
THE HERBST NEWSLETTER

astrological-cultural-spiritual-political views & opinions

--- Thoughts, dates, and reminders about our lives as members of the craziest species on this lovely planet. Like a message in a bottle washing up on the sandy shores of consciousness ---

Issue #118; January 2010

Dear friends,

Welcome to 2010. Since 2005, I've written newsletters that anticipated this decade — the 2010s — which most of us expect to be extraordinary. This is my 34th Commentary in what I call the Uranus-Pluto Series. Over the next two years, I intend to go back and re-write some of the earlier essays to provide updated context and more relevant meanings, and also to focus on a number of the emerging crises in consciousness faced by collective humanity. This month's Commentary sets up those future newsletters.

--Bill Herbst

Commentary: **Where is Our Wisdom?**

For a species that is characterized by an extraordinary, almost inexhaustible cleverness and, less positively, by an equally sharp-edged cunning, *homo sapiens sapiens* (that's us, friends) seems remarkably devoid of wisdom. If the various elements of human consciousness can be considered resources, our coffers simply don't contain much of anything that could be called wise. The opposite qualities, however — ignorance and stupidity — are available in vast abundance. In fact, the affairs of managing civilization are so topsy-turvy that, much like sow's ears masquerading as silk purses, ignorance and stupidity are often passed off as if they were actually wisdom, and frequently to great acclaim.

Some people assert the presence of tidal rhythms in group intelligence, a natural ebb-and-flow in the relation of idiots to savants, especially among those who run society from positions of formal or informal leadership. If this is true, then over my lifetime of 60 years we have witnessed in America a culminating tsunami of idiocy, a virtual tidal wave of ignoramuses. [Please keep in mind that when I categorize someone as an idiot or ignoramus, that person may still be and often is remarkably clever and devilishly cunning.]

My definition of wisdom is NOT scholarly knowledge. We have scholars who are wise, and scholars who are damned fools. The same is true of every profession,

every discipline, and every calling. While a good education in learning how to think clearly and logically can be extremely helpful in achieving wisdom, thinking itself is not at the heart of the experience. Nor is wisdom a sophisticated lexicon of metaphysical or religious beliefs. We know more than enough about the scandalous failings of too many priests and gurus. In fact, cultural roles that embody the appearance of wisdom often attract people to fill them whose main talents lie in their skill in appearing wise rather than possession of any deeper wisdom. Too many "empty suits" occupy posts of authority and power in our society. Institutions tend to be run by "institutional types," just as corporations are usually run by "corporate types." And temperament is not wisdom.

Many qualities that foster social or financial success have precious little to do with wisdom. Self-assertion is one. Ambition is another. Success itself is no guarantee of wisdom.

The qualities that make up the wisdom basket include simple and complex traits: maturity, patience, distilled experience, forbearance to postpone immediate gratification, accurate self-assessments, appreciation for harmony as well as conflict, understanding of paradox and irony, willingness for passionate involvement contrasted with abilities for cool detachment, and the overarching skill of empathizing with others.

The last quality of that short list — empathy — is critical. If I cannot put myself in another's shoes, I'm not likely to get very far down the road toward wisdom. I may possess other sterling qualities, but wisdom won't be one of them. Seeing oneself in others is probably the single most important "spiritual" achievement required for consciousness to flower into its highest adult form.

More often than we'd like, wisdom is tied to suffering. Ill health, whether traumatic or chronic, physical or emotional pain, broken bodies, and all the myriad forms of loss are potential gateways to wisdom, although other paths are sometimes taken by those so afflicted. Not that one must suffer to become wise, but it helps.

Now, I am well aware that what I've written here about wisdom does not comprise an academic treatise or even a working definition. My brief reflections are more like random thoughts, mere notes from the field. Add to that the truth that wisdom, like beauty, exists in the eye of the beholder, and we're pretty much back to square one, which is where the Uranus-Pluto cycle enters the picture.

More than any other pair of archetypal symbols in astrology, Uranus and Pluto correspond to radical, revolutionary stimulation of both individual and collective consciousness. The medium through which these archetypes operate is unexpected and seemingly insignificant events. These seminal events provoke profound reactions that morph suddenly into mass movements galvanizing large segments of the human population into dramatic new awareness. Such Uranian-Plutonian changes in consciousness occur within individuals; the effects, however, spread like wildfire through the collective, instigating challenges to the day-to-day operations of culture.

Here at the beginning of 2010, we are in the middle of the first of two astrological alignments that, taken together, will correspond to more than a decade of the most profound changes in civilization that any of us now alive has ever seen. The first alignment — already effective for the past two years with two more years yet to come — is a Saturn-Uranus-Pluto T-square (right triangle). Under this configuration, the wrecking ball has shown up to begin destruction of social institutions (Pluto in Capricorn), especially those that constitute the core of our global economic systems.

Radical changes in consciousness do not even start until 2012. In 2010-2011, we will see more of what we've already witnessed in 2008-2009: a decided lack of consciousness among the general population, and concerted resistance to necessary change among the powers that be — politicians, corporate execs, and those behind the scenes who exert influence over collective decisions. Those elites will continue in their efforts to resuscitate the economic and financial institutions that are collapsing, so as to return to "business-as-usual." Gradually, however, over the next two years, more people will acknowledge the futility of such wrong-headed efforts.

Andrew Ross Sorkin is a New York Times mergers and acquisitions reporter/columnist, assistant editor, and author of the exposé **Too Big to Fail**, which recounts the financial implosion of 2008-2009 from the perspective of Wall Street insiders. Interviewed on the December 30th edition of The PBS News Hour, Sorkin commented on the aftermath of the financial crisis and the current attitudes of Wall Street executives:

ANDREW ROSS SORKIN: "So, here is the sad news. Having now lived with many of these [Wall Street] people for a year at the very, very top in the corner office, I'm not sure much has changed at all. The culture has not changed. The whole ethos, the 'greed is good' mentality, seems to still be alive and well. And, frankly, there hasn't been much reform out of Washington. When you talk to CEOs on Wall Street, they now think of themselves, oddly enough, as survivors. That is the word they use, like a cancer survivor. And I'm not sure they appreciate that they have been rescued. I did have an encounter with John Mack, who is the CEO of Morgan Stanley, who actually was probably the most self-aware of the CEOs, who said recently that, actually, Wall Street people can't control themselves. It was a remarkable statement. And he said, we need to be controlled, almost like he was an addict, and you needed to take the crack pipe away. And I thought that was remarkable. But I will tell you, most other people on Wall Street, not only do they not have that view. They are pushing back on any view that would put real reform in place."

To learn that the great majority of Wall Street's "masters of the universe" feel little if any humility or remorse may be disappointing, but it's hardly surprising. For one thing, this is the very last group whose consciousness is likely to move toward wisdom, and for another, the period of collective transformation of consciousness does not even begin for another two years. In other words, the party hasn't started yet, so we shouldn't be surprised or disheartened if the dance floor is empty.

In June 2012, critical mass will be reached with the second of the two alignments stepping up as Saturn moves out of the picture and Uranus-Pluto command center-stage with the first of seven exact passes in their first-quarter square. What began as a financial meltdown will likely deepen by 2013-2014 into the general commercial contraction of a global depression, whose repercussions will ripple out into every nook and cranny of shared life in culture and civilization. This period marks the beginning of the radical changes in consciousness provoked by Uranus and Pluto together. One specific result is likely to be a profound spiritual crisis concerning the nature of experiences that provide core meaning for human life.

If money and all the various activities surrounding it (getting money, working to make more money, managing debts, shopping, and spending money) can no longer constitute the center of our lives, what will replace money? What do we make central instead? That particular challenge is only one of numerous necessary awakenings in the direction of wisdom. How we respond to these challenges will carry great weight in determining our future survival as a species. Assuming that my physical health and psychological wellness hold up, I intend to use the public soapbox of these newsletter commentaries to ruminate about those increasing pressures to awaken us into more grace and reverence.

All the crises of human consciousness that may emerge over the next decade will take much more than a mere ten years to reach some working resolution about how humans live and conduct our affairs on this small garden planet. I don't claim to know how humans will live in two centuries, but I hope that those future generations might look back to the 2010s as a seminal time in humanity's vainglorious history, when we took our first tentative steps toward maturing into wisdom.

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