

Hitchhikers Guide to the Aquarian Age

By Donna Woodwell, MA

Don't Panic!

We've all seen the astrological equivalent of lurid headlines: Cardinal Planets Menace World Axis! Uranus-Pluto Square Looms Immanent! In astrology magazines, blogs and lectures, much ado has been made about the "perfect storm" of intense astrological aspects marking the years 2008-2015...

- Pluto ingress into Capricorn
- Uranus and Jupiter ingress into Aries
- Neptune ingress into Pisces
- Too many Uranus-Pluto squares to count

The delineations have been dire: economic collapse, governments overthrown, corporations fall, natural disasters, environmental catastrophes, protesters taking to the streets. Sadly, flipping on the news reveals many of these things have indeed come to pass.

Clearly, we live in challenging times. But are we to be satisfied fiddling with forecasts while the world burns? Who wants to send their clients home with a predictions of doom-and-gloom without any remedial measures?

Don't panic! The Hitchhikers Guide to the Aquarian Age has a few things to say about living with uncertainty and change. Grab your towel, and read on.

Neoplatonism and the Ladder of Planets

Philosophers have always pondered the nature of creation. One concept popular in the ancient Near East in Hellenistic times was the notion of manifestation by emanation. In this theory, the Divine "One" transformed to become the "many" manifest objects, moving through a series of "emanations" along the way. As summarized by Richards Tarnas in the *Passion of the Western Mind*:

"The Neoplatonic cosmos is the result of a divine emanation from the supreme One ... The One, also called the Good, in an overflow of sheer perfection produces the 'other' – the created cosmos in all its variety. ... The emanation of divinity from the One is an ontological process which Plotinus compared to the light that moves gradually outward from a candle until it at last disappears into darkness."¹

Human souls were said to take a similar journey in the process of incarnating on Earth.

"It had become tradition in Plotinus' day to interpret the myth of Plato's *Phaedrus* and *Republic* pretty much according to the letter. The descent of the soul was represented as a tumble through the spheres to the Earth where the soul took on, one after another, various irrational faculties."²

Put another way, the descent through the "spheres" (i.e. planets) is the pathway through which things are made manifest in the physical realm.

This model is echoed in the astrological works of Claudius Ptolemy, another Neoplatonic philosopher. In his *Tetrabiblos*³, Ptolemy describes a planetary ladder based on the planets and the signs they rule. Throughout the course of the year, the Sun descends this ladder, descending from summer to winter through the Leo (Sun), Virgo (Mercury), Libra (Venus), Scorpio (Mars), Sagittarius (Jupiter), Capricorn (Saturn), then ascending from winter to summer through Aquarius (Saturn), Pisces (Jupiter), Aries (Mars), Taurus (Venus), Gemini (Mercury), Cancer (Moon) before returning to its own sign Leo. From the light of the summer, to the darkness of the winter, and back again, the zodiac itself was seen as the cosmic path of creative manifestation.

Some ancient astral religions took this metaphor a step further, believing that, if humanity's "fall" into darkness was a function of descending the planetary ladder, then meditations on these planetary realms could allow the aspirant to ascend back to the more enlightened realms of divinity. Using ritual, prayers, and magic to invoke celestial intelligences to aid the seeker was known as *astral theurgy*.

Modern Planetary Mystics

Given the recent challenging astrological aspects occurring on the world axis, now is an especially apt time to work with the metaphor of the Planetary Ladder. Faced with serious economic, environmental and social challenges, the old ways of doing things do not always produce constructive results. Instead, we need to re-create ourselves and our governments and institutions to find solutions that are appropriate to the realities of our 21st century, global society.

Let us then imagine following the ancient logic even further. If we visualize *ascending* the ladder of the planets to find a

pathway to enlightenment, then meditating on *descending* the planetary ladder should give us clues about how to creatively manifest new solutions in our world.

This idea has implications for the practice of astrology. First, it gives an astrological metaphor for how to proactively manifest change in our personal lives and as a society. Secondly, it suggests a way for those who have specific planets (either natively or by progression) that are activated by transiting planets to negotiate with the inhabitants of the planetary realms in constructive ways. For example, for the person who has Mercury strongly activated by the transiting cardinal planets, a visit to Mercury's realm may be a productive strategy.

Let's now take a trip through the planetary realms and see what we discover along the way.

Sun's Realm **Embrace Change**

Vitality. Creativity. Self-awareness. Decision-making. Such are the activities enjoyed by visitors to the Sun's realm.

Change is unavoidable; how we deal with change is our choice. The first step in managing change gracefully is the choice to actively *embrace change*. As in the now-immortal words of Leo-Sun Harry Potter:

“But he understood at last what Dumbledore had been trying to tell him. It was, he thought, the difference between being dragged into the arena to face a battle to the death and walking into the arena with your head held high. Some people, perhaps, would say that there was little to choose between the two ways, but Dumbledore knew — *and so do I*, thought Harry — that there was all the difference in the world.”²⁴

When you are seated in heart of the Sun, destiny is not something that just happens to you, it is something that you co-create by your thoughts and actions.

If transits have landed you in the Sun's realm, it's time to welcome change in your life. Don't focus on the past; rather, shine the solar spotlight on the new opportunities presented. When we own the decisions in our lives, we experience more energy and vitality; harnessing that energy source is a powerful force in creating what you seek.

Moon's Realm **Imagine**

Imagine the town council is deciding to grant permission for the building of a nuclear power plant. Council members are

intrigued by the possibility of new jobs and new revenue being brought to the city, and are leaning toward approving the plan.

Now imagine a neighborhood group has just heard of the plans for the new power plant. They are horrified to think of a dangerous nuclear plant so close to their homes. They worry about the potential environmental impact on their families. They decide to protest the building of the plant. They make signs that say “No Nukes” and hold a rally in front of the town council.

So, here's the question: if the council members are visualizing a power plant (and enthusiastic about it) and the protesters are visualizing a power plant (and fearful of it), who is imagining a town *without* a power plant?

Unfortunately, it's often easier to imagine what we fear than it is to imagine a more satisfying alternative. Yet our ability to imagine is essential to our ability to create. We must dare to dream!

When in the realm of the Moon, reflect on what you want the future to be. Visualize yourself working toward your ideal and achieving positive outcomes. Use as many of your senses as you can to create your vision of success. The more vivid and compelling your dream, the more likely you will be to make it manifest in your world.

Mercury's Realm **Educate Yourself**

Have a vision, but don't know how to get there? Take a trip to Mercury's realm!

Dreams remain just that until we map out how we can achieve them. Denizens of Mercury love to collect information from many sources (Gemini), analyze it and make an action plan (Virgo).

As visitors to Mercury's realm we need to seek knowledge. Learn. Ask questions. Listen. Think. Understand the root causes of change in your life and in your world. Often when facing change the old ways of doing things will no longer work. We need to brainstorm new strategies for navigating a changing landscape. Build flexibility your plans so you may adapt to new information and circumstances as they come along.

Write down your intentions. Studies have shown time and again that the act of writing clearly defined goals is one of the leading indicators that you will achieve them. Better still, communicate your plans with other people. The act of talking about your plans with someone else can bring both clarity and accountability.

What? Need people to talk to? Then pack your bags for the next stop of our journey...

Venus' Realm **Build Community**

A few years ago, a group of local astrologers got together to build Austin's first astrological society. Of course, we shared a common interest in astrology, but more than that, we wanted to build a community of astrologers. Knowing what was on the cosmic horizon, we believed it was important to start forging connections where we could.

Relating is a core value of Venus' realm. So is sharing and networking. Lady Venus finds pleasure in human connections.

When we are in the midst of intense change, there is sometimes a tendency to pull away from other people. Because change can be scary and it can hurt, we might curl up and feel sorry for ourselves. Or we insist that nobody understands. Or we fall into the trap of Me vs. Them thinking.

Especially in this time of global changes, we need to recognize that we all share the same planet. For what is still coming, we are stronger acting on shared goals. "We must all hang together, or assuredly we shall all hang separately," said Benjamin Franklin. The act of reaching out to others can not only make us feel less alone, it also allows us to combine our talents and resources in creative ways that can benefit the whole community. Plus, it's fun!

If transits have delivered you to Venus' realm, it's time to reach out. Make new friends. Talk to your neighbors. Share ideas and resources. Delight in the company of others. Open your heart.

Mars' Realm **Take Action**

All thrusters on! In the realm of Mars we move beyond the worlds of ideas into the world of action. On your visit to the Red Planet, prepare to set your alarm early, eat a hearty breakfast, and roll up your sleeves. Martians seize the day!

Years ago, I worked for a human rights organization that chronicled cases of torture around the world. Though the stories we collected were horrifying testament to humanity's potential for cruelty, they were also evidence of our ability to transcend the most extreme circumstances. Those who found small ways to reclaim power, such as by counting seconds before they would allow themselves to scream, where those who were most likely to survive and eventually overcome their experiences.

Much is changing in the world. Everywhere we look, old systems are breaking down. The scale of change is so enormous, it's easy to feel powerless — an anonymous victim of circumstances. An activated Mars challenges us to reclaim our own power. Take action, even if you're not sure yet if it's the best action, you will learn by doing.

Like homesteaders on the frontier, the denizens of Mars are self-reliantly building a new world. Where ever you are in life, your actions can make a difference. Get out of debt. Don't buy what you don't need. Grow your own food. Build new habits. Act creatively.

The Martian sages teach this: "Brightening your own light helps the world see better." Do your part.

Jupiter's Realm **Cultivating Hope**

Jupiter's composition is very similar to the Sun. Then why isn't it a star? Scientists say it's because Jupiter never reached its critical mass. But the residents of this almost-star have never given up hope.

Psychologists have defined hope as our "perceived capacity" to achieve our goals.⁵ Like the *Little Engine That Could*, hope says "I think I can, I think I can" until the train has reached the summit. A virtual panacea, hope reduces depression, stress and procrastination and increases health, longevity, achievement and happiness.

When our travels land us in the realm of Jupiter, we are invited to cultivate hope. Rather than something that just happens, hope can be a learned response. Each time we choose to look at the positive elements of life events, we are increasing our capacity for hope. Similarly, each time we achieve one of our goals, no matter how small, we create hope for achieving the next goal.

Once we have made our plans and done our work, at some point in time we must end our travails and hope for the best. By letting go and trusting, we allow our energies to flow toward positively manifest the changes we seek in the world. Over time, these small movements can move mountains.

Saturn's Realm **Live in the now.**

The last stop on our interplanetary journey is Saturn, the planetary realm that grounds us in bounded, physical manifestation. Here we are rooted in the sensible world, surrounded by things we can touch and see. It is the province of ideas made manifest.

Saturn is also the Lord of time; a sojourn to his realm reminds us that the past is but a memory, the future is still a dream. The only place from which to creatively act is the present moment.

Simplicity, groundedness, real: the gift of Saturn is the practice of mindfulness. Mindfulness is a kind of meditation in which the mind focuses on the present moment without judgment. With practice, mindfulness can become a way of life, in which we can slow down, put our past traumas and anxieties over the future aside, and embrace “what is.”

An example, environmentalist and author Bill McKibben has spent a lifetime studying and educating the public about the threat of global warming. In one of his lectures, an audience member asked him: “Every day in your work you are faced with the most gloomy predictions of our future. How do you keep going?” He thought for a moment, then replied: “Don’t divorce yourself from the living that needs to be done.”

Living in the now brings us our only opportunity to act with intention. The choices we make from moment to moment create our reality. Slow down, breathe deeply, and take a step.

Descending Heaven’s Stairway: Seven Steps to a Brighter Future

Now that we’ve returned from our quick trip through the classical planetary realms, we can see how our journey through each of these “emanations” brought us deeper into our physically manifested reality. In the realm of the Sun we chose to make a change. While stopping by the Moon, we imagined what possibilities awaited us, and on Mercury we picked up the skills and information we needed to make it happen. On Venus we reached out to others for companionship, and on Mars we took action to make things happen. Then finally, on Jupiter we found the hope to keep moving forward, and embraced the present moment on Saturn.

Of course, our imaginary interplanetary hitchhiker could travel from one planet to the next in a linear fashion, gathering experience as she went. But our reality is far more complex. Often we find ourselves thrust into more than one of these archetypal worlds simultaneously. How do we know where to concentrate our efforts?

At the simplest level, we may look for planets in the natal chart that receive challenging aspects (conjunctions, squares and oppositions) from other planets in the nativity. Such configurations signify lifelong arenas of interest, and we may find ourselves frequent visitors to the realms of the planets involved.

We may also find ourselves with a season pass to a planetary realm when natal or progressed planets experience challenging aspects by transiting planets, particularly the slower moving ones. With so many slower transiting planets making aspects to each other right now, it’s likely that some natal or progressed planets may be activated by more than one planet at a time. But focusing on the planets being transited, rather than on the ones doing the transiting, is often the most fertile ground to start the exploration.

In the end, to manifest the future we desire, we need to master the navigation of all of the planetary realms. Fortunately, with a little creativity and imagination, we can playfully engage with the planetary intelligences and discover what wisdom they have to share with us. Enjoy the cosmic adventure!

“It’s The Great Space Coaster, Get on board.
On The Great Space Coaster, We’ll explore.”⁶

Biography

A true Renaissance woman, **Donna Woodwell**, MA, is an astrologer, writer, hypnotist, and Internet entrepreneur. Her mission: to live creatively with passion, purpose, abundance and joy, and empower others to do the same. An active member of the astrological community, Donna is currently a board member of the International Society for Astrological Research (ISAR), and has served on the Astrology News Service (ANS), launched the Astrological Society of Austin and as NCGR’s membership director. Donna is a certified hypnotist, an Initiate of the Hermetic Order of the Brotherhood of Light, an Usui Reiki master, and an experienced guide for shamanic journeywork. She lives in Austin, Texas. Catch up on her latest projects at www.fourmoonsastrology.com and www.GNO515.com.

Endnotes

- 1 Tarnas, Richard. *Passion of the Western Mind*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1991. p. 84-85
- 2 O’Brien, Elmer. *The Essential Plotinus*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1964. p. 59.
- 3 Ptolemy, Claudius. *Tetrabiblos*. Book One, Chapter 17.
- 4 Rowling, J.K. *Harry Potter and the Half Blood Prince*. New York: Scholastic Press, 2005. p. 479.
- 5 Pychyl, Timothy A. “Don’t Delay: Understanding procrastination and how to achieve our goals.” *Psychology Today*, May 21, 2008. <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/dont-delay/200805/coping-and-procrastination-the-role-hope>
- 6 Great Space Coaster Theme song. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dddm5bQeKvg>