

Leaving home is often a traumatic experience for everyone involved in this stage of separation. The incomplete feelings left from the 'leaving home' resurface at other important transitional points in our lives. In this article Glennys Lawton explores the astrological and psychological statements around leaving home.....

LEAVING HOME: Crossing the Threshold to the Outside World

by
Glennys Lawton

She's Leaving Home

*“Silently closing her bedroom door
Leaving a note that she hoped would say more
She goes downstairs to the kitchen
Clutching her handkerchief
Quietly turning the back door key
Stepping outside she is free”*

- Lennon and McCartney
*She's Leaving Home*ⁱ

The Beatles' lyrics to the mid-60's hit encapsulated the desperate way many of the Pluto in Leo generation left home. Turning her back on her parents, without any good-byes, she sneaks away into the early morning darkness to rendezvous with her destiny. Her parents, who claimed to have given 'everything money could buy', are in shock. They are left with disbelief, feeling abandoned and betrayed. The heroine leaves the stifling atmosphere of her parent's home for the promise of more fun with the 'man from the motor trade'ⁱⁱ; who represents a new and exciting liberated life. Unprepared for the road ahead and unaware of the grief her separation from home will stir, she is at risk of having no security or safety net once her relationship fails. The familial environment and her parents have failed to help her prepare for the initiation of 'leaving home'. Without the encouraging messages that will support her in crossing the threshold to the outer world, she is at risk of recreating the stifling home atmosphere she desperately wants to leave. Astrologically she is at risk of regressing to the 4th house, unable to separate from the powerful and archaic patterns

that underpin her foundation stone, the IC. Her future security rests on this base which has been constructed with the material supplied by the family of origin and their ancestors.

An earlier tune, sung by Sue Thompson, “James Hold the Ladder Steady” in a more light hearted way, told of elopement, the only option left after both mother and father had rejected and ridiculed the daughter’s pleas to marry her sweetheart. Leaving home for the Pluto in Leo generation was often a traumatic experience for everyone involved in this stage of separation.

One of the most common ways for this generation to leave their parent’s home was into a marriage, romantically being carried over the threshold of their new home, yet poised to recreate the same familial scenario they had vowed to leave. Or into the arms of a lover who held the promise of a new life, or onto an aeroplane or ship that took them to a faraway adventure. Naively there was an assumption that the world would provide nourishment the way the parental home should have. Unfortunately this important transition was often poorly executed with no rituals or process of conscious separation, so those left at home often felt abandoned or betrayed, while those who left felt guilty and unworthy.

However it was not only this generation that struggled to cross the straits between the familial home and the outside world. This stage of the life cycle is an archetypal experience, a passage myth often detailed.ⁱⁱⁱ Mythic heroines also left their parents’ home leaving behind them a storm of feelings of betrayal. Ariadne fell in love with the shining face of the young hero Theseus who had been sent to her Minoan palace

from Athens to face the Minotaur, her half-brother. Besotted, she arranged to help him slay the Minotaur. Fleeing the palace with him, she escaped into the dark Mediterranean night on his Athenian ship. She left her father's palace having betrayed her family by transferring her loyalties to the foreign hero. She has colluded in killing her half brother and also abandoned her younger sister. Phaedra, on the threshold of puberty, watches the course her older sister takes to leave home, being impressed and influenced by her actions and choices. Having betrayed her family, Ariadne is betrayed, left abandoned on the island of Naxos, the first port of call since their departure from Crete. Similarly Ariadne's cousin, Medea, betrays her father, kills her brother, and abandons her homeland to help a foreign hero. Without Medea, Jason could have never completed his quest. Like Theseus, Jason also turns his back on his helpmate/lover.

Betrayal is recreated in both relationships. The partner, who has been the impetus for leaving home, is now the one to leave. The trauma of the severed relationship with family and homeland is a haunting and powerful force, which will reverberate throughout their life and be replayed at other endings. The success of this transition from the homeland not only signifies the end of childhood and parental dependence but also is a pattern that reemerges whenever old ways of being are no longer valid. During major life changes the unfinished business of 'leaving home' is revealed, emotionally catapulting the individual back into the earlier patterns of separation turmoil. To leave home emotionally requires not only the heroic impulse, but the support and encouragement of those we leave behind.

Leaving home represents a transitional time in every family member's life. This pivotal time is crucial, as leaving home represents the movement away from the safety and security of the familial womb out into the world beyond the family. Astrologically the crossing of the threshold between the fourth house of family and the fifth house of the heroic self represents this liminal phase. Developmentally the fourth house marks the ending of the first four houses of the personal initiation, ideally ending with the fourth house sense of inner security. The fifth marks the first of the four inter-personal houses and the beginning of the labours of forging identity outside the family, as well as the beginning of transferring the loyalties away from the familial matrix out onto the beloved. The fifth house cusp which separates the homeland from the world beyond is the threshold crossed when leaving home:

“The hero leaves home and often the 5th house cusp is a vivid indication of the process of leaving home.”^{iv}

Like the other cusps of the 'houses of life' (1 and 9) the 5th house cusp represents the emergence into new worlds of discovery. The Beatles' heroine turns the 'back door' key and steps across the threshold into the arms of her lover. Like Theseus and Jason he is the embodiment of the hero who stimulates the urge to leave and venture into the world beyond family. Lamenting, the chorus realises 'fun is the one thing money can't buy'. The fifth house represents a world of exploration that no longer can take place in the familial home. The heroine falls in love with the foreign hero, the representation of the world outside her familial container. The Lunar world of the fourth house and the symbiosis with the family matrix are left behind in the transition towards the solar hero. The fifth house constellates the mythic hero who battles the dragons of the Great Mother and who ventures outside his comfort zone. When the

4th house environment is polluted with the toxicity of secrets, lies or repressed monsters (like the Minotaur and the Dragon) then the heroic impulse is to “kill off” the monster which sets the circle of betrayal in motion.

Underpinning this change is an enormity of grief invisible in the excitement of separation. Childhood is finished. Unconditional acceptance is threatened. When the leaving home process is complicated or threatened the individual indiscriminately places their trust in the outsider. The assumed reality is that the world outside will be supportive. Disillusionment often follows, shattering the assumptions that the external world will be more welcoming. The misplaced loyalties and love rebound. Mourning is generally not ritualised at this stage and sits as a hollow feeling of emptiness under the upwardly mobile urges to discover the world outside. Without the proper mentoring the mourning can turn to despair, self-destruction, at worst self-loathing. The courage to leave what is familiar is often projected onto another who then must betray us in order for us to find the interior courage imbedded in the fifth house.

Attachment and Separation

Separation is intimately linked to bonding. The ability to separate without destructive emotional undertones is a product of secure attachment. Broadly we could categorise this into three groups.^v

- **Bond – Separate** Secure attachment facilitates a healthy separation. If the individual’s needs are met, then the feeling of being well nourished and a sense of belonging promote the ability to be separate. This can only occur if we have been encouraged to explore beyond what is familiar, to have

been acknowledged for that exploration and applauded on our return. Our secure base supports our explorations outside. This helps to create mastery over our environment, which is an essential component of secure development. Astrologically, this would suggest a well supported moon or similar themes.

Bond – Can’t Separate This attachment style promotes dependency and symbiosis or suggests the inability to separate due to the high level of rigidity and pressures to conform. Both promote a chaotic atmosphere, which engenders fear and anxiety at the juncture of separating as no secure base has been developed. When astrological archetypes prone to enmeshment, chaos or rigidity (Neptune, Pluto & Saturn) are in difficult aspect to the Moon, the tendency towards this style of attachment is heightened. Examples might be: Neptune square Moon where separation could constellate fears of not being able to survive outside the alembic of the family or the fear that those we leave will be weakened by our departure. Pluto quincunx Moon may evoke a dread of betraying those we leave behind or being betrayed by those we are trying to trust. Saturn opposite Moon may evoke guilt when we feel we are not care taking those we have left or self-criticism and fear of how we will manage to provide for ourselves. Difficult lunar aspects will highlight separation issues.

- **Won’t Bond – Can’t Separate** An inability to bond promotes disconnection, separation being more a dread of connection than authentic separateness. When attachment has not been successful then the individual may instinctually sense disconnection, which interferes with the process of bonding. Astrologically this could bring the principles of freedom and separateness into contact with the Moon; for instance the simplistic statement of the Moon in Air could identify this dynamic. Brian Clark in *The Sibling Constellation* suggests this:

“Having the Moon in an air sign implies that the drive for emotional security is constantly filtered through an experience of disconnection. The earliest feelings, recorded by the Moon, include an innate sense of separateness, space and distance. Hence there may be a strange sense of dislocation: a feeling of being disconnected from where one is or where one settles. The gulf between

the sense of closeness and separateness propels the Moon in air to swing back and forth between extremes.”^{vi}

Other astrological indicators would be derived from Moon/Uranus themes. This astrological combination suggests the tendency to amputate security systems due to an anxiety or dread of being trapped or suffocated.

Attachment is a necessity in human development as it instinctually develops the ability to discriminate between the protector and the predator. When the familial home has been violated by abuse or the atmosphere is clouded with violence, then the world outside is also unsafe. Without secure attachment the individual is often at risk of making the wrong choices, trusting the wrong individual and therefore constellating betrayal. At the transitional point of leaving home, our sense of secure attachment becomes a primary indication of the transition’s success.

Astrologically, attachment styles are recognised in a myriad of ways connected to the lunar archetype (the Moon, 4th house, and Cancer), the other ‘houses of endings’ (8th & 12th houses) and their derivatives of Scorpio, Pisces, Neptune and Pluto. However a definitive way of delineating attachment styles begins with examining aspects to the Moon. When the slower-moving planets are in a difficult aspect to the Moon then the ‘leaving home’ process may be fraught with incomplete feelings and ambiguity. Complexes, which complicate the transition, may be organised by their aspects to the Moon. These are potent aspects, which reverberate through the system of the family. Following is a short synopsis of these aspects, however I would encourage you to delve more deeply into these images reflecting on your separation process and attachment style. These themes will also be evident with the planets in or ruling the fourth house.

Saturn Saturn/Moon aspects could constellate familial themes of rigidity, authority and rules. When the parental values and rules are at the expense of the young, then the individual may be fixed in a system, not of their choosing, which keeps them bound to the old system. Compelled to live out the unlived life of the parent they may feel trapped and fearful of leaving the only structure provided for them. Predictability and controllability are vital allies to secure development, however if they engender fear and anxiety, then the rigidity of the family system suffocates development. Hierarchy is essential in early childhood, however this balance must loosen if we are to develop a sense of personal autonomy. Otherwise structure and safety, predictability and controllability become rigid and imprisoning threatening the creativity of the individual.

Chiron Themes of abandonment, estrangement, or displacement may have permeated the family atmosphere to the extent where the individual feels unsafe and unfamiliar outside the family culture. If the family is the outsider in the society, then the individual may feel that safety can only be sustained in the family. Often with this aspect the familial myth may suggest the pain of living is great, wounding the will and the spirit that promotes adventure and exploration outside the family and culture. With a Chiron/Moon aspect we are also alerted to the potentiality of a familial wound which cripples the young person's attempt to leave home.

Uranus Disengagement and separation are themes that resonate when the archetypes of Uranus and the Moon combine. The possibility of a fractured or dislocated family atmosphere or lack of unconditional bonds is suggested, whether perceived or real. A cold family climate or an unconscious memory of feeling abandoned or cut off from security could emphasise the need to be disengaged, so freedom and separateness is always at the expense of closeness and togetherness.

When the safety of our childhood atmosphere has been punctured by a sudden or unresolved severance, then our own ability to sustain relationship and our adult family unit will be compromised.

Neptune With both Neptune and the Moon, the urge to merge is dominant. Therefore themes of enmeshment, sacrifice, abandonment and illness may be part of the familial inheritance when these two planets are in aspect. The individual's sense of self is sacrificed for the family well being, often rendering the young person invisible. Leaving home may place others at risk, therefore the individual could feel compelled to stay to care for the parent who is in need, increasing the danger of becoming psychologically stranded. The young person may become ill as an unconscious attempt to delay the leaving home process.

Pluto Family secrets, shame, unexpressed grief, power and control may dominate the family atmosphere with Pluto aspecting the Moon. If the family atmosphere is polluted with a family secret or unexpressed grief then the young person feels unable to be intimate with outsiders for fear of betraying their family. In this case Persephone's 'leaving home' process may be emulated, where the Underworld God is evoked to abduct us into another atmosphere of control and domination. When the family is bonded through an inappropriate secret or shame this 'protects' the family as a unit and anyone leaving is at risk; the message becomes "if you leave us we will be destroyed". Transferring of loyalties to a lover or partner outside the family is seen as a betrayal, which constellates the fear of being disinherited.

The Moon is systemic in nature as it also describes Mother and her feeling life, perhaps her experience of her familial atmosphere. In this way the Moon describes a

legacy from the ancestors, especially Mother's line. Quite literally it may also describe the route Mother took to leave home, a roadway we may have instinctually traveled. Young people often repeat the leaving home pattern of their parents.

The Lunar statement in the horoscope suggests how we bond and how our urge to bond was met in the atmosphere of the home, directly shaping the way we separate and leave home. When the lunar constellation or 4th house is too difficult to deal with, we may split off from that aspect in favour of a more supportive one. Perhaps our Beatles' heroine left her Saturn/Moon constellation to pursue a more favourable aspect of her horoscope, however without the support to help her cross the threshold that leads to the outside world, she is destined to carry this Saturn/Moon image into her relationships.

Leaving Home Messages

Jay Haley, one of the pioneers of the Family Therapy movement, suggests four important messages to help us leave home without guilt, shame or feeling encumbered by parental grief.^{vii} The roots of these messages are held in our early experiences of attachment and separation and are important for encouraging the development of ego strength. Mythically this is similar to the commencement of the heroic trial or labours where the gods offer the hero important gifts for their forward journey. These four messages are:

1. **You can go.** Released by the parent's love and encouraged to pursue their life away from home, the individual is free to explore themselves away from

parental control. Their journey forward is buoyed by memories of approval, support and encouragement. However often the unconscious message is *you should not go* which hovers as a ghost over every successive adult relationship. With this negative message the individual feels compelled to seek freedom from every relationship and to be constantly reassured that they will be free.

2. **We believe in you.** Armed with faith in themselves, instilled by the parents, the hero is free to learn by his mistakes. But when the parents do not trust their child can make their way in the world the message is toxic. If the message is *we don't believe in you*, then the individual constantly struggles to believe in themselves, driven to prove themselves in the world at large.
3. **We will miss you** Leaving with the sense of feeling valued helps free ourselves from the compulsive need to be loved by another. Knowing we are loved allows us to love. When the message fails and *we won't miss you* is internalised, then the feelings of not being valued seep into each successive relationship, creating the need for the partner to provide constant reassurance that they are desired and needed in every new relationship.
4. **We will be fine** The young adult is launched into the world freed from feeling responsible for those they are leaving. They leave home with feelings of completion and an authentic knowing that this phase of their life has ended. Failing this the individual may fear that *if you abandon us, we will be destroyed*. The individual then feels unable to cope with others relying on them or unable to leave difficult situations. Without the freedom to go the individual may feel imprisoned in a situation they cannot leave.

With security in their attachment to the family, the crossing to the world beyond family is accompanied by memories of encouragement and applause. These internalised memories form the foundation of ego strength, an anchor for future separations or times of fear and despair. This strong base enables the person to move through the dark nights of their lives, rather than become paralyzed and impotent. The solidity of the IC and the fourth house provide the launching pad for the Solar and heroic impulses, explored in the fifth house.

The prominent factors in the familial environment that place the individual at risk of a rough crossing include rigidity, enmeshment, chaos and disengagement. The individual who finds themselves swinging between being tightly bound by the rigidity of the familial container or completely unbound and uncontained lacks a center, a secure base. The foundation stone at the IC is weakened and the lunar container is vulnerable. Another continuum stretches from one pole, where the individual's personality may be engulfed and smothered by the family, to the other pole, where the individual could feel cut off from the heart of the family. Both extremes complicate the leaving home process. In a healthy familial environment we feel more centred and less dismembered by these extremes. Astrological themes that combine the lunar archetype with other planets sketch the landscape of the familial terrain.

When the Saturnian archetype is overemphasized, the family structure probably is rigid. Family members may be at risk of disavowing their authenticity in favour of an external authority. Important in the rigid family are accepted traditions, rules, and authority, not individuals. When Saturn is weakened, a chaotic family atmosphere may be present and no form or structure is present to contain the developing

individual. No safety net is available to help the individual feel secure in exploration and discovery outside the familial structure and rules. At the other extreme, in a chaotic atmosphere, hierarchy is non-existent and the young child may feel responsible for their parents or siblings and feel the need of take charge of the situation.

Within a disengaged familial atmosphere or with a feeling of parental distance, then the separation process is weighed down with anxiety. Here the archetype of Uranus is constellated. At any sign of dependency or emotional bonding the individual instinctively pulls away. The urge to bond unconsciously beckons others, however when they respond they are pushed away. This engagement-disengagement dynamic sabotages both the attachment and the separation processes.

High enmeshment between family members also inhibits the process of separation. Astrologically this can be described through the archetype of Neptune. Statements like Neptune in the fourth house, the Moon in Pisces or Neptune-Moon aspects are a signal for the individual's propensity to sacrifice themselves for the community well being of the family. If this is the case the webbing of the family traps the individual and leaving home is difficult. Plutonic enmeshment could also occur through family secrets or the threat of familial betrayal, binding the individual to the familial unconscious.^{viii}

Time to Leave

The optimum time to leave home varies with each culture, the familial environment, and the current social and economic climate. Family therapists suggest that in Westernized cultures the optimum time for the launching of young adults is late adolescence, between the ages of 18 ½ and 24. Astrologically this embraces the period from the first nodal return to the second Jupiter return and includes the other important planetary cycles, which cluster around the ages of 21/22. Currently this passage is being journeyed by the Pluto in Libra (with Neptune in Sagittarius) generation.

When the leaving home process is enacted too early there is a danger of being ejected from the family home, whereas if this occurs too late, the individual may feel immobilized. The leaving home process is a shift from the familial to the social world and the developmental cycles of the planets represent this transitory period. Each generation redefines this process in its own way.

Leaving Home Optimum Time: Late Adolescent Phase		
First Nodal Return	<i>Approximately</i>	18.6 years old
Waning Progressed Moon Square		20.5 years
Neptune Waxing Semi-Square		20.5 years
Uranus Waxing Square		21 years
Saturn Waning Square		22 years
Second Jupiter Return		24 years

Until we have psychologically left home, we can't return home. We continue to take the incomplete 'leaving home' issues into every aspect of our lives, especially during transitional periods when we are about to traverse another important threshold. Of

course, in later life home leaving does not necessarily mean we go anywhere: sometimes someone leaves us. What remains is a reminder of what once seemed secure. In the chasm that opens with the separation, we are challenged to draw upon our skills of mastery, as our assumed reality is once again shattered. Our ability to handle the “black holes of despair”, a developmental process first strongly tested in adolescence, will continue to inform our leaving home experiences. We are challenged in adolescence with the task of reducing our attachment schema to the externalized images of mother and father in order to develop our internal sense of autonomy and ego strength. This reforming of identity carries implications from our earliest sense of belonging and separateness. Although this template at adolescence can only ever be superimposed over the initial statement of attachment, it provides a reinforced base that creates the platform from which we can effectively leave home.

The astrological threshold crossed in leaving home is symbolically the fifth house cusp, the gateway to our creative self. This is a world beyond family yet informed and shaped by the experience of the family of origin. Leaving the familial environs (of the 4th) is an archetypal experience, which when poorly executed, leaves its scar on each successive transition. The Pluto in Leo generation typified this difficult transition in leaving their Pluto in Cancer parental home. Having ‘quietly turned the back door key’ perhaps this generation is in a more conscious position to launch their own children into the extra-familial world of adventure and self-discovery.

ⁱ Lyrics quoted from Paul McCartney and John Lennon, ‘She’s Leaving Home’, from the Beatles’ album *Sgt. Peppers Lonely Hearts Club Band*.

ⁱⁱ Throughout the text lyrics from Paul McCartney and John Lennon, ‘She’s Leaving Home’ are quoted.

ⁱⁱⁱ For amplification on this see Liz Greene and Juliet Sharman-Burke, *The Mythic Journey; The Meaning of Myth as a Guide for Life*, Eddison-Sadd (London: 1999), pages 74-90.

^{iv} Brian Clark, “Gemini: The Search for the Missing Twin, *The Mountain Astrologer* (May/June 2000).

^v John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth are the pioneers in delineating attachment styles. See John Bowlby, *A Secure Base: Parent-Child Attachment and Healthy Human Development*, Routledge (London: 1988).

^{vi} Brian Clark, *The Sibling Constellation: The Astrology and Psychology of Brothers and Sisters*, Penguin Arkana (London: 1999).

^{vii} These four messages are inspired by the work of Jay Haley. See Jay Haley, *Leaving Home: The Therapy of Disturbed Young People, Second Edition*, Brunner/Mazel, Inc. (New York: 1997).

^{viii} For amplification on family systems see Erin Sullivan, *Dynasty, The Astrology of Family Dynamics*, Penguin Arkana (London: 1996). Pages 53-60 explore the archetypes of Uranus and Neptune in light of the disengaged-enmeshed family system.

Glennys Lawton is one of the main tutors in the four year program in applied astrology, Astro*Synthesis, at the Chiron Centre in Melbourne Australia. Besides her full time astrological practice Glennys is also a family therapist, registered as a clinical member of the Victorian Association of Family Therapists, as well as an accredited bereavement counsellor and educator. She has lectured at major astrological conferences overseas, as well as lecturing at family therapy conferences and conducting specialised workshops on areas of grief here in Australia.