

Planetary Returns and Renewals

- Brian Clark

While the horoscope is a permanent moment, fixed at the crossroads between this and the other world, it continuously participates in the passing of time. Shaped when we autonomously take in our first breath, our horoscope continues to respond to every heartbeat of life that follows. In a way it is renewed with each breath and each moment in time. The living horoscope is a testament to the cycles of time being a constant reminder of the inevitability of endings, yet also the confidence of a renewal to follow.

One way of thinking about how the horoscope continually renews itself is through planetary and nodal returns. Each return infuses the planetary archetype with experience and awareness that deepens and expands our understanding of this part of the Self. Astrologically we can reflect on returns in two distinct ways. Firstly we can contemplate the planetary return through a secondary horoscope created for the precise time the planet returns to its natal position. Each return horoscope is a tribute to the new cycle and highlights the condition of the subsequent cycle. It is born at the crossroads when completion of the last cycle and commencement of the new happens in the same instant. A return horoscope honours this moment of rebirth; in essence, it captures the image of the eternal return, symbolizing a renewal of life through regenerating the patterns embedded in the natal horoscope. The return chart could be likened to a herald for the next planetary cycle as it can be read in context of how the planetary archetype is refreshed and revitalized for its next round. While this technique could be applied to all planets, these types of return charts are mainly utilised for the inner planets, most popularly the Sun.

Secondly we can consider the planetary return as a homecoming; a coming back to an authentic aspect of the self. This way of thinking invites reflection and recognition on how we might be more aware of the authenticity of its archetypal expression throughout the next cycle. As we look back on the last cycle and forward into the next, the planetary symbol can be re-visioned in its movement through time. This is especially helpful for forward planning and scheduling given that each planetary archetype has its own timetable. All planetary returns can be helpful in this way, but the returns of the social planets, Jupiter and Saturn, the Lunar Nodes and the Progressed Moon outline the major timeframes that reconnect us to our deeply authentic social, moral, vocational and emotional selves. Each return marks the major milestones and transitions on the path of life.

Returns are instinctive in the human experience. While we may not be familiar with the philosophy or the concept of the eternal return we all know about the experience of return on an instinctual level. It is deep-seated and inbred in the human soul. Before we focus on how each planetary return invites us to revisit an essential aspect of the self, I would like to amplify the concept of return since the notion of eternal recurrence has been on our collective mind for a long time. Ancient Greek stories of homecoming portray the archetypal nature of return.

Nostos: The Return Home

In Greek myth, return was an important aspect of the heroic (or soulø) journey, detailed in the Homeric epic *Odyssey*, which narrated Odysseys return from Troy to his homeland of Ithaca. *Nostos* is the ancient Greek word for return, which implied homecoming. The *return home* is a significant aspect of the heroic saga. In myth and ritual the return marks the ending, yet also the beginning of a new spirited approach to life. An initiatory phase of being has culminated and is ending; a threshold is crossed and a new appreciation of home emerges.

Joseph Campbell formatted this cycle of rites of passage as separation, initiation and return, which can be applied to the experience of transition and planetary returns.¹

Nostos is the journey homeward, perhaps to a home we have never known, but one that is authentic to our soul. At this time of return we are being pushed forward into our future and pulled back into our past. Pushed, pulled and prodded, we have returned to a place we started from with experience and knowledge. Home is the inner anchor from where we begin and where we return. Here we make reparations and preparations to begin anew. In Joseph Campbell's way of thinking, the return brought both blessings and responsibility since the hero returned from his mysterious adventures with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man. The return marks a cycle of completion and with it comes understanding and maturity, gleaned from the experiences of the past cycle.

Nostalgia is derived from the Greek *nostos*, suggesting the return home, and *algos*, the Greek word for pain. While we commonly equate nostalgia with wistfulness, the sentimental yearning for what has been and the longing to return to the past, in essence the word encapsulates the pain of return. It is not an ancient word, but one coined as a medical condition in the 17th C to characterize the anxiety and homesickness of Swiss soldiers fighting away from home. The mood of the word is melancholic and this pining to return home can often be triggered by smell or touch, music or weather, an image or person. Nostalgia is an aspect of return. It highlights the urge to regress to the way we were rather than move into the unknown; to elongate the present rather than evolve into the new cycle. Joseph Campbell called this aspect of the heroic adventure 'Refusal of the Return'². Without a conscious participation with the inevitable ending and return, renewal cannot take place.

The road leading from the past and the road which stretches out into the future cross at the return. Like Janus, one face glimpses the past world; the other looks forward to anticipate the future. The forward-looking Promethean spirit is influenced and shaped by his backward-looking Epithemean counterpart. Returns are a time of transition, suspended by two ways of being. It is an ending, yet like all endings it has seeds for the future, distilled from the past cycle. Like all beginnings it is subjective, unknown, anticipatory, hopeful, and fearful. No light is visible in this pre-dawn phase. It is pre-historic; the future has not yet come, yet instincts and feelings, stored in memory, resurface at this junction.

Applying this way of thinking to planetary returns has helped me to understand the significance of the timeframe leading to the return and the potential renewal that can benefit and bless the emergence of the new cycle. Astrologically thinking, what we return to is our own individualistic and authentic expression of the planetary archetype which has undergone a full cycle of development and is ready to move to the next stage of its growth. The planet returns home, but what does the planet come home to?

Eternal Recurrence

Eternal recurrence has been a continuous consideration since antiquity.³ Aristotle summarized it in his own way: 'The same opinions recur in rotation among men, not once or twice, but infinitely often'⁴ From a modern perspective, it was Friedrich Nietzsche who developed his ideas of eternal recurrence in his writings, such as *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. He characterized our existence as an hourglass turned over and over and us along with it, a concept other writers have articulated through time.

While many symbols have been used to characterize the eternal return and rebirth, the ouroboros, or the snake biting its own tail, as well as the circle with an endless knot

epitomize the recurrent nature of the cosmos. These two images depict linear and chronological time shaped into an endless cycle. When a piece of rope is stretched out, then knotted, the line becomes a circle; the knot or node being the start and finish of an endless loop. Astrologically this is the powerful concept that underpins the crossroads of the conjunction, the aspect where a cycle of time comes to an end, yet another cycle begins simultaneously. This eternal cycle of death and rebirth, creation and destruction, beginning and ending, heads and tails is the eternal return, the never-ending cycle of regeneration, engraved in the heavens as the zodiac, the infinite cycle where all the planets perpetually return.

Inherent in the eternal return is the suggestion that a similar state will recur at some point once again since time is infinite. This idea is used astrologically when looking at comparable times in past cycles to consider events and possibilities in light of the future. We draw on the past to imagine the future from where we are in the present. When we are at the return, all time is enmeshed in the knot that binds time together.

Astrological Returns

Planetary returns occur at the completion of their sidereal cycle, that is, the completion of one full zodiacal round. However, we also experience returns of planetary pairs in their synodic cycles.⁵ This time contains both alpha and omega; it is an ending, yet also a beginning, a period of completion, yet also a period of anticipation. At this crossroads the past and the future intersect in the present. Planetary returns are thresholds that indicate important transitional periods, turning points in human development and growth. Astrologically a return distinguishes the complete cycle of a planet, its return home. And like the mythological heroes, these returns can succeed or fail, depending on the consciousness applied during the initiatory crossing of the threshold.

All planets along with other celestial bodies return. Some are particularly significant for their metaphoric imagery which marks out times of re-envisioning and re-structuring the Self. All are significant in their own way and when considered in context of their cycle they are deeply meaningful. Following are short reflections on planetary returns and the possibility of renewal.

The Sun: The Return and Renewal of the 'True Self'

Since the Sun represents both the vitality and the light of the Self, it is an important archetype to honour as it completes its cycle. The birthday, or celebration of the Sun's annual return, is one of the few planetary rituals still celebrated in our society. It honours and recognizes the renewal of spirit and the beginning of an individual's New Year. Festivities associated with the birthday ritualize the return of the Sun to its natal position and pay tribute to the renewal of our birth right.

Astrologically this return is honoured through the solar return horoscope, a chart erected for the time when the Sun returns to its exact natal position. As representative of the Sun's return, the horoscope symbolizes the renewal of identity, confidence and purpose outlining another initiation into the experience of self while also identifying important developmental areas for the upcoming year. Therefore the solar return is like the annual rebirth of the hero who reconfirms their identity and purposefulness each year. Each solar return chart is in effect from one birthday to the next and not only maps the potentialities of the year, but also restates the soul's intention, the deeper motives behind our life experiences and the unfolding of our individuation process. In a way celebrating our birthday is akin to participating with the return of the Sun and a re-cognition of the journey of the soul and the self.

Since the Sun is the focus of the horoscope, it will be the only constant in the solar return chart, always being at the same zodiacal position as the natal Sun. However, over time patterns emerge as each planet is depicted in its unique cycle with the Sun (the synodic cycle). For instance the Sun-Moon grand cycle of 19 years is embedded in the Solar Return as is the Mercury grand cycle of 33 years and the Venus grand cycle of 8 years.⁶ The Sun moves consistently through the horoscope quadrants and the outer planets move with its rhythm. Over time our Solar Return horoscopes are living manuscripts of the commemoration of our journey through time.

The Moon: Return and Renewal of the 'Home Base'

The Moon returns every 27.3 days; therefore there are 13 lunar returns in a calendar year. Similarly a chart can be cast for the exact moment of return and used as a guide to the emotional climate, moods, attachments, domestic changes and inner life that emerges throughout the course of the month. I am particularly mindful of dreams that occur during the 24 hours either side of the lunar return. I also contextualize any emotions, reveries or reactions in the light of the return to reflect on the authenticity of the feeling and what it may be excavating, releasing or renewing.

Mercury, Venus & Mars: Return and Renewal to Connectivity

All three planetary returns can be complicated by their retrograde sub-cycle creating three return charts for their period of renewal identifying the importance of the archetype during this period. Return charts can be cast to help us become more mindful of each archetypal domain. For instance I have seen the Mercury return charts helpful when clients have had questions about the development of ideas, studying, schooling or writing over the next period. Similarly for Venus, these returns can be helpful in the ongoing development of relationship or self value. Becoming aware of their returns to the natal placements annually encourages us to be more attuned to our individual development of the archetype over time.

Mars returns anywhere between 17 to 24 months; therefore its first return coincides with what we refer to as the 'terrible twos' of the infant's initiation into mobility, assertion of strength and will. The return to our natal Mars invites us to become more proactive and intentional, conscious of what we want and how best to make that happen. I have experienced a large percentage of clients have their first consultation near a Mars return which for me symbolizes their urge to investigate new avenues to express their individuality and move towards their goals.

Jupiter: The Return and Renewal of Hope

Jupiter returns reconnect us to our original sense of meaning and hope. At these times we naturally re-envision the next 12 years of our life from a more authentic and meaningful perspective. The initiatory passages of Jupiter are often experienced through education, pilgrimage and social development which shape our integrity and morality.

Jupiter Returns
between ages 11 - 12
between ages 23 - 24
between ages 35 - 36
between ages 47 - 48
between ages 59 - 60
between ages 71 - 72
between ages 83 - 84

Since the archetype symbolizes justice, the formation of a moral compass, the development of ethics and a social conscience, this is where we return to. Each Jupiter return marks a maturation of our personal and authentic beliefs. On the cusp of each of these returns is a graduation, a step forward that needs to be approached mindfully as it introduces the next twelve years. I have always encouraged my clients at these times to reflect on the past 12 years and imagine where they would like to be 12 years from now. I also encourage an active imagination and reflection on purpose and potential.

Saturn: The Return and Renewal of Autonomy, Containment & Self-Determination

Saturn returns symbolize coming home to our innate sovereignty, autonomy and authority. Each return brings us closer to the core of our aloneness or perhaps our all-one-ness. Saturn initiates us through the aches and pains of time and ageing. This is Saturn's maturation process so that we live in the world being authentic to our self.

Saturn Returns
between ages 29 - 30
between ages 58 - 59
between ages 87 - 88

Saturn returns encourage us to be in our own skin, no one else's. The dominating archetypal symbol is accountability and responsibility; therefore Saturn's initiations often are focused on personal and social reliability, spiritual autonomy and life lessons which help us find the place in the world that is waiting for us.

The Lunar Nodes: The Return and Renewal of Purpose

These returns reconnect us to our spiritual heritage and birthright renewing our spirit and inner life. We can epitomize these returns as a calling to accept (or not) our vocational path. The Nodal returns renew our authentic spiritual path through the world, awakening us to something larger than ourselves. Often these returns are accompanied by an outer event which reconnects us to an interior sense of meaningfulness, a felt sense of purpose and/or a reconnection to the divine. I find these returns to be highly significant in helping others revision and reconnect to a deeper sense of their spiritual authenticity.

Nodal Returns
between ages 18 - 19
between ages 37 - 38
between ages 55 - 56
between ages 74 - 75

The Progressed Moon: Return and Renewal to Belonging

These returns signify the reconnection to a more authentic feeling base, a maturity of emotional expression and a deeper felt sense of where we belong. The Progressed Moon symbolizes the feeling archives of the soul, initiating us through emotional maturation, social sensitivity and surrendering to soul needs.

Progressed Moon Return
between ages 27 - 28
between ages 54 - 55
between ages 81 - 82

Through attachment and bonding we are inducted into life. At these returns we re-member the continuity of our familial attachments, bonds forged through time and the interconnecting

stories of those we love and have loved. At each return the child, the parent and the elder/crone linger at the crossroads.

Chiron: The Return and Renewal of our Authentic Humanness

Chiron, the pain of our divinity encased in temporality, completes its cycle between ages 49 ó 50 and returns us to the authentic and spiritual aspects of the self that have been overshadowed by the necessity to conform. This return signifies the remembrance of being both mortal and divine through acknowledging the suffering of living and the inevitability of dying. The Chironic initiation into accepting the pain of living and its limitations is the healing balm that renews our spirit and frees us from limiting life systems.

Uranus: The Return and Renewal of the Soul Story

Uranus returns at 84, a lifespan, returning us into the mystery and sanctity of life. At this ouroboric point of endings and beginnings, a round of embodied life has been completed, as its next cycle is personified spiritually. Uranusø initiation is separation from the known to embrace the not known. The renewal is the welcoming of the mystery that lies ahead.

We return time and time again to essential aspects of our Self, symbolized by the planet, to know it in a personally authentic way. Each return promises regeneration. The possibility of renewal is inherent in each planetary cycle, but consciousness is vital in applying the energy available at this time. Most planets return over a lifetime, perhaps over a thousand times like the Moon; or just once, like Uranus. It takes a lifetime to return to Uranus!

ENDNOTES

¹ Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with A Thousand Faces*, Bollingen Series, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ: 1968.

² Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with A Thousand Faces*, p. 193

³ Although Plato had articulated the Great Year, the doctrine of *apokatastasis* or eternal recurrence is often attributed to Berossus, the Babylonian/Greek astrologer of the 3rd C BCE, by Seneca ó see *The Archaeology of Measurement*, edited by Iain Morley and Colin Renfrew, Cambridge University Press, New York, NY: 2010, 191.

⁴ Aristotle, *Critical Assessment*, edited by Lloyd P. Gerson, Routledge, New York, N.Y.: 1999, 178.

⁵ Synodic cycles are the period from one conjunction of two celestial bodies to their return at the next conjunction. In 2020 we have three planetary pairs returning and renewing: Saturn-Pluto, Jupiter-Pluto and Jupiter-Saturn.

⁶ Grand cycleø refers to the planets returning to their same zodiacal position. While the Sun-Moon synodic cycle is 29.5 days, the zodiacal positions repeat every 19 years (the Metonic cycle). The Sun-Mercury synodic cycle averages 116 days while the Sun-Venus averages 584 days, yet their grand cycles will be 33 and 8 years respectively. Since the Solar return horoscope always has the Sun at the same zodiacal position these planets repeat in this cycle over time.