

# The Dawn of Aquarius - The Turning of the Great Ages

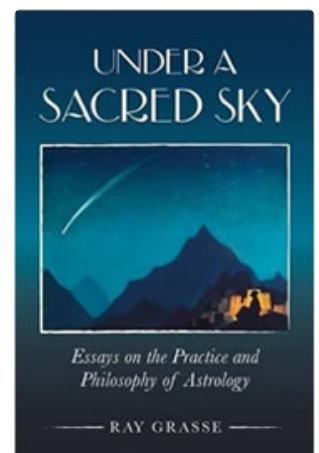
by Ray Grasse



Imagine the world as it might appear from the perspective of an ant wandering on-stage during a performance of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. All around you there unfolds a great drama, replete with exotic colors, sounds, and complex happenings; yet because of your limited perspective, the meaning of it all escapes you. You can't comprehend the multi-layered significance of this drama, nor grasp how these diverse elements fit into the greater unfolding narrative being played out over several acts. Only by understanding that larger context can you truly see how those transitory events are integral facets of a broader pattern of meaning, a greater story.

In a way, our own predicament is rather like that. We, too, find ourselves meandering across a great "stage" – that of history itself. To the casual eye, the events transpiring around us may seem like a chaotic jumble of random occurrences: a rocket carrying seven crew members explodes in mid-air; a world leader finds himself embroiled in a foreign war; a new computer technology suddenly takes the world by storm. At first glance there is little to suggest such things possess any meaning or relation to one another. Yet our problem may simply be one of proximity: perhaps we are simply too close to grasp what is going on. If only our perspectives were broad enough, perhaps we could recognize how these isolated events were actually facets of a much larger story.

For the esotericist, an important key toward helping unlock that broader perspective lies in a concept known as the *Great Ages*. We presently find ourselves straddling the threshold between "acts," as it were, between the Piscean and the Aquarian Ages. Like vast tectonic plates shifting deep within the collective unconscious, this epochal transition has already begun manifesting as a series of seismic changes throughout our world, as the forms of an older order make way for those of a radically new one. Will the coming era be a time of "peace, love, and brotherhood," as some suggest? Or will it instead bring about an Orwellian police state where men and women are little more than cogs in a bureaucratic machine? As always, the truth will almost certainly be more complex than we expect, or perhaps even imagine. It's useful to remember that the same Piscean Age which brought us Jesus Christ also brought us Torquemada and the Inquisition, not to mention evangelist Jimmy Swaggert. To help us make sense of these unfolding complexities, let us look briefly at a few of the key symbols and archetypal themes associated with both of these shifting eras.



This essay is taken from Ray Grasse's book "Under a Sacred Sky" which can be ordered at [Wessex Astrologer](http://WessexAstrologer.com) or [amazon.com](http://amazon.com)

## The Age of Pisces (c. 1 A.D. to 2100 A.D.)

For two millennia now, we have been under the influence primarily of the watery sign of Pisces. Among the manifestations of the Piscean Age has been the rise of a global religion centering primarily on symbols of water: baptism, walking on water, changing water into wine, and so forth. Indeed, for the student of astrological symbolism Christianity offers a virtual mother lode of correspondences in connection with Pisces. For example, Christian scripture speaks extensively of fishermen, sympathy for society's outcasts, martyrdom, and the washing of feet – all traditional symbols of Pisces. One of the defining miracles of Christ's ministry was the feeding of the multitude with two fishes and five loaves of bread. More subtly, the eating of fish on Friday by Catholics is linked by some to the fact that Friday is governed by Venus, the planet that is "exalted" (i.e., attains its optimal expression) in Pisces.

Were such correspondences intentional on the part of the Church fathers, or was their emergence purely synchronistic? Even scholars disagree on this point, so we may never know for sure. But either way we can study these symbols for what they reveal about the archetypal dynamics of the time. Viewed as a whole, they tell us that humanity was learning to relate to reality and the divine through a more emotional filter. In its constructive aspect, this brought about a newfound element of compassion and faith in key

segments of society, especially within the Christian world. Animal sacrifice was abandoned, and there arose a spiritual sensibility that spoke of “turning the other cheek” rather than the smiting of enemies. It was a shift from *Roma* to *Amor*, one could say.

In a more negative vein, this same emphasis on emotionality ushered in a spirit of dogmatism and persecution within the emerging religions. Pisces is intensely concerned with matters of faith, but taken to extremes this can lead to zealotry, self-righteousness, and the urge to establish absolute guidelines for all to follow. At its worst, the Piscean Age was an era of religious intolerance, when large populations were expected to show unquestioning allegiance to a monolithic belief system, as exhibited in much of Christianity and Islam during this time.



One of the more striking Piscean symbols found in Christianity is its central image: the crucifixion. It is sobering to consider that for nearly two thousand years, Western culture has defined itself largely in terms of an image of a man nailed to a cross, tortured in a most gruesome manner. Yet viewed archetypally, this singular seed-image contains the best and worst of the Piscean legacy. On a negative level, the crucifixion expresses dark Piscean qualities like self-pity, masochism, guilt, and martyrdom. These traits reflect the ego-dissolving principle of water but directed in a

more destructive, self-abnegating way. In some respects, the Piscean Age might well be called the ultimate age of neurosis, this being an era when many felt that suffering and guilt were somehow synonymous with spirituality. This is precisely the sort of delusion that arises when the ego is unhealthy or ungrounded, and finds itself drawn back into the more corrosive and self-destructive emotions of the soul.

But the crucifixion has a more positive interpretation, too. As astrologers know, Pisces symbolically relates to the transcendence of the ego and the surrendering of personal interests in service of a higher ideal. As the last sign in the zodiac (determined by the sun’s counter-clockwise movement), Pisces is that final stage in the soul’s evolution where the boundaries of personality have begun to dissolve and the soul now merges with the cosmic ocean of existence. This is what the crucifixion means in its highest sense: the willing capacity for sacrifice, worship, and profound devotion. This is the water element at its most refined. Some examples of this higher aspect of Pisces would be St. Francis of Assisi, or the ideals of chivalry and courtly love, with their ethos of self-sacrifice and idealism, that arose during the medieval era. Note, too, that the word for that other major Piscean Age religion, Islam, means “surrender” when translated into English.

Whereas the Age of Aries brought an awakening of the outwardly-directed ego, the more feminine Piscean Age brought about a newfound sense of interiority or inwardness. In religious terms, this was evident in the emerging Christian emphasis on moral reflectivity, or conscience. The flip side of this development, unfortunately, was the emergence of a new mood of guilt throughout Western society. Prior to Christianity, one rarely finds a sense of conscience or “sin” as we now think of it. By way of contrast, the earlier Greeks saw their relationship to the gods in more mechanical and external terms than we do now. When crimes were committed, one atoned for them not because of an inner sense of guilt so much as a belief that one had accrued a “stain” of sorts which could be removed through an appropriate sacrifice.

On another level, this new sense of interiority was mirrored in the rise of architectural features like the dome and the arch, so critical to the Islamic mosque or Roman structures like the Pantheon. This interiority was visible as well as in the introduction of pupils into the eyes of Roman statues early in the Age; examine the ancient busts of early Romans and the Greeks and one finds that their eyes have no pupils. Artistic shifts like these symbolized a new world of emotions opening up during the early Christian era. It was a development that, centuries later, made possible the later birth of modern psychology.

## The Age of Aquarius (c. 2100 A.D. to 4200 A.D.)

The most frequently asked question concerning the Aquarian Age is, *when* does it begin? That is a bit like determining when the dawn starts. Is it when the morning sky first starts glowing, long before the actual sunrise? Or is it when the sun actually appears over the horizon?

The same problem applies to understanding the timing of the Great Ages. An Age doesn't begin on a single day or year, but unfolds gradually over many years, exerting its influence in pronounced waves like an incoming tide. Consequently, while the Aquarian Age may not fully manifest for several centuries yet (most estimates suggest somewhere between 2100 and 2800 A.D.), there are many examples to suggest its symbols are already appearing in our world. The internet and democracy are but two expressions of this.

Whereas Pisces is traditionally associated with the element of water, Aquarius is associated with air. Exoterically, this is reflected in the startling rise of aviation technologies and space travel over the last two centuries. Humans are quite literally learning to master the air realm, not only through aviation but in the construction of ever-taller buildings that allow us to live higher up off the ground. The media also employs metaphors which reflect this elemental shift when it says that a show goes “on the air,” or when a broadcaster “takes to the airwaves.”



Such outer developments are only reflections of an inner shift taking place throughout the culture, one that relates to an awakening of *mind* in human evolution. Understood symbolically, air is the medium through which we communicate our thoughts and ideas, and is the element most associated with rationality and thinking. What this means is that the Aquarian Age will undoubtedly witness advances in humanity's intellectual growth, no doubt at widely varying levels of sophistication. Someone living life in front of their TV set can be said to be pursuing a “mental” existence, but one quite different in quality from that of a scientist struggling to unlock the mysteries of the cosmos. Terms like “information superhighway” or the “information revolution” are further examples of how the impending Aquarian influence has already begun to propel our world toward more mental values and modes of experience. The modern separation of church and state is another important example of the disengaging of our rational minds from the dogmatic and emotional concerns of the Piscean Age.

A vital key toward understanding the meaning of Aquarius resides in the way each of the different elements repeats itself three times over the course of the zodiac. In other words, there are three earth signs, three water signs, three fire signs, and three air signs. With each version of that element, we find that elemental principle expressing itself in subtly different ways. To illustrate this, let us focus here on the trio of air signs: Gemini, Libra, and Aquarius.

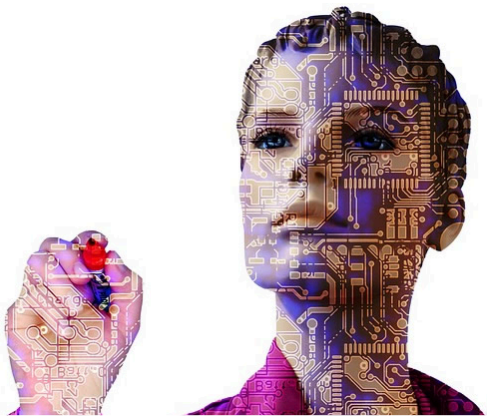
## The Three Faces of Air

Given the progressive nature of the zodiac, it is not surprising that each of these three signs might reflect the workings of the mind in broader and more impersonal ways. For instance, in Gemini, rationality expresses itself in highly personal ways: through the workings of the everyday mind and through ordinary forms of communication. In Libra, the rationality of the air element manifests in a more interpersonal way, through a mentality directed toward interactions with others in wider social contexts. An example of this would be a teacher standing before a class, or a salesman dealing with clients.

In Aquarius, we find the element of air-rationality expressing itself through the most impersonal contexts of all – in terms of the masses, or even the cosmos itself. Aquarius could be described as the principle of cosmic rationality or cosmic mind, the ability to perceive and make connections of the most abstract and cosmic sort. Aquarius isn't simply concerned with ideas and theoretical relations; it is concerned with ideas and relationships that are global or universal in scope.

For this reason, the Aquarian Age will likely be an era when science, rather than religion, will be the dominant paradigm, and its scientists the new high priests. Rather than focus its attention on any one individual's ideas or feelings, science attempts to uncover laws and principles that apply everywhere, and everywhen. This same impersonality is also evident in the way many of us now are involved with social connections and networks extending over vast distances, through technologies like the internet or TV. These allow people across the world to communicate with one another, but in more cerebral ways. It is one of the paradoxes of our time that we find ourselves becoming more interconnected with people across the entire world while knowing less and less about the person living next door.





This shifting orientation toward Aquarian air is also responsible for the growing fascination we see with outer space and its exploration, as reflected in films like *Star Wars* or *2001: A Space Odyssey*, or TV shows like *Star Trek*. Works like these capture the emerging spirit of a “longing for the stars” that is so intrinsic to Aquarius. The modern fascination with UFOs and extraterrestrial life will likely become even more pronounced in the years to come, as humanity finds its speculations and fantasies in these areas transforming into hard reality.

## **Transitional Symbols on the Brink of Aquarius**

With one foot in the Piscean Age behind us and the other in the Aquarian Age before us, we find ourselves caught between radically contrasting, and sometimes conflicting, value systems. If the Great Ages represent a Shakespearean drama of cosmic proportions, we have stepped onstage precisely at the point “between acts,” as it were, when the old props and backdrops are being replaced by new ones. One result of living in this liminal or inbetween state is the rise of various transitional forms – symbolic hybrids of Piscean and Aquarian energies together. Here are a few examples of these from recent times.

### **Televangelism**

What happens when old-style Piscean Christianity meets up with Aquarian-style media technology? One result is that distinctly modern phenomenon called televangelism, where preachers employ the fruits of global technology for spreading the gospel of salvation to even larger audiences than before.

### **The Abortion Debate**

As one age comes up against another, there can be a violent clashing of values and ideologies from both sides of the divide. A vivid example of this is the modern controversy over abortion. On the one hand, we have the largely Christian-based “pro-life” advocates representing the values of the Piscean Age, reflecting sympathy for the helpless unborn. On the other hand, there are the “pro-choice” advocates representing the forces of Aquarius, championing the rights of individuals to decide their own fates. Through the years there has been little compromise between these two camps, and there is little hope for change in sight, but with good reason. They arise out of two fundamentally different paradigms, two radically different ways of seeing and evaluating the world – one from the last Great Age and the other from the next.

### **The Storming of the Bastille**

Even single events from history can sometimes serve as symbolic benchmarks in the transition between eras. One of the earliest and most dramatic examples of this was the storming of the Bastille on July 14, 1789, a pivotal event in the French Revolution. On this date, French radicals overtook and opened up the famed prison which had been holding political prisoners, and released those few who remained. In astrological symbolism, prisons are associated with Pisces, while the principles of freedom and revolution are associated with Aquarius. The opening up of a prison and release of its prisoners was a symbolic landmark in the move from the old authoritarian order to a more freedom-oriented one.

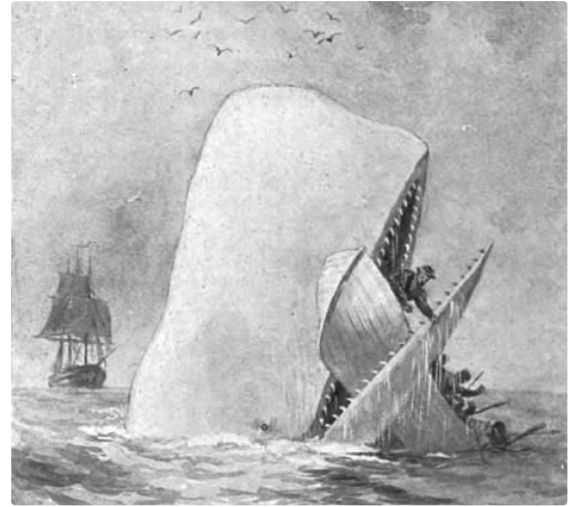
### **Alcoholics Anonymous**

For astrologers, one of the negative symbols associated with Pisces has long been the addiction to intoxicants like alcohol, drugs, or even fossil fuel! Groups like Alcoholics Anonymous offer an example of people coming together to break free from their addiction to alcohol, nicely symbolizing the effort to undo our bondage to Piscean-Age consciousness. AA is thus a complex phenomenon: on the one hand, it has one foot firmly planted in the values of the receding age, as evidenced by its emphasis on surrendering to a higher power (“Let go and let God!”), as well as its own brand of “commandments” (the “twelve steps”). At the same time, AA is essentially democratic and non-denominational, qualities associated with the emerging era. Viewed archetypally, AA is a hybrid creation that blends the values of both Piscean and Aquarian Ages.

# Transitional Symbols in Literature

The transition to the Aquarian Age has expressed itself within the forms of modern literature as well. For instance, the passage from one age to another sometimes expresses itself mythically in symbols which depict a hero doing battle with a creature associated with the prior age. A historical example from Western religion would be Moses casting out the golden calf, symbolizing the transition from the Age of Taurus to that of Aries.

In modern times, a similar pattern expresses itself in books like *Moby Dick*. In Herman Melville's sprawling novel we see a figure in the open air (Ahab) attempting to slay a creature of the sea, symbolizing transcendence over the water realm (Pisces). Additionally, if the whaling industry is taken as a symbol for modern industrial civilization generally (it was the first true industry to emerge from the young America), then Melville's tale underscores the shift from a more emotional age to the more technological and business-minded one of Aquarius.



On another level, it's possible to view Melville's tale as foreshadowing the cataclysm that was about to shake America to its core one decade later – the Civil War. Here, too, we saw a clash between Ages being acted out, with the Union forces, symbolizing the values of freedom (led by Abraham Lincoln – an Aquarian born on the same day as Charles Darwin), seeking to overturn the slavery-based world of the U.S. South.

Although very different on its surface, the same essential dynamic was at work more than a century later in the tragic story of government agents attacking David Koresh's religious compound in Waco, Texas. Whatever one's own thoughts about the attack or its possible justification, the symbolism is clear: a secular government imposing limits on a religious community – i.e. Aquarius restricting Pisces. The fact that the attack took place precisely as the planetary rulers of Aquarius and Pisces moved into alignment, when Uranus conjoined Neptune in 1993, succinctly underscores the archetypal meaning of the event.

## The Pilgrims' Immigration to America

Whether we know it or not, we are all pushed or pulled to one degree or another by the imperatives of our age, we all act out the necessities of a broader drama. As a case in point, the attempt by pilgrims to flee religious persecution in the old world to find religious freedom in the new one reflected a shift from the more dogmatic and persecution-oriented Piscean era to the freedom-oriented Aquarian Age. Little could they have realized how they were also setting the stage for a collective drama whose implications would extend far into the future and influence the geopolitical direction of an entire planet for centuries to come.