

A VERY GOOD YEAR:
Turning the Pages on a New Decade

by Brian Clark

Milestones in an individual's life cycle are those threshold years that usher in new decades. Even those normally reluctant to celebrating their birthdays are generally inspired to mark a new decade with some ritual or celebration. Turning 30, 40, 50 and 60 are watershed years in the adult life cycle. Each decade presents its own challenges, offers its own rewards, and has its own distinctive atmosphere. And every decade can be astrologically mapped out to reveal ages when challenges and crises can be expected, as well as offer insight into what each life stage signifies. Each generation travels a similar astrological route. However each generation has a unique atmosphere with its own landmarks, road signs and territorial backdrop that mark their journey across the life span.

The astrological life cycle is charted through the cycles of the slower moving planets, since their orbits symbolise initiations into particular life experiences. Planets complete a full cycle at predictable ages, and make important aspects within that round at certain times. The 'crisis' points in these planetary cycles are usually fourfold: the initial critical period occurs when the orbiting planet forms a square to its natal position; the second turning point is the opposition of the orbiting planet to its natal position; the third crisis period is the final square of the cycle. Lastly the return of the planet marks the fourth and final critical period of the cycle. This final passage suggests a maturity of this particular planetary archetype. Each period marks a critical turning point in the experience of this archetype in an individual's life. Another factor is the outer planets' dance with each other during the life cycle. For example, the planet Pluto is transiting Neptune for young adults currently at about the age of 22-24, characteristic of an intense encounter with their idealism and the dreams they harbour. However for individuals in their late 50's orbiting Neptune is opposing their natal Pluto suggesting that more considered and objective ideals be forged for the next part of their journey. Therefore specific ages in the life cycle become apparent and important to consider. In a way the astrological life cycle reminds us of important initiatory periods our culture no longer acknowledges in the rush of life. While the transitional periods in the life cycle suggest particular themes, each generation encounters the experience differently due to the constantly changing social landscape.

The two slowest moving planets, Neptune and Pluto, govern astrological generations. Neptune symbolises a generation's legacy of ideals and dreams while Pluto suggest its intentions, its taboos as well as its strengths and its obsessions. For the generation turning 30, with Pluto in Libra and Neptune in Sagittarius, their intention for equality and their ideals of justice, while challenged, are supported by the current astrological repetition of the outer planets' elemental emphasis of fire and air. However, the generation turning 40 this year have Neptune in Scorpio and Pluto in Virgo. Their ideals of shared economic resources and their intention to ecologically rebalance the planet may feel adrift in a sea of corruption, disbelief and misplaced idealism.

While every individual will experience each initiatory period in his or her own unique way there is an archetypal theme, which underlies the transition. This is where the roadmap of astrology becomes priceless at comprehending the meaning of change. Each decade has its own uniqueness. But let's start at 21, rather than 20, for here we receive the key to adult life.

At 21: Leaving Home

The World Health Organisation defines the end of adolescence as age 24, encompassing the second Jupiter cycle that began twelve years earlier. Therefore our early twenties are its final phase. Adolescence is a metamorphosis, which begins at puberty. Near age 21 we are preparing to leave the chrysalis. Astrologically the decade is ushered in by the square of transiting Uranus to its natal place in our horoscope, identifying the urge to propel ourselves out of the familial orbit into another world. Modern economics suggests this launch is becoming increasingly difficult delaying the process of leaving the nest. Nevertheless the urge is a forceful one, and whether or not we can physically leave home, we are ready to sever other ties to the security base. Following on Uranus' heels is Saturn, which is also squaring its natal placement. The first time this occurred in its cycle was at age 7-8, when separation from childhood fantasies began. At 22 we are pressured to separate from our adolescent ones. And if we can't quite manage that, then the next major transit of Pluto conjuncting natal Neptune over the next few years¹ will help to crush some of the lingering fantasies. For the first time in our lives we may be acting out an episode of the Secret Life of Us! Or confronted for the first time with our inner demons.

Celebrating 21 acknowledges that we are turning the ignition key and starting the motor to drive away from what is familiar. It is a time when we are launched into the world beyond our adolescent security systems. And by age 24 the second Jupiter return suggests we are primed to take a bigger leap into the unknown. During the 20's we try out for many teams, seeking our reflection in many ponds, big and small. It is a time of experimentation, adventure, breaking away. The generation turning 21 this year inherit a world anxious about safety, security and money, yet astrologically are more equipped to take risks than their older sibs were.

Recently the passage of the early twenties has been referred to as the 'quarter-life crisis'. In one sense it is a crisis, as it presents an opportunity for change and growth. Hopefully it is these opportunities for experimentation into the self we celebrate turning 21!

AGE	PLANETARY CYCLE
21	Uranus Square Uranus
22	Saturn Square Saturn
24	Second Jupiter Return
22-25	Pluto Conjunct Neptune
27	Progressed Lunar Return
28-30	Saturn Return

Figure 1: The Twenties

30-Something: *Upwardly Mobile*

A major cyclical return heralds the decade of the thirties. The 'Saturn Return' has become popular shorthand for the important passage that bridges the end of the 20's and the start of the 30's. The Saturn return initiates us into this new decade. Two other cycles support the return; the progressed lunation cycle repeats its natal phase and Jupiter opposes itself. The former

¹ For the generations in the last half of the 20th century and the first half of the 21st century this transit will occur during the 20's. However it will vary due to the changing rate of speed of the planet Pluto. For instance those born in 1982 will begin to receive this transit as early as age 23 whereas their parent probably would not have experienced it until age 27 or so.

suggests an alignment with character potentials innate in the birth horoscope, while the latter cycle suggest awareness that this new cycle of change needs to be conceptualised. The Saturn return is akin to a rebirth. By 30 we have experience a full cycle of Saturn in all its permutations through our horoscope. Therefore we are ready, at least theoretically, to seek validation and acknowledgment in the world. The Saturn return identifies the time to begin to master the direction of one's life.

Life cycle experts have pushed the decades forward suggesting 40 is 30 and even 30 is what 20 used to be like. While the life cycle has altered dramatically over the past generation, the planetary orbits have not. They are fixed. Saturn still returns at 30, and 30 marks an age of maturity when we are fully responsible for our own fate. Our past, whether it is this life or any other, is now our fate and our responsibility to manage, direct and control.

The thirties are a decade of construction when our lives are like building sites: building our careers, our relationships, our interests and our hobbies, and our families. Often in the attempt to be worldly we unwittingly construct a false self, abandoning some of the true essence of ourselves through compromising and conforming in order to be accepted. The first half of the thirties is a steady building period continuing to find a niche in the world. But by age 35-36 a series of cycles begin which promote a dramatic leap forward. New opportunities, new commitments, and new challenges may present themselves. Hard work begins to pay off and we find the path inclines steadily upward at this point. This is the first glimmer of the turning to mid-life. Only a glimmer, though, as there is enough momentum built up in the life to be propelled forward along the preferred path. Changes made at this juncture in the life cycle have far-reaching affects.

Celebrating turning thirty is honouring a new commitment to life, renewing its contract. At 30 we celebrate the wide road ahead, firmly in control of the moving vehicle speeding down life's highway.

AGE	PLANETARY CYCLE
28-30	First Saturn Return
36	Third Jupiter Return
37	Saturn Square Saturn
37	Second Nodal Return
38 -	Pluto Square Pluto

Figure 2: The Thirties

Middlence: Turning Forty

Astrologically the full mid life passage could be defined as embracing the period between the third and fourth Jupiter returns (36-47). During this period the three outer planets aspect their natal placements in a dynamic way: Pluto and Neptune are in a waxing square to their natal

placements² while Uranus is at the mid point of its cycle. The psychological landscape of the late thirties and early forties, symbolised by the critical arrangement of the outer planets, is profound. At this juncture in the life cycle, mid-life offers the soul the facility to retrieve aspects of the un-lived life, to deepen one's inner experience through self-examination, and to forge a more authentic self. During mid-life, alternate choices and risks may be taken which help to reorient the course of one's life. The life force is waxing and triumphant and entering into the demands of this period clear the path forward.

Turning forty deserves a wild and extravagant celebration with all the many parts of your life represented by your eclectic group of friends, associates and loved ones. At 40 there is a potent mix of youthfulness and maturity, as well as enough self-awareness to make wiser choices in life. But in the year to come two feminine planets, Neptune and the Moon, make important aspects in their cycles that identify the need to be more inner orientated, less compelled with the outer world are more concerned with the inner. For each individual this arranges itself in its own unique way. However the recognition of loss of meaning, or feeling we do not belong in the situation we are in, or feeling a lack of purpose help to redirect us to a more introspective position, asking spiritual questions in our life. While we may have always asked the important spiritual questions this is more in earnest, as for the first time we experience a life to reflect upon. For this generation another cycle synchronises with the search for meaning and that is the Uranus opposition. It supports the process of separating and relinquishing what is no longer working in one's life. In the early 40's there is a collusion of powerful energies, which promote and encourage a more authentic journey forward and help to reorient ourselves towards meaningful goals while prioritising what is important to us.

AGE	PLANETARY CYCLE
41	Neptune Square Neptune
41	Progressed Moon opposite Moon
41	Uranus Opposite Uranus
42	Jupiter Opposite Jupiter
44 - 45	Saturn Opposite Saturn

Figure 3: The Forties

At 50: Brave New World

The 50's decade is embraced by two potent astrological symbols, which profoundly encapsulate the psychological processes taking place. The first Chiron return occurs near the age of 50, the entry point into the decade, while the second Saturn return, which coincides with the fifth Jupiter return, occurs near the age of 58/9, the ending of the decade and its process of transition. This

² The sequence shifts for each generation due to Pluto's orbit. Presently the Pluto in Virgo generation experiences their Pluto Square as early as 35/36. Neptune squares itself at 41, while the Uranus Square could occur between the ages of 38 – 42. Those turning 40 this year have already experience their Pluto square near age 36. They will receive their Neptune Square in about a year and their Uranus Square in another 18 months.

period is also punctuated by two other important returns, which are often underestimated: the second progressed lunar return (age 54.6) and the third return of the lunar nodes (age 56).

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 our earlier choices. In the midst of the decade all three outer planets are trining their natal positions³, 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 generation that worshipped immortality, eternity, youthfulness, and the magical child are navigating a new territory, which challenges these constructs.

When this generation looks back to their parents at fifty, the changes that have occurred are startling. Life expectancy, medical technology, changing life-styles, life enhancing drugs, and retirement options have redefined the landscape of growing older. The life cycle as the Pluto in Cancer generation knew it has dramatically altered. Pop psychology is now labelling middle age as middle youth, partially due to the youthfulness of this generation, but partially as a defence against aging. 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 is to care for what is meaningful to us, not what others judge as important, but what is intimately creative and restorative to the individual.⁴ Chiron's return helps initiate us into this life task by presenting the disenfranchised aspects of ones self, which are dear to the soul. In the midst of the decade two powerful returns speak of the entry into a new age; the third age of life when life experience is distilled into the role of a mentor. By the end of the decade the Saturn return reminds us of this consolidation of the mentor figure.

Turning 50 is celebrated with circumspection as we honour the upcoming decade. Enormous strides are taken towards the acceptance of the true self and these contribute to the emerging role of mentor. However there is also a dawning of awareness that the world ahead is a brave new frontier, no longer demarcated by signposts in the outer world.

AGE	PLANETARY CYCLE
50	Chiron Return
52	Saturn Square Saturn
54	Second Progressed Moon Return
56	Third Nodal Return
58 - 59	Second Saturn return

Figure 4: The Fifties

³ 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. For those turning 50 this year Pluto will begin its trine to its natal position at age 52. These ages will vary due to the ellipse of the planetary orbit and the retrogradation cycle. As well, the dance of the outer planets performs some interesting oppositions in the 50's for this generation: Uranus opposite Pluto and Neptune opposite Pluto.

60: A New Frontier

The current generation reaching their seventh decade this year all have Pluto in Leo with Saturn and Uranus both in Gemini. Two thirds will have Neptune in Libra so the dominance of Air suggests the agility, youthfulness and mental alertness of this group. Like the beginning of the thirties, the sixties begin in the wake of the Saturn return. Like the previous time, a new way forward has hopefully been reconstructed. A Jupiter return accompanies the Saturn return, and many turning 60 will experience this as the opening lines to their new chapter of life. Following in another year will be a Uranus square to itself. The combination of Jupiter/Uranus is an exciting symbol for the next cycle. Freedom and new possibilities exist.

Of course the freedom and possibilities are anchored in the developmental changes, which have taken place during the last decade. At her second Saturn return May Sarton wrote her *Journal of Solitude*. The struggle she articulated was to make space in her life to be, to forge a balance between reflection and relationship, to find solitude. The decade of the 50's helps to reorganise our priorities so we may create time for this solitude. Saturn's return offers the opportunity to build the structures to support this emerging new way of being. Outer life structures have reached their capacity; the soul yearns to fortify its inner life.

At 30 our gaze is on the world ahead of us, outside of ourselves. At 60 this is internalised, focused on the creative self. May Sarton expressed that her second Saturn return was about being, not doing. The end of the fifties is marked by two potent returns, which characterise a return to wisdom, not information or knowledge. For the Pluto in Leo generation, this wisdom has always been focused on the intense search for the self. The second Saturn return coupled with the fifth Jupiter return marks the commencement of living in the world of the intangible, the internal, and the sacred.

At her second Saturn return Germaine Greer wrote *The Whole Woman*. Critics suggested this was a sequel to her ground breaking *The Female Eunuch*, written at her first Saturn return. Greer has been a potent voice on woman's issues throughout her adult life. In an interview at her second Saturn return she shared the greatest sadness of her life was not giving birth to a child. At her present stage of life her inner dream world still carried the expectancy of giving birth. However wisdom at the second Saturn return is forged out of this experience of loss and the relinquishment of her dream child.⁵ Greer typifies the Pluto in Leo loss of the magical child; a loss that helps initiate this generation into the wisdom of the third age which begins at the second Saturn return.

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, now can be realised. Saturn's urge for acknowledgment, hopefully, has now been internalised. Pluto in Leo does not retire; it has a lifestyle change. At this stage of life we depend more on our investments and it is the investment into self, which yields the highest return at this stage of the life cycle.

⁴ EH Erikson, JM Erikson and HQ Kivnick, *Vital Involvement in Old Age*, Norton (New York, NY: 1986). 37.

⁵ Germaine Greer interviewed for "Baby Love", *Herald Sun Sunday Magazine*, Melbourne, April 16, 2000.

Each decade is informed by the experiences of the previous cycles. At major transitional times we are drawn back to the times of the previous cycles. Shortly after turning 60 we experience the final square of Uranus. The first square occurred at the beginning of the 20's, which launched us into the early days of adulthood. At this waning square we are launched into the early days of elder hood. Uranus charges the atmosphere with electricity, discards the outdated and celebrates individuality. At its waning square these rituals are more internal, unlike the waxing square where they tended to be more acted out in the external environment. On the threshold to the 60's we are awoken to the liberation of being un-tethered to the rituals of daily life as we once knew them, the intense demands of a full time career, the financial burdens of dependents, the grind of everyday adult responsibilities. The freedom to explore the internal world is available, not just for a weekend, a vacation or a sabbatical, but for the rest of the life. At Uranus' waning square the freedom to separate from the demands of the external world is taking hold. This is not a separation from work or even career (although it often experienced as this) but a separation from the false and inauthentic values of the external world. Retirement is from the false self, not the literal world. The Uranus square launches the spirit into a period of excitement and change.

AGE	PLANETARY CYCLE
59 - 60	Fifth Jupiter Return
60 - 62	Uranus Square Uranus
65	Saturn Square Saturn

Figure 5: The Sixties

A Chinese sage pointed out that crisis was not only danger, but also a great opportunity for change. Astrologically we are reminded of the opportunities each decade holds and perhaps the only danger with these critical periods of the life cycle is in not honouring them.