

The Astrology of Midlife and Aging

by Erin Sullivan

The Significance of Saturn and Uranus in the Midlife Transition

The transitions of life's second half offer a special kind of opportunity to break with the social conditioning that has carried us successfully this far and [onward] to do something really new and different.

William Bridges, Transitions [1]

The two planets most consistently lively in a psychoactive fashion during the midlife transition are Saturn and Uranus. Prior to the sighting of Uranus in 1781, Saturn was the ruler of the sign Aquarius, and as with all the signs with modern rulers, the ancient ruler is not only still effective, it acts as a highly significant agent in the sign's behavior or manifestation.

Saturn and Uranus embody antithetical properties and have strongly polarized characteristics:

1. *Saturn* embodies the positive agency of homeostasis and urges us to stay the same, to automatically correct any influence toward change, transformation, or upheaval. Saturn's agency thus, is to maintain earthy, practical needs, even at the risk of calcification or depression. If Saturn is not honored in life, then it can bring a sense of soulless conventionality and psychological and physical stuckness to bear on the soul.
2. *Uranus* is the planetary medium which impels us toward change and acts as the inner agency for experimentation, growth, evolution and individuation. Too, Uranus is our inner witness, watching for opportunities to change habitual behaviors, disrupt the status quo and stir up any stagnant pool. If Uranus is not honored, then anxiety and manic behavior can erupt, forcing one to "wake up" to what is required.

As you might suspect, if we were made up only of Saturn and Uranus as planetary agents for life forces, we would not survive the stress of the conflict! In fact the conflict of Saturn and Uranus are older than time, and herald the archetypal struggle of heaven and earth that is present in all forms of creative struggle, whether that is socio-political, interpersonal, or within one's own self.

In the Beginning ...

Mythologically, Uranus is the eponymous planet of the ancient Greek god who was, in fact, the heavens as a place. Ouranos was never worshipped as a god, nor are there any shrines, emblems or evidence of temples and the usual indicators of an individual entity. That Ouranos was the sky, and not a sky god gives him a very special place in myth - not as a singular entity but as a realm of experience. This is very significant in considering the astrology of Uranus and the interpretation of its qualities both as a natal planet and in transit.

Ouranos came into being because, Gaia - mother earth - created him herself to comfort her and be her consort. After she birthed many other earth and nature divinities on her own (or with the aid of Eros, according to the oldest myth) she grew lonely and wanted a mate. And, so she created Ouranos, the heavens, to surround her and keep her constant company, and he enveloped the earth in all his aetheric power. Their union produced many offspring, such as the Cyclopes and the Titans.

Then, Gaia found herself pregnant with new offspring, the Hekatonchires, or the "hundred-handed ones". They were multiple and monstrous, but being a mother, Gaia loved them anyway. Ouranos, did not. He was horrified at their monstrosity, their imperfect and fearful traits, and refused her birthing them. Naturally, Gaia grew uncomfortable and angry, and she employed the youngest of the Titan's, their son, Kronos in an act that would change the course of mythic history.



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Gaia und Uranus

She presented Kronos with a scythe, made of adamant - obsidian - a clear, hard crystalline sickle and told him to reach up, “as *Ouranos lay round Gaia, longing for love*”, and castrate him. Which he did. [2] Thus, forever separating the archetypal parents, as well as launching a new mythology.

We can view this myth variously, but with the ensuing battle of the Titans and the collapse of the unified male/female, and the polarization of “above and below”, there issued a new archetype into life. The separation of heaven and earth, of male and female, the split of the archetypal parents into separate quarters, remains a strong and influential component in our collective and individual psyches.

We can view the “above/below” polarity in many ways. Not only does it symbolize the manifestation of conscious and unconscious behavior, it also represents the first inklings of dual perception - that there is something “outside oneself” or even deep within oneself that is in opposition or conflict.

Jung thought mediation of conflict was the stuff of life; that inner conflict resolution was the reply to the universal challenge toward wholeness. This is a powerful concept, and more often than not, resolution of inner conflict results in conscious peace of mind for individuals.

The function of Saturn and Uranus, the mythic father/son conflict as we experience it in mid-life, is about resolution of conflict and the need for change, even if it is a violent or disruptive act. As a psychic complex, or a dichotomy, Saturn can act as the severing function of our creative ideas. We might be so worried about our own creativity that it never actually is given birth, but is “castrated” before any idea, concept, action or experiment is enacted! In contrast to this suppression, if Uranus has the upper hand, so to speak, then we can be too outrageous, too eccentric and simply unable to get our point across or find an acceptable median for behavior or communication.



Die Entmannung von Uranus durch Saturn
Giorgio Vasari und Gherardi Christofano

The urge for creative experimentation and individuation at midlife can be stuffed back down inside the psychic womb, just as Ouranos stuffed the Hekatonchires back into the womb of Gaia. And, it would then take an “adamant” personal attitude toward one’s own self to birth the inner urge for creative change.

Howard Sasportas, in *The Twelve Houses*, says: “*Uranus’ house may show where we rashly disrespect the limits of our human-ness’. Presuming we can automatically transcend the restrictions of the physical body or ‘rise above’ the instinctual components of our nature, we commit the sin of hubris and invite punishment to fall on us.*” [3]

Saturn is the planet that held domain over the entire solar system until 1781 CE, the period of both the French and American revolutions, inaugurating the Industrial Revolution and involved the whole of western civilization as it was then. Prior to that era, social life existed within the bounds of family and cultural limitations. In synchrony with the advent of the “new planet” sighted by astronomer Herschel, there followed decades of phenomenal innovation and discovery. The flourishing of science, technology, philosophy, literature, music, social opportunities and, in virtually every aspect of human life, exploded Western civilization toward liberation, freedom and choice.

Uranus has become the standard bearer now for such terms as *liberation, freedom, choice, individuality, uniqueness, innovation, challenge and breaking out of old ways and challenging the status quo*. Saturn was and remains the criterion in astrology for the opposite of those values, indeed, is often relegated to a kind of “prison guard” realm. So, it may seem curious that I equate the overthrow of Ouranos/Uranus by Kronos/Saturn with liberation and freedom according to the rote astrological definition of each planet - and call that act the beginning of a new way of being.

With respect to Saturn and Uranus as “celestial sacred” symbols, they are both heavenly in position (in the sky) , but are quite different in symbol. As I mentioned above, Saturn is to do with the realm of the world and its forms. While, Uranus is to do with the ideal of the world and its forms. To propitiate both is the trick. How to acknowledge the perfection of the Ideal, while humanly existing in the realm of the Real? Essentially, we are required, periodically, to give birth to ourselves as if it were a new idea, a new culture, a new mythology.

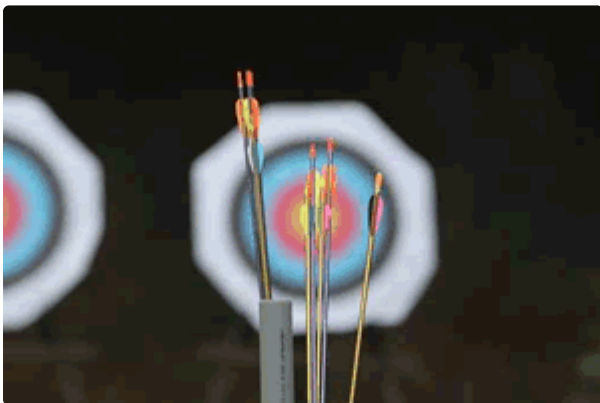
Naturally, there is an underbelly - a shadow - of the Uranian attribute which also refers back to the origin myth: if we don't trust our ability to render a creation or idea into form (Saturn) we abandon it, abort it, before it can be given birth. In other words we refuse birth of the creation due to its imperfection - just like Ouranos and the Hekatonchires.

In *Creation Myths*, Jungian analyst Marie Louise Von Franz says about crossing the threshold from the Ideal possible to the Real thing, *“People sometimes resist becoming creative because one's would be creativeness is always so much more impressive and important than the little egg on lays in the end when birth takes place!”*

It is during such times of high innovation and creativity as adolescence, midlife and the threshold of old age that we have difficulty in the trust of our own creative powers. [\[5\]](#)

One might think that the principles of Uranus overpowering Saturn would be the “new way”, but rather the opposite is what happens in our inner life. *It is in this paradox that the astrological and therefore psychological struggle for identity lies.*

As psychic components, both Saturn and Uranus are needed for wholeness. For innovation to become manifest it requires the adamant sickle of old Kronos - the discipline of matter over mind. The eidolon itself is simply the archetype of Uranus while the Idea takes form with the effort and adamant labor of Saturn. An harmonious equilibrium between both is the substance of progress, evolution and the development of consciousness.



At the midlife threshold, we arrive at a crossroads - at which stands the god of change and the god of stasis. These gods, represented by Uranus/change and Saturn/stasis, begin a dance toward the future.

It is at this very threshold - the doorway between youth and old age - that we meet many facets of ourself which have remained dormant or sleeping, awaiting this moment in development for their proper time. It is in this threshold, this liminal place, *where we are not who we used to be, but are not yet who we are to become.* For most extraverted people of this era, this experience of liminal living is a most uncomfortable and at times, deeply

distressing place.

Uranus by Sign as Midlife Purpose indicators

Dream or Fantasy?

Because we are exploring the half-Uranus cycle as the gateway to midlife's transition, the sign Uranus is in natally secrets characteristics of the opposite sign as its “unlived life”. When any planet in transit comes to the opposition point to itself in the natal chart, a half-cycle is noted. And, as with all half-cycles, it simulates the lunation cycle as a “full planet phase”, which allows for the fullness of the experience of that planet to emerge and reflect back the messages and lessons learned. That is, the opposition, or the “half-cycle” is an illumination from the transiting planet and its manifestation of intent as it reflects back to the natal planet its “secret intent”.

The fullness of any experience always is in reflection to the things “not had”; if we long for chocolate cake it is because we haven't had it in a while. Similarly if we long for something we haven't had for a while, or ever had perhaps, often it is something that actually does lie within the realm of possibility, and

also, more importantly, within one's own Self.

This potential "thing" that could happen, must lie within the seed of self, or it won't be possible. Facing reality is important here, and so is facing the myriad contexts in which we live out our dreams. If you have never studied the piano, then it is unlikely you will become a concert pianist in midlife - however, if you have always longed to play the piano and learn music, it is certainly something that can be done in midlife and enjoyed.

So, it is the beginning of a time of high potential to carry out a life dream you have always carried within, but time and circumstances have only arrived now to live it. So, if you have nurtured a dream to get a degree or take up a new trade, or travel to foreign places, but so far life has not presented you with the environment or context to fulfil those dreams and at midlife you find yourself in a new life situation (such as, the children have moved on, your partner is supportive, or you are on your own) then it is entirely possible.

Distinguishing between *fantasy* and *dream* is important in midlife. Fantasy serves a meaningful function for us - the psyche needs time off, play-time, and fantasies are very healthy for that. They are often not rendered into reality, however, such as in the example of wanting to play the piano but not knowing how does not prevent the psyche from exploring what that would be like. So an elaborate fantasy might be built around playing a complex and beloved piece of music at the piano, doing it brilliantly, and basking in the applause at the Metropolitan in New York or the Royal Albert Hall in London. No harm done.

But a dream, ah, that is different. Dreams are often linked to a real potential. Dreams are always good to nurture, while fantasies are to be indulged in. A dream comes true if both Saturn and Uranus are working at optimum. Saturn will remind you what you cannot do, and Uranus will prod you to explore, experiment and to define what it is your genius or daemon is dragging you toward. Between the two agencies, you can harness your creative potential and live it out realistically.

The half-Uranus is a time of awakening to the un-lived life and the time to assess your assets and liabilities objectively. Being able to witness yourself and your own true limits and boundaries, while simultaneously appreciating that which is really possible to fulfil is the task assigned at the crossroads. Mediating the gods of "stop" and "go" can generate a very fruitful quest.

Saturn's job is to let you know what your limits and boundaries are, and in that safe, contained place, you can become successful. You might say to yourself, "I can do anything I want, within limits."

So, when your natal Uranus is opposed by transiting Uranus, it is sending you a message, that all the unique traits and characteristics that you embody but have not yet brought to life, are calling out.

It is obvious that the midlife can bring far too many "un-lived" aspects of your life to the fore - hence the panic and angst that are frequently associated with midlife crisis. The creative aspect of Divine Discontent comes most alive at the threshold of midlife, and thence periodically throughout the entire transition.

I have associated Saturn with Divine Discontent, but it is a quality of Uranus as well.^[6] The two planets walk hand in hand on this journey, and, as mentioned before, Saturn is the planet that defines our limits, while Uranus is the planet that offers all possibility. Being grumpy and depressed is not necessarily Divine Discontent, it might simply be being grumpy and miserable. However, the mood, the tenor and numinosity associated with Divine Discontent is a prod from the unconscious toward greater creativity, to find the means to exploit your talent.

[How does the half Uranus return affect different generations? We have selected only a few of Uranus' natal positions which might be interesting for our readers as they deal with the current generations.]



Leo

Uranus in Leo has its crossover experience when Uranus transits Aquarius. Since Leo is the archetypal sign of the heart and the child, there are many indications that the first “half” of life is spent playfully and without concern for the collective, but suddenly there is a calling at midlife to nurture the world soul. The polarity of Leo and Aquarius embodies the syzygy of Individualism and Collectivity. That is, You and The Group. Within the social and tribal collective we exist as an individual, but it is only in the context of others that we can define our individuality. The conflict that exists at midlife for the Uranus in Leo is primarily one of finding one's own self within a supportive group, and to begin a process of humanitarian individuation.

Virgo

Midlife occurs when Uranus enters Pisces and the polarity between serving or suffering on behalf of the world rises to critical mass. Since the most recent Uranus in Virgo group has a majority of individuals who have the Uranus/Pluto conjunction, the quality of their midlife is amplified by this nuclear aspect. Uranus in Virgo is about individuation through the process of being useful, serviceable, helpful and on call for those who suffer. Now, when the half Uranus cycle occurs, there comes a sacrifice to be made that will serve each individual psyche toward its ultimate intent - to sacrifice something deeply personal to the demand of the global ethos. Through inventiveness and “progress” the culture arrives at a time of maximum sacrifice, and in that environment, the Uranus in Virgo generation comes of age. Finding a life purpose through organization and re-culturalization will bring the essence of Uranus in Virgo's ultimate intent in life.

Libra

Uranus in Aries is the advent of midlife for those who were born with it in the sign of Libra. As each sign represents an evolution from the previous, and a preparation for the next, it follows that the intent of Uranus in Libra is to find a balance between the individual and the collective. Now, this has been said before with the other signs, because Uranus itself represents the concept of the “one in the many”, however, it is especially significant for Libra/Aries. The restoration of the individual rights and prerogatives of each person in balance with a new social order is the key to this individuation process. The first half of life is spent coming to terms with relationships in an intensely personal fashion, while the crossover experience into midlife induces the psychic demand to find ways for all individuals to have a sense of equality, belonging and influence in the world.

Scorpio

When Uranus enters Taurus, and opposes the natal Uranus of those who have it in Scorpio, the shock of “real world” practicality awakens a new impetus for personal growth. Uranus in Scorpio has already spent half its life in a state of mystical and transformative experience, and at midlife must transmute the esoteric intangibles into manifest form. Uranus in Scorpio urges the individual to explore his or her uniqueness and individual self in ways that are often dark and mysterious. The path to self and wholeness involves incorporating the shadow self and, in midlife, acknowledging the purpose of the shadow. This will take the form of dealing with collective shadow material and working with it to integrate the darker aspects of society and the world - and ultimately, to perform a kind of magical transformation for the future. The inner resources of Uranus in Scorpio are profound, drawing on an ancestral level of information. But, the impulse to truly embody the “work of the ancestors” either through good works, teachings or commerce becomes essential to their sense of inner purpose.

Transits of Midlife: 37 to 60

The Half-Uranus - A Meeting at the Crossroads
*The Generic Aspects from the Half-Uranus to the
Second Saturn Return and Their Meeting*

The Preparation Phase Prior to the Half-Uranus

36: *Jupiter and Saturn - Preparing the Way to Midlife*

Across the Threshold - Uranus and Neptune (and Pluto)

h 6 4 P Ω

38-44: *The Big Leap Forward*

38: *Second Return of the Lunar Nodes*

40: *Saturn Trine Saturn - Familiar Boundaries*

42: *Neptune Square Neptune - Beautiful Dreamer*

Pluto - The Nuclear Dilemma and the Existential Experience

P

The "Problem" with Pluto

The Power of Pluto - For Some of Us

So, what does that mean?

Middlescence

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44-46: *Saturn and Uranus - Success in Limitation*
Know Thyself and Nothing Too Much

47-48: *Inversion of the Lunar Nodes and Jupiter Return - quo vadis?*

50: **The Watershed**

h

52: *Saturn Square Saturn - Return of the Repressed and Liminality*

54-57: **Integration**

☾ 4 h 6 P Ω

54: *The Second Lunar Return,*
Saturn Sextile Saturn

55-56: *Uranus, Neptune and Pluto Trine Themselves,*
Third Return of the Lunar Nodes

59-60: **The Saturn Return**

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Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans everything?