Saturn return. This marks the point in life where we are no longer seen as children or even very young adults by the larger world. We are expected to take responsibility for our own actions and to be effective in the world as workers, partners, parents, and friends, with no excuses or allowances having to be made for our youth and immaturity.

Ideally, we should also have developed a sense of what the boundary is between our parents and ourselves — between their demands of us and ours of them — and how to respond

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to them in a mature fashion without falling prey to old child-like patterns of behavior. If our parents haven't been mature enough to let go of us, we should be well on the way toward having the maturity to draw our own boundaries.

Although there is a common core to the rites of passage we all face, birth charts show that there are as many different Saturn returns as there are individuals. With **Saturn in a fire sign**, one's core challenge is to find faith in life which, in turn, fuels the struggle to establish an unshakable sense of self-worth and of the special nature of one's contributions to the world. The **Saturn-in-water** person's major task is to come to terms with the inevitability that we are all separate and alone, no matter how much we may love other people or be loved by them. For **Saturn in air**, developing mental discipline, establishing intellectual credibility, and contributing worthwhile ideas to collective life are key formative tasks. The **Saturn-in-earth** person, to a greater extent than the other three elements, must form a sound relationship with the world of everyday reality, and honor the physical and material dimensions of life in order to feel at peace within. Each will have a different journey through the first formative Saturn cycle.

The sign and house position of Saturn (as well as whether it is angular or not), the lunar nodes, Chiron, and other planetary connections provide the fine-tuning that shows the relationship between the archetypal forces present in all of life and the many differing ways they may manifest individually.

Whether a person is functioning in a healthy way by the first Saturn return is dependent psychologically on how well he or she has negotiated the first three stages of the cycle. For example, those who have been unable to effectively separate from their mothers at the waxing square at age 7–8 may still be locked into a dependent relationship at age 29–30, and this will distort their development as the second cycle begins. Those without long-term partners, unable as yet to mature from the challenges of the first opposition at age 14–15, may not see that being alone is better than being in an unfulfilling partnership, and are likely to carry some self-destructive relationship patterns into the next cycle. And finally, those who have failed to negotiate effective entry into the adult working world at the

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waning square of age 21–22 are likely to have even more difficulty as their thirties advance, unless they can begin to see what self-defeating patterns are blocking their path.

Everyone has their distortions, their failures, and their blind spots. The gift of the first Saturn return is that the pressures it inevitably applies bring a great opportunity for us to look at those very aspects we have hitherto been unable to face. Saturn turns up the heat and pressure so much that the price of continued avoidance usually becomes higher than we are prepared to pay. Thus, realizing at a heart and soul level that “... *the easiest path ... is not the path of personal growth*” has been the major turning point of many a life.

I find it very satisfying to work with clients who are either in the 27- to 30-year phase, or have been through the first Saturn return and are taking stock at the beginning of the second cycle. It is here that the gifts of astrology are at their most potent, but only if people are willing to face who they are and be open to exploring some possible avenues of development that a good astrology reading can provide.

Clients who are strongly plugged into the energies symbolized by Uranus, Neptune, and/or Pluto can take a very

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long time to bring these connections into consciousness. The usual pattern is to be battered and buffeted by these forces right up until the age of 30 and beyond. It usually takes at least this long for such individuals to begin to comprehend their relationship with those great impersonal forces. Then they can *consciously* begin to align the personal with the impersonal in a more aware, less fearful, and therefore more creative way.

Until age 30, life’s energy is waxing. The first Saturn return could be seen as the Full Moon point of life. Thereafter,

the body starts to die, energy to wane, and our ability to recover from self-inflicted punishment and the batterings of life begins to diminish. Consequently, the margin for serious errors — from which one can recover and even benefit — grows inexorably narrower. The development of self-awareness and a realistic appreciation of both one’s gifts and limitations becomes ever more important.

Second Saturn Return Cycle

Saturn is the planet of strict justice. Blind, stubborn, arrogant, or fearful refusal to face certain basic realities in life, as the second Saturn cycle unfolds, skews the life path further and further away from who we could become, were we able to acknowledge and accept who we actually *are* rather than try to be who we *are not*. This brings increasing pain, dissatisfaction, emptiness, depression, and perhaps despair, as the second Saturn return approaches.

By the second Saturn return, we can see what our lives have become — and we can see what it is too late to change. This is one of the most fundamental differences in perspective between the first and second return. At age 30, we have probably still to sow the most productive seeds of our lives — what we have already sown is still only germinating. But by the approach of 60, we are reaping the harvest and are confronted with the stark Biblical words, “As you sow, so shall you reap.”

At one end of the spectrum are those who arrive at this stage feeling that their time on this Earth has not been wasted. They have very few regrets and are prepared to face the final cycle of life with equanimity, perhaps rooted in great spiritual depth. These people usually retain a great zest for life and its remaining possibilities. At the other end are those who have sown meanly, poorly, or fearfully and are reaping a harvest of regret, bitterness, loneliness, physical ill health, and fear of the waning of physical power and attractiveness in the inevitable decline toward death.

Most of us will arrive somewhere in the middle range, satisfied with some aspects of our achievement and disappointed by our areas of failure — or those things that fate appears to have denied us without our having had much option for negotiation. I see the main challenges of this stage as follows: first, to value what we *have* been able to do; second, to come to terms with and accept those failures or disappointments that it is now too late to change; and third, to find within the limitations and constraints, imposed by our state of mind, body,

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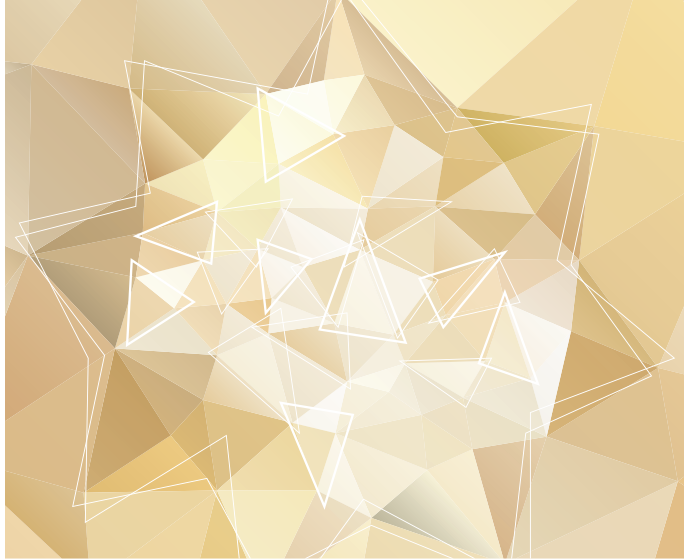
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2016 Postscript

Well, I *have* lived that long, and without as yet feeling the need to indulge in the John Donne option! A friend of mine remarked recently, with grim humour, that after the age of 60 anyone not in pain from one thing or another is probably dead. Another older friend also remarked, “Growing old is not for softies ...”

They are right, up to a point. There are many positives to being an Elder, but let’s get the minuses out of the way first. Nothing works as well as it once did — from joints to the digestive system to memory (for people’s names or what you did yesterday or even five minutes ago). Some of us have to live with debilitating conditions like arthritis, hearing loss, eyesight problems, or diabetes. Juggling responsibilities between grandchildren and increasingly frail elderly parents is a major challenge for many. Money is often tighter than it was. There is the stark realisation, during the final Saturn cycle, that we are moving toward the end of our time on Earth.

Despite those realities, I can honestly report feeling freer and more at peace now than ever before. From my experience, and that of friends, family, and clients who are well into the third Saturn cycle, the key is to *embrace* being an Elder, facing as best we can the challenges laid out in the latter part of the above article. In sum, what I have learned since I wrote it 20 years ago is as follows: The best way to prepare for the end of life is to live out what time is left as fully and authentically as possible.

One of my delights in returning to the teaching and practice of astrology, after a very long Neptunian absence, has

spirit, and bank balance, some further goals that are realistically achievable, which can bring a sense of meaning and enjoyment to whatever time we have left.

To end on a personal note, I agree with Jung’s dictum that a major task for the second half of life is preparation for the end of it — this is not morbid but full of wisdom. I intend to start specifically, rather than tangentially, to prepare for the end of my life by the time I get through the second Saturn return, if I live that long. Whether I will take it as far as the 16th-century poet John Donne, who practiced for his death by lying in his coffin on a daily basis in the latter years of his life, I don’t know. But with an exact Saturn–Pluto conjunction, also conjunct Mercury, Venus, the Moon, and the Sun, I can’t pretend that the idea doesn’t appeal to me!

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been the re-encountering of clients and students who, thanks to the Internet and social media, have found me again for horoscope updates, more classes, or both, in the last four years. Cheeringly, most of the clients I last saw when in their 30s and 40s, now in their 60s or older, are coping with the process of aging pretty well, finding new freedoms and satisfactions. Some typical observations have been: “I am more **me** than I have ever been,” “I do what I want to do far more than when I was younger,” “I no longer care much, if at all, what anyone thinks,” and “I have got rid of the hangers-on and hung onto my **real** friends.” Three members of my astrology tutorial class are women in their 60s, and they are such fun to teach. They are warm, witty, wise, and very sharp. Working with them and enjoying their insights is a real gift.

The happiest Elders I know have important things in common. *One*, they are aware of life’s fragility and do not pretend otherwise. They choose to live in the moment as much as possible, taking pleasure in life’s many gifts, no matter how small. *Two*, they are glad to offer time and experience to help both younger and older folks in their various communities. And *three*, they have varied but deeply rooted spiritual beliefs.

They have tried their best, given the inevitable frailties and limitations, to honour Saturn. And Saturn, dispenser of strict justice, is thus far returning the compliment.

References and Notes

1. Alexander Ruperti, *Cycles of Becoming: The Planetary Pattern of Growth*, CRCS Publications, 1978, p. 56; reprint edition by Earthwalk School of Astrology Publishing, 2005.
2. Stephen Arroyo, *Astrology, Karma & Transformation: The Inner Dimensions of the Birth Chart*, CRCS Publications, 1978, p. 73; reprint edition, 2013.

3. *Editor’s Note:* This pattern is confined to an approximate 100-year period that has the following criteria: (1) the Neptune–Pluto sextile, which moved into orb in the early 1940s and continues well into the 21st century; and (2) Pluto’s current rate of passage through the zodiac signs. This pattern begins with people born around 1920 and ends for those who will be born after 2015.

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