

*What happens after mid-life? After 50? After the Chiron return? Quite a lot really!
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BRAVE NEW WORLD:

Forward into the Fifties

By Brian Clark

*“we cannot live in the afternoon of life according to the programme of life's morning;
for what was great in the morning will be little at evening, and
what in the morning was true will at evening become a lie.”¹*

- Carl G. Jung

Three days before my exact Chiron return I had an appointment with a skin specialist as a cyst had erupted under my eyebrow. The cyst had made its untimely appearance on the morning of my 50th birthday celebration; another unwanted reminder that the body was involuntarily reshaping and changing itself. Cautious, since I have previously had a cancerous cyst removed from the same location, I made the appointment.

The doctor confirmed it was only a sebaceous cyst that needed removing. Prompted by a watercolour on his office wall, a conversation began about how places we once loved change. We shared our disappointment at how we have returned to special, magical places only to find them commercially overdeveloped and spoilt. We agreed that it was unwise to go back to try to recapture something that existed in a time before this time. In the middle of our polite conversation, the doctor suddenly said: “I have had a life threatening illness this year!” The doctor had relinquished his position of authority, and the confession had made him vulnerable. I was immediately confronted since the conversation had become immensely personal. And I felt I did

¹ CG Jung, *Volume 8 The Collected Works, The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche*, translated by RFC Hull, Routledge & Kegan Paul (London: 1960). 784.

not have enough time to pursue this new direction in our conversation: I had to get back to the office for *my* next client. Almost immediately I was able to let that go, as something important was happening at that very moment. I nodded empathetically, and he continued. For the next twenty minutes we talked about his brush with death, the cancerous kidney that had been removed, his sabbatical and lifestyle change, his fear about how long he had left, his disappointments and hopes, his uncertain future. Mainly he talked about this New World he had entered; ironically his death sentence was allowing him to shape his life in a way he had never imagined. I continued to listen. Curious, I asked how old he was. “Fifty three”, he said. Then embarrassment descended and he mumbled something about holding me captive with his boring stories. We shook hands; I wished him luck and left his office. Was it easier to tell a complete stranger about your fears of dying?

I arrived at my office just in time for my first consultation. The client was also 53, although the synchronicity did not sink in at that moment. Three years before she had a tumour removed from her brain. Her recovery had been arduous, but successful, and the woman who sat across from me was vivacious, and determined not to walk down paths chosen out of guilt, fear or pressure to conform. She was determined to follow a path her spirit invited her down, even if that way collided with her pragmatic self.

In the evening, reflecting on what had occurred during the day, my conversation with the doctor surfaced. Synchronous to my Chiron return, I pondered on the significance of the wounded doctor who had shared his vulnerability with me. The doctor’s wound had called him to the threshold of death, a threshold he could cross at anytime. This theme also resonated with the client who had the brain tumour at her Chiron return. Her recovery regenerated a determined spirit, which infused her with a new enthusiasm for life.

I began to accept that I too was on a threshold of change. Turning 50 was a momentous watershed. I had complained and grizzled about getting old and losing my vitality, openly mourned for the death of youth and all its accoutrements and resigned myself to a grumpy future. On the morning of my 50th I awoke with relief

that I had arrived and that it was not so bad: could even be OK! Ahead lay the next decade of my life, a decade which as an astrologer I had already mapped and studied. But for the first time the possible roadways on the map had new meaning. And the crisis of finding new meaning for the forward journey seemed to be a dominant feature on the horizon of the fifties.

The 50's decade is embraced by two potent astrological symbols: the first Chiron return and the second Saturn return (which occurs with the fifth Jupiter return). This decade is also punctuated by two other important returns, which are often underestimated: the second progressed lunar return and the third nodal return. These occur mid-stream. Up until these returns the crisis of meaning dominates. The hunger to nourish the soul is ever present. The Chiron return and its subsequent years present the misshapen aspects of ourselves, which the body and the psyche are forced to accommodate. What was sacrificed to find our niche in the world and to conform to worldly expectations challenges us to reconsider earlier choices. Also in the midst of the decade all three outer planets are trining their natal positions², a blatant clue to the potential psychological integration taking place, as well as the variety of choices available for this task to be successful. In all, five cycles are renewed in this decade, which suggest the psychological alignments occurring throughout the 50's are profound. At present the Pluto in Leo generation are journeying this passage. The oldest member of this group is 62 at the turn of the millennium while their youngest sibling is 41.³ The generation that worshipped immortality, eternity, youthfulness, and the magical child are navigating a new territory, a brave new world, which challenges these constructs.

When the generation now turning fifty looks back to their parents at fifty, the changes that have occurred are startling. Life expectancy, medical technology, life-styles, the family life cycle and retirement options have redefined the landscape of growing

² Uranus is in waning trine to its natal position at approximately age 54-56. Neptune is in waxing trine to its natal position at approximately 55. These ages will vary due to the ellipse of the planetary orbit and the retrogradation cycle. For the current mid 50-ers, Pluto will trine itself around the age of 55. Also during this passage Uranus is opposing Pluto while Pluto opposes Uranus. Again due to Pluto's very elliptical orbit this will vary. For those at the end of the decade Neptune has opposed Pluto.

³ Pluto went into Leo for the first time (UT) on 7 October, 1937 and exited Leo on 10 June, 1958 for the last time. (Neil F. Michelsen, *Tables of Planetary Phenomena*, ACS Publications, San Diego, CA: 1990).

older. Pop psychology is labeling forty the ‘new thirty’, middle age is middle youth and the decade of the fifties has become the ‘invisible decade’.⁴ Erik Erikson, one of the foremost researchers into the life cycle, suggested that the fifties were the beginning of a matured adulthood. During this time the task was to care for what is meaningful to us, not what others judge as important, but which is intimately creative and restorative to the individual.⁵

Initiation: Chiron’s Return at 50

‘The Chiron Return poses the question:

“What am I going to do with this last part of my life?”’⁶

-Melanie Reinhart

Chiron returns near the 50th. Since its discovery, Chiron has alluded categorization and been called many things: asteroid, planetoid, and comet. During the nineties it has found its niche with the other Centaurs which are being discovered beyond Neptune. Turning 50 also takes time to find your niche. A metaphor I find useful to amplify Chiron’s return is his mythic exchange with Prometheus: Chiron, with his incurable wound, trades places with Prometheus in the underworld, freeing the imprisoned spirit. Chiron chooses death to relieve his suffering (the fate of his mortal side) yet this choice releases Prometheus from imprisonment on the rock in Tartarus. Hopefully what chooses to die are the misshapen and inauthentic parts of self. The initiation could then help reorder priorities, relinquish what is no longer appropriate or authentic and liberate the unlived spirit.

Chiron, for most of its cycle, orbits between Saturn and Uranus attempting to bridge their antithetical relationship, often colluding with one at the expense of the other. The incarnate sphere of Saturn is polarized to the spirited realm of Uranus. Chiron’s

⁴ William H. Bergquist, Elinor Miller Greenberg and Alan Klaum, *In Our Fifties: Voices of Men and Women Reinventing Their Lives*, Jossey-Bass Publishers (San Francisco, CA: 1993). In Chapter 1, the authors label the fifties the ‘invisible decade’ since their premise is that the 50’s are uncharted and disputed territory.

⁵ EH Erikson, JM Erikson and HQ Kivnick, *Vital Involvement in Old Age*, Norton (New York, NY: 1986). 37.

⁶ Melanie Reinhart, *Chiron and the Healing Journey*, Arkana (London: 1998). 268.

fate embraces both the pain of incarnation and the fires of spirit. In reality, the spirit is often chained up in the cellar, buried under ancestral rubble, until the wound of living has reached its density then spirit bursts through. At fifty death is no longer just a psychological process or metaphysical metaphor; it is a physical reality. The pain of living is peeking. While death may seem unreachable, on a faraway horizon, nonetheless, it is visible, more visible than ever before. Moving towards that inevitability seems to also hold the key to a renewed release of spirit. The authentic aspects of the self that are still buried may still be alive under the rubble. In writing on this period Jung suggested that ‘too many aspects of life which should also have been experienced lie in the lumber-room among dusty memories; but sometimes, too, they are glowing coals under grey ashes.’⁷

Fifty marks a new paradigm. And this new state has immense possibilities, but the map needed is different than the one used in the first half of life. Chiron returns in the period post mid-life. The mid-life map, with its potent astrological cycles, looked back; it took a psychodynamic approach to understanding the self. Childhood demons were exorcised, the inner child liberated, adolescence was revisited, and the road less travelled was explored. The decade of the fifties, however, looks forward into an uncertain yet brave New World. Spirit is unleashed as we turn towards the western horizon of our life. The quest for meaning has a different hue. And what was a priority in the morning of one’s life is not as important in the evening. Erica Jong expressed it this way: ‘All the things you suffer from when you’re younger become far less important at the age of fifty.’⁸ Priorities are shifting, a redirection has been seeded.

Chiron was mentor to the solar heroes who came to his cave to be initiated in the mysteries of life. Chiron’s return marks the end of the hero’s worldly quests, the death of the embodied mentor and the entry into the elder phase of life. The next major astrological return occurs before the 55th birthday. The Chiron return is followed by the second Saturn waning square at age 52, then the fourth Jupiter opposition at 53, when the process of reinvention is starting to take hold. While a lot

⁷ CG Jung, *Collected Works Volume 8*. 772.

of reshaping and reinventing is occurring between 50 and 55, the individual may feel they are in a liminal state, suspended. Yet an orientation to a new life is occurring. In this liminal space, I encountered the wounded doctor.

Recollection: The Progressed Moon Return at 55

“In their fifties, men and women look more closely at the stories of their lives.”⁹

The mythological nature of the Moon is triune. This triform nature of the lunar cycle amplifies the experience of the progressed Moon. The progressed Moon throughout the life cycle has three separate, yet interwoven, phases. Each cycle of the progressed moon lasts approximately 27.3 years charting important transitions in the individual and family life cycle. Circumnavigating the horoscope three times in an average life span¹⁰, the progressed moon defines three distinct developmental stages: youth, adult and elder. Three stages of life are symbolised by her three phases; the youthful maiden at the waxing crescent moon, the adult woman at the full moon and the elder crone during the dark of the moon. The secondary progressed moon also symbolises these three stages of the life cycle. A few months before the 55th birthday the Progressed Moon commences its 3rd cycle through the horoscope, returning first to its natal position. This is the third and last phase of the Moon, often represented by Hecate. In Latin her epithet was Trivia, which translates literally into three roads or three ways.

At the triple crossroads Hecate is encountered. At 55 we stand at the intersection of these three life paths; we look back to reminisce about our youth, turn around to see the adult path that is just behind us, and look forward along the new un-trodden path. Three roads merge, and we prepare to take the road not yet travelled. At this life stage, there may be synchronous developments in the family: the grandchild may just be beginning to walk that road of our youth, while our child may just be starting on

⁸ Erica Jong, “Pathfinder” from *What We Know So Far*, edited by Beth Benatovich, St. Martin’s Press (New York, NY: 1995). 6.

⁹ William H. Bergquist and others, *In Our Fifties*. 27.

¹⁰ Recent statistics have suggested that the average life span for a woman in Australia is 82, which is synchronous to the return of the third progressed moon.

the adult journey we are leaving behind. Familial rituals and turning points include the birth of grandchildren and children's weddings. Symbolically the child, the adult and the beginning of this new elder phase meet at the crossroads. The child and adult are ready to be internalised through our experiences and memories. The final path of eldership and the period of interiorization lay ahead. All three phases of the lunar cycle intersect at this last lunar juncture of the life cycle. While living in a culture where the crone is outcast and marginalised, we are susceptible to returning to places that are overdeveloped by recreating our youth and defying the natural process of aging, rather than embracing the mystery which lay ahead at the dark of the Moon.

The return also marks another complete cycle of emotional and physiological development. The body has undergone many hormonal changes up until this return. For women the onset of menopause at the beginning of the decade is probably the most obvious shift, however hormonal changes for men have also occurred. Emotional and psychological priorities have been reshaped. What begins to emerge is often a more balanced sense of self, and a growing comfort with one's androgynous nature. Gail Sheehy in *New Passages* suggests the greatest gender differences take place in the late thirties at the onset of mid-life but 'around the mid-fifties, males and females become more like each other, with a tendency for males to take on female attributes and females to take on male attributes.'¹¹

The second progressed lunar return is a time of both remembering and forgetting. Lunar memoirs are stored in psyche as images, symbols, feelings, impressions and instincts or imprinted upon the body. Lunar memory is not lineal, memorising dates and statistics, but revealed through dreams and senses. At the mid point of the decade we are ready to gather together the threads of our life. Here at the crossroads we are starting to weave the story of our life, recollecting and remembering. For the current generation in their mid -fifties passage, Uranus, Neptune and Pluto are all trining their natal position, an aesthetic synchrony for this stage of the life cycle.

¹¹ Gail Sheehy, *New Passages*, Random House (New York, NY: 1995). 320.

Redirection: The Nodal Return at 56

“The great leap that can be made at the turning-point of fifty-seven is often the impetus for some of the biggest changes in life direction, second only to the entry into mid-life.”¹²

- Erin Sullivan

Rahu, the demonic Vedic representation of the North Node, lays on the ecliptic ready to swallow the Sun. Rahu cycles through the horoscope every 18.6 years defining the location where he will swallow the Sun and eclipse the hero for a moment. Each nodal return also brings the repeat of the eclipses before and after our birth. The demon dragon, who swallows time, is the enemy of the hero and at each nodal return the solar identity is challenged. Each nodal return is like a calling, a rendezvous with destiny, a purposeful awakening and a reminder of the soul's intention. This nodal return occurs at the intersection of middle and old age, a pivotal point defining a new branch on the path. Like a signpost, the nodal return points the way. The South Node return suggests a completion of the past cycle, an emptying out of the contents held from the past so that forward movement becomes possible. The possibilities of the new life are ascending. At this point a more authentic quest begins, when the heroic ego relinquishes the battle with the worldly dragons to seek the solace and security of a relationship with the internal world. Erin Sullivan describes this nodal period as ‘insight into one's true purpose in life. Because the nodal cycle marks the return of inspiration and the re-evaluation of one's spiritual path, this is a time when religious and spiritual commitments are reviewed.’¹³

Nodal transits often literalise as important encounters with others or special events, which reshape our beliefs, values or attitudes. Here the effort and work of the mid-life passage can be reaped. The search for authenticity and for a deeper sense of meaning, which began at mid-life, culminates at this nodal return. The emergent spirituality is not an evangelical awakening but an assured sense of one's morals and values. A calling occurs which inspires us to relinquish what is no longer meaningful.

¹² Erin Sullivan, *Saturn in Transit*, Arkana (London: 1991). 85.

¹³ Erin Sullivan, *Saturn In Transit*, 85.

A Return to Wisdom: The Jupiter and Saturn Return at 59

*“You are old, Father William,” the young man said,
“And your hair has become very white;
And yet you incessantly stand on your head-
Do you think, at your age, it is right?”*

*“In my youth,” Father William replied to his son,
“I feared it might injure the brain;
But now that I’m perfectly sure I have none,
Why, I do it again and again.”*

- Lewis Carroll

The current generation reaching their seventh decade this year all belong to the early Pluto in Leo generation. Some will also be propelled into the new decade with a waning Uranus square to itself along with the Jupiter return. The combination of Jupiter/Uranus is an exciting symbol for the next cycle of Saturn. Freedom and new possibilities exist.

The landscape of old age has changed; retirement as it was once known is no longer the preferred option, or even the goal. The question is what do we retire from? Conscious preparation during the previous decade has helped to define a path beyond 60. What has emerged during our fifties that is creative, rewarding and of value can be honoured and attended to. Saturn’s quest for autonomy, hopefully, can be realised. Saturn’s urge for acknowledgment, hopefully, has been internalised. Pluto in Leo does not retire; it has a lifestyle change. At this stage of life we depend more on our investments. The investment into the self yields the highest return at this stage of the life cycle.

The end of the fifties marks the transition into elderhood that the last decade has prepared us for. The angst of aging has been spent and the inevitable has arrived.

Saturn's gifts at this passage are the time and encouragement to pursue the true *opus* of one's life and the conviction and dedication to structure the brave new world.



A few days after my appointment, I called into the doctor's office to drop off a book I had mentioned during our conversation. The book was *A Leg to Stand On* by Oliver Sacks, a personal account of the doctor's recovery from a leg injury. While the Chironic symbolism of recovery from a wounded leg was apparent I had not consciously realised this until I decided to give him the book, my ritualistic exchange.

Thanks to Peter O'Connor for our meaningful exchanges on the 50's.

THE FIFTIES

Ages listed are approximate and will vary. Consult your ephemeris for your personal life cycle. Ages listed in parentheses are the ages when the return previously occurred.

- 50 First Chiron Return
- 52 Second Waning Square of Saturn to natal Saturn (22)
- 53 Fourth Jupiter Opposition (6, 18, 30, 42).
- 54 Second Progressed Moon Return (27)

54-56 Neptune Waxing Trine to Natal Neptune

Uranus Waning Trine to Natal Uranus

Pluto Waxing Trine to Natal Pluto*

56 Third Nodal Return (19, 37)

59 Second Saturn Return (First occurred at 29)

Fifth Jupiter Return (Occurred at 12, 24, 36, 47)

60 Uranus Waning Square

For the current generation in their mid-fifties, Chiron is also in waxing square to its natal position.

** For current times only.*