

URANUS



BECOMING THE SACRED CLOWN

*“Hey, Johnny, what are you rebelling against?”
“What do you got?”*


MARLON BRANDO
The Wild One

In the Koran, Gabriel tells Mohammed, “You know, we could have had no evil in the world if we’d made you all alike. But God would have none of it and insisted that each creature be unique.” And so the greater experiment is to come into cooperative accord from uniqueness rather than similarity. Uranus is the god of uniqueness, intuition, innovation, ingenuity, rebellion, and rascalry. We all have a maverick within.

In his essay “Uranus as Prometheus,” Rick Tarnas writes that Uranus is the one planet that was mythologically misnamed, because its themes are more aptly associated with Prometheus. Prometheus stole fire from the humorless gods of the old order and gave it to humans. His punishment was to be chained to a rock where, each day in perpetuity, an eagle would come and pluck out his liver—a gloomy prognosis for the defiant trickster part of ourselves. However, if we dig more deeply into the Greek texts, we learn that Prometheus could see the future in which Hercules would set him free.

PLANET: URANUS

SIGN: AQUARIUS

Glyph: 

Key words and qualities: Nature's raw, experimental drive; intuition: an accurate sense of potential inherent in a person or situation; awakening; lightning that strikes the circle of habit and turns it into a spiral. Freedom through loss of the nonessential (of course, Uranus often has a different idea from ours of what's essential).

Color: Electric blue

Metal: Uranium

Physical body affinities: Our winged ankles, because Uranus is designated the "higher octave" of Mercury. And our body's electrical energy, also called the etheric body or aura.

Day: Every day

Way of honoring: Experiment, experiment, experiment. Don't worry about success or failure; Uranus feels that life is in the attempt. As Eleanor Roosevelt said, "Failure is the first step toward success." Festivals are a social form of honoring Uranus.

Shadow, when not honored: Uranus unrelated to Saturn (responsibility to self and others) tends toward erratic rebellion and procrastination—angst without outcome. But Uranus wedded to Saturn produces the desirable effect of disciplined wildness. When Uranus is not wedded to Neptune (devotional compassion), "spiritual" techniques blast us open but leave us with an anxious buzz. Inventiveness produces technological brilliance without heart.

This provides more encouragement for the rascal-rebel part of us that defies the stodgy gods of convention. We are not sentenced to eternal punishment and retribution, but in fact are rescued by Hercules, a heroic Mars animation of our own strength and determination. Cultivating a strong alliance with Mars is an important key if we aspire to being successful social change artists. The strength of our alliance with Mars determines how much time we spend chained to the rock.

If we cultivate Mars by being physical—dancing, doing martial arts, spending time with animals, gardening, walking in the woods, we thus tap into the erotic vitality of life, and therefore can have a grand time being Uranus.

In Amerindian myth, the trickster god Coyote steals fire from the gods. Among the Maori of New Zealand, their trickster hero Maui also steals fire. The Dogon people of Mali are grateful to their hermaphrodite god, Nommo, who stole a piece of the Sun to provide fire for the Dogon blacksmiths. Inanna not only stole the Tablets of Heaven, but sailed to an island kingdom, got the king drunk, and stole culture, which included the capacity to articulate thought, and gave it to humanity. This part of us, as we will see, steals thunder as well as fire. When the Uranus-Prometheus-Coyote-Maui-Nommo-Inanna part of us steals fiery creativity (always a threat to the old, tired regime), it gives it to all of humanity, on out to all of creation. Acts of fiery creativity are good for the whole team.

Uranus has an affinity for Aquarius, which comprises the whole community of creation. Intuition connects us to the larger dance of creation and, through the agency of synchronicity, keeps us all in touch with each other. Uranus is that electrical current we experience when, just as we are thinking of somebody, the phone rings and that very person is on the line; or when we are in need of a sign and open a book to a passage that provides just the guidance we seek. Through the intervention of meaningful Uranian coincidence, we are the words with which the universe talks to itself.

Inspired plans come with the capacity to attract the connections and means whereby to realize them. Taking a stand on an issue is an act of telepathy, sending a clear signal radiating out into the cosmos. Action polishes our emanations so that we more efficiently connect with and attract those people, creatures, and situations with which we have shared affinity.

In this world, all creatures in all realms are our teammates, our allies, all equal; therefore the appropriate manner of address is respectful, reverent, and direct. People can be richer, poorer, wiser, less wise, older, younger, whatever, but the only effective form of communication is neither down nor up, but addressing each creature straight across as an equal.

A friend told me a charming, fierce story. Trekking in the wilderness for many days, he noticed that a mountain lion was stalking him, getting closer each night. To ward off the cat, my friend had to keep the fire going all night. He was getting run down and exhausted. Finally, in extremity, he pitched his sleeping bag right on the edge of a cliff; he could see the mountain lion's eyes gleaming at him across the firelight. He telepathed directly to the mountain lion, "Okay, baby. If you come for me, we're both going over the edge." The mountain lion looked at him, got the message, went away, and never came back.

There are certain times in our lives when we really have to "mean it," and when we really mean it, we engage the respect of the other. We telepath straight across, man to mountain lion, and are understood as an equal. Authentic calm clarity, catalyzed by extremity and often emerging from desperation, has the power to command respect and achieve peaceful resolution.

ONLY CONNECT

As the story of my friend's encounter with the mountain lion reminds us, taking a stance is an act of telepathy, sending a clear signal radiating out into the cosmos.

When we find ourselves inveigled by negative group dynamics, it is always great to catch someone's eye and know that they are with you, an ally in a glance. Having a conscious teammate helps a lot in gathering the force to leave a bad situation or to change its dynamics. Two people connecting in this way more than doubles the current for truthful change. Once two connect, the entire dynamic begins to shift. The whole group starts to wake up.

Sociologists have hypothesized that there are only six people separating any two people in the world—six degrees of separation. You know someone who knows someone who knows someone, so that only six people lie between you and a Haitian refugee—or between you and the President. As a friend of mine said, “Well, if it's not true, then it's a challenge. Let's make it so.” As Uranus said, in the voice of E. M. Forster, “Only connect.”

On March 9, 1959, Jung wrote a letter to a depressed woman who was incredibly lonely: “I am sorry you are so miserable. Depression means literally ‘being forced downwards.’ . . . If I had to live in a foreign country, I would seek out one or two people who seemed amiable and would make myself useful to them, so that libido came to me from outside, even though in a somewhat primitive form, say of a dog wagging its tail. I would raise animals and plants and find joy in their thriving. I would surround myself with beauty—no matter how primitive and artless—objects, colors, sounds. I would eat and drink well.”⁹

Jung gives voice to Uranus's exhortation to connect to the community of creation in whatever form it is available—animals, plants, color, beauty. Uranus's passionate pantheism advises treating everyone and everything as an equal.

REBEL AS COMMUNITY BUILDER

Uranus encourages us to kick our addiction to following a leader. A strong leader can weaken a community; a wise leader can strengthen it. Gandhi said, “If I can lead people out of the forest,

someone else can lead them back in." In the winter of 1997, community was at last effectively achieved on the streets of Belgrade without there being any one strong charismatic leader. When the lawyers joined the general strike, one was quoted on National Public Radio as saying, "The energy on the streets is very high. Everyone is ready for radical economic change, and everyone is like a small stone or brick for the new road we are building."

Uranus is the most individualistic, intrinsically disruptive of forces. Yet it is described, through its "rulership" of Aquarius, as the most community-oriented energy. One of Uranus's teachings is that when everyone is truly honest, consensus is possible. Community is real if everyone reverences the uniqueness of each member. Uranian truth-telling and experimentation are needed so that we can grow social forms that serve rather than suppress individuality.

Uranus entered its own sign of Aquarius in January of 1996 and will preside over our passage into the twenty-first century. "Let the experiment in real democracy begin," proclaims this god, strengthened by being in his own domain. This astrological pattern instructs us that now is the time to connect with our team. Without a community of our own, we can have no respect for the communities of others, be they villages, hives, or pods.

As it has entered Aquarius, Uranus invites us to lob liberating esoterica into the mainstream. Let lobbing supplant lobbying. Uranus says, "Experiment with ways to let people cultivate the capacity for true community. Experiment with life and with cooperative endeavor."

The Saturn shadow might sneer, "That's not realistic. You'll look foolish to others." Or the Saturn shadow might even utter the old curse, "If you are different, they will kill you." But Uranus proffers the antidote: coyote trickster medicine, guaranteed to cure self-conscious inhibitions and paralytic dread. Other parts of our psyche care very much what others think of us, but Uranus's originality is unconstrained by anticipatory fear of other people's opinions.

SOOTHSAYING

We feel the electric hum of Uranus when the inner and outer are not in accord, a sure sign that the situation is not honest. Uranus's disruptive intelligence dwells in any crevice of discrepancy between appearance and the invisible energetic reality. The resulting tension catalyzes the energy necessary for change.

We sense this discrepancy when we go to seminars about "energetic aliveness," yet the energy in the room is dead. Or to a *feng shui* lecture given in a Hyatt, and no one speaks out. Uranus would speak out or leave, unable to stay in an energetically dishonest environment. "Disrupt droning" is a Uranian imperative. The advanced Uranus initiate would do this without any unkindly exclusion of the droner from the ensuing festivities.

A person possessed by this god can easily get into trouble. She or he is a truth-sayer, traditionally known as a "soothsayer." The truth-sayer's difficult task is to address discrepancy with sensitivity. The sensitivity ideally extends both to motivation (*why* one is saying something) and to timing (*when* one is saying it).

According to Uranus, the truth always has to be said, but not necessarily to another human. Sometimes you have to run under a railway bridge and yell your insight at the train trestle just to restore the energetic balance of the universe.

Once, when Uranus was transiting my ascendant, I had been invited to a small group of "leading-edge thinkers" to discuss radical health-care reform. For hours, people had been droning on in a thinly veiled elitist manner, saying things like, "We are intelligent people, but *most* people . . ." or "Is health care a right or a privilege?"

It's going to take a long time for this conversation to become interesting, I thought, resignedly. After what seemed an interminable time during which men pontificated and women chimed in deferentially, someone insisted I share my perspective. Well, I (or the Uranus in me) told them *exactly* what I thought. I said that we

were talking about innovative ideas in a really tired old way, that the form was suppressing rather than serving the content.

At that, a famous left-wing Jesuit icon shrieked, "I *hate* criticism. Get out! Either you leave the room or I will!" Mustering the lesson from a recent aikido class, I let his fury pass through me. Meanwhile, he hurtled himself out of the room (or was hurtled), only to slink back in twenty minutes later. You don't face off with Uranus.

Knowing that I had been neither tactful nor enlightened in my delivery, I said to the group, "Let's think of this as a demonic outburst on my part. But since we are all part of each other in one large dream, perhaps I'm expressing a point of view shared by others here." This failed to move the authority figure. However, others later whispered to me that, yes, they'd agreed.

When Uranus is emphasized, whether by birth chart or transit, you feel that if you don't express yourself you'll shatter or explode. The truth leaps out of your mouth, often in ungracious ways. In Sufism, the Malamazi order of Dervishes follows the "Path of Blame." Members teach others by being disruptive and attracting blame. However, it is considered such a difficult path that you are allowed to resign periodically. After my Uranus transit was over, I formally declared in my own psyche, "I'm taking a break from the Malamazi order of Dervishes. I no longer wish to follow the path of blame, of teaching by having the truth leap out of my mouth, of catching flak, being the recipient of terrified resentment, and disrupting things in ways that are not graceful. I temporarily resign from the hard work of unmasking tyrants disguised as sages by having them shriek at me."

The goal for adepts is to be a clean conduit for Uranus's lightning bolt of enlivening, awakening energy. Saying the thing that everyone is thinking generates a wonderfully scary electrical current that brings the room alive. Whether welcome or unwelcome, this voicing is a service to the community, a risky relief to everyone.

Cultivating the Uranus part of us feeds the sacred clown—the part of ourselves that defies the authorities internally and externally.

As a liberating inspiration to others, it does so with great wit, elan, confidence, and aplomb. And a pie in the face.

In his introduction to Idries Shah's invaluable book *The Sufis*, Robert Graves writes,

The court fool of the Spanish kings with his bladder stick, his motley clothes, cock crest, jingling bells, simple wisdom and utter disrespect for authority is a Sufi figure. His jokes were accepted by the sovereigns as having a deeper wisdom than the most solemn advice of eldest councilors. When Philip II of Spain was accentuating his persecution of Jews, he decided that every Spaniard with Jewish blood must wear a hat of a certain shape. Foreseeing trouble, the fool appeared the same evening with three such hats. "For whom are these, fool?" asked Philip. "One for me, nuncle, one for thee, and one for the Grand Inquisitor." And since it was true that numerous medieval Spanish aristocrats had married into rich Jewish families, Philip thereupon abandoned his plan.¹⁰

Saying the truth is a challenge, but the greater challenge is to say the truth in a clean, inclusive way, like Philip's fool. This requires training, experimentation, practice, and sometimes plant allies.

A friend of mine returned from visiting a Brazilian tribe that is organized around the *ayahuasca* plant, which is a sacramental herb of kinship. She reported that babies are given a teaspoon at their baptism. It is ceremonially used to provide unifying visions for the tribe. Whenever a sudden, difficult tumult erupts, everyone drinks the ceremonial tea and they perceive the truth of the situation through collective dialogue that leads to shared vision.

Consensus is cultivated in spiritual politics that encourages (as opposed to suppresses) individuality. A word to the wise to be wary: unfortunately this wonderful sacrament, *ayahuasca*, is being exported by, among others, the Brazilian Daimon church, a bull pri-

mate organization peddling suppressive orthodoxy in the guise of enlightenment. This is definitely a case of form suppressing content.

Keeping our Uranian sensibilities toned allows us to discriminate between authentic community building and suppressive bullies in exotic dress. Pretense is the toxic mimic of the real. Uranus never falls for image, and eats duplicity and pretense for lunch.

URANUS'S SHADOW: REBEL WITHOUT A CAUSE

Uranus defies the authorities. So far, so good. However, its shadow is procrastination. Under the Saturnian pressure of having to do things, the psyche goes to the movies. Somebody who is very strongly Uranian—independent and rebellious—learned in early childhood how to evade compliance in order to protect his or her unique wildness. As we get older, we find that the old Uranus pattern of evasion has outlived its usefulness. The rebel no longer has a cause, but continues to sneer, “I don’t have to do that.” One is now rebelling against oneself. The strategy that had fostered freedom has now become an impediment to liberation.

Our challenge is to have a summit conference of all the parts of our psyche in which the other planets address the rogue: “Listen, Uranus, all of us in here have decided that we really want to do this. No external authority is saying that we have to; we’ve made up our own mind as a community. We are no longer defining freedom as rebelling against. Now we define freedom as self-chosen accomplishment. Now we want to create.”

Once freedom has been redefined, Uranus relaxes and cooperates, realizing that there is no longer any external authority to rebel against. The previously conscious rebellion against routine had become a routine. Uranus is the part of us that resists external direction, but all in the service of freedom.

Constantly renewing and clarifying our terms and definitions is a radical act. Once we have realized that rebelling against something

places us just as much in its thrall as conforming to it, Uranus forms a partnership with Saturn. Together, they encourage us to be disciplined wild people, a necessary aspiration if we want to serve the full vitality of possibilities.

GETTING ZAPPED

We can have an intense Plutonian encounter and no one else might know. But when Uranus crosses our path, everyone knows. Either we trumpet "Eureka!" or we attract the world's attention through wild and creative behavior. Whereas Pluto's disruption catalyzes the inward descent to his domain of the Underworld, Uranus strikes with a bolt from the blue catalyzing outward experimentation.

While Uranus transits occur at different times for different people, because Uranus makes a complete orbit every eighty-four years, around the age of forty-two Uranus opposes everyone's natal position. This period has been boringly labeled the "midlife crisis." What's really going on here is that the wild, authentic part of us has completed half of its orbit and is checking in with itself. It is a time of self-assessment, when the Uranus side of us queries the community of the psyche regarding how truly we are living our unique wildness.

What follows is that those areas of life in which we are cultivating and expressing our unique gifts experience rapid acceleration, while those areas that have been more dormant become the arena for wild, experimental disruption. By the time I was forty-two, astrology had been my vocation for almost twenty-five years. Yet I knew that no matter how much I studied, there would always be more to know, so I continued to seek new modes of expression. Uranus was pleased with this, and my work rocketed along, increasingly connected to the larger social world. It was my love life that Uranus deemed could use some experimental, disruptive enlivening.

Freud, who hated astrology, nonetheless was subject to it. According to Freud, on July 24, 1895, "the secret of the power of

dreams" was revealed to him. He wrote to his friend Fleis, with characteristic modesty, "There should be a monument erected that says, 'On this day the secret of the power of dreams was revealed to Sigmund Freud.'" Unbeknownst to him, on that day Uranus in the sky was stationary, exactly opposing his Sun and natal Uranus.

Wherever Uranus lands in a chart natively or by transit, it assigns us the task of being disruptive, transcending the status quo, and heading out beyond known limitations; of learning more, discovering more, and becoming more inventive. Uranus's force is a lightning bolt, casting illumination wherever it travels. When lightning actually strikes, it is attracted by a simultaneous welcoming surge of electricity from the ground. Similarly, a surge of inner restlessness rises from within our ground to greet this Change God.

To grow shiitake mushrooms, one plants the spores in a stick and lets it sit for a year. Then you must strenuously pound the stick to awaken the dormant life within. For the same reason, during midlife and Uranus transits, we get pounded. Like the spores, we are comfortably snoozing when suddenly, "What the . . . ?!" Thump! Thump! Thump!

We invoke Uranus by posing the question, "If I feel agitated, restless, on the brink of a discovery, where in my life do I want lightning to strike?" The question becomes the lightning rod, serving as an active offering of self. Freud wanted illumination and revelation in the domain of dreams, a Neptunian realm. Where would we like breakthrough? In Venus's realm of creativity and love? In Mars' domain of awakened instinct and confident action? Do we want to overthrow the internal and external tyrants (negative Saturn) in our lives? Our sense of agitation gives us the clue. Consciously sitting with uncertainty attracts the lightning strike of revelatory Aha!

The goddess Oya, in the Santería pantheon, would be a feminine aspect of Uranus, whirling her horsetail whip. When she summons the winds of change, hoisting our sails signals our willingness to play.

Without even knowing your chart, you can feel when Uranus/Oya is dancing through your life, because this god's calling card is restlessness, agitation, angst, and readiness to change. Sometimes Uranus approaches you—the hairs on your neck go up—and then backs off. In the ensuing—often confusing—calm, we wonder what happened. To which Uranus says, "I'll be back. Use this time between our initial encounter and my return for the luxury/necessity of self-clarification." This is the privileged time between the lightning and the thunder. In this interval, it is our job to ask ourselves, "What do I want illumined in myself and the world? What do I want changed in myself and in the world? What fire do I want to come alive?" Life will both be and provide the answers to these questions.

Uranus always heralds the most radically enlivening change that could possibly happen to us. We cannot presume to know for ourselves, let alone anyone else, what such a change might be. Therefore, Uranus's influence in a chart and Uranus transits are amusingly unpredictable. When Uranus hits a really tight life in which there has been little prior self-reflective experience, that person might suddenly buy a red car and head west. By contrast, someone who is far too loose might get super-organized and motivated. I have seen both these things happen in a lightning flash under Uranus transits.

But most of us are not cartoons of simplicity. Understanding the complexity of our natures allows us to relinquish our insistence upon certainty. We pay tribute to this god by sacrificing certainty and welcoming the unexpected.

In the late twentieth century, Uranus has more opportunity to express itself through us than ever before. Uranus extends an invitation to the eccentric, individualistic, creative part of all of us: "Welcome to the age of mavericks. Exile is over. Ally-ally in come free!" Astrologically, at present Uranus enjoys a heightened imaginative expression in our lives thanks to its wedding to Neptune. And socially we have comparatively few physical or societal constrictions. Most of us have the historically extraordinary luxury of con-

sidering previously unimaginable options. "What shall we eat?" is now the question, rather than whether we will survive the winter. It is a great luxury to be able to ask "What shall we do?" "Where shall we live?" "Whom shall we love?" Uranus blasts through prior limitations, encouraging us to explore and expand the options we have for original self-expression.

Uranus zaps all traditions open, saying, "Do not do anything (get married, get a job) simply because it is expected until you have found a meaningful reason to do so." Find the authentic impulse and let it grow its own form. No more form suppressing content. No more tame books about how we should be wild.

A WORD ABOUT SUDDENNESS

In pop astrology, one of Uranus's attributes is "suddenness." Uranus would say that sudden events take a long time to develop. An earthquake releases tension *suddenly*, but the tension has been building over a long period of time. When circumstances are out of alignment, the resulting drama is an earthquake that resolves the tension of being false, compromised, or not true to one's self. Suddenly a relationship bursts apart, a deal blows up, plans fall through.

Of course, while the drama is a visible release, it really is not a sudden development. Emotions lurking beneath the surface, or hidden events, brew for a long time. If we were intuitively connected to the invisible, to the energetic truth of the situation, we would not be taken so much by surprise. When people do not heed subtle messages to change, then the messages become more emphatic. An Aries friend hated her job of writing her company's annual report, but rather than quit, she broke her writing arm in an "accident": while practicing the discipline of tantrum yoga, she slammed her arm into the windshield of her car. She no longer had to write the report.

I once told a client that the nature of her work was about to be enlivened by Uranus on a particular day, and she called up, very angry, because on that day she got fired. In a sense, she hired Uranus

to fire her. Uranus said to her, "Will you get out of here already, or must I actually arrange for you to get fired!" Now she runs her own business, which is wildly successful.

Uranus is dedicated to liberation, by whatever means necessary. Something dramatic happens, something is lost, but freedom is gained. We might measure our evolution by our capacity to learn to skip the unpleasant melodrama and go more gracefully to the liberating outcome. Just quit the job.

Like Pluto, Uranus plays hardball. Uranus is least subtle where the tension and the discrepancy between artifice and authenticity is acute. Truth bursts through any impediment. Uranus has no tolerance for people who are unhappy about their relationships but not talking about or working on the emotional truth. Avoidance—conscious or unconscious—is a setup for real trouble.

Uranus says there is no enlivening of a life, a relationship, or a work without risk. Affairs are not real risk, but an evasion of real risk. As the novelist Vladimir Nabokov observes, "An affair is the most conventional of unconventionalities." It's up to us whether we want to be consciously or unconsciously propelled out into life with melodramatic force. Uranus catapults us often as a last, exasperated resort.

Uranus also represents nature's raw, experimental evolutionary drive. This dauntless aspect of nature does not fret over whether it looks foolish to put giant ears on a small mammal. She says, "Let's try it! What the hell, see if the little critter survives several hundred thousand years or not." This part of the psyche is not concerned with the category of failure or success, but only with vital authentic attempt. We worship this god through sincere experimentation.

Uranus would say, "At least if you're failing, you know you're alive; you're participating, engaged, learning, and therefore contributing to evolution." The Japanese have a phrase for this—they call it "the nobility of failure," implying, "Look at all the great things at which this person failed. She was really alive."

The word *illusion* comes, in Latin, from *in ludo*, which means “in the game.” Uranus says that it is better to be in the game, even the illusion of the game, the illusion of life, than “deluded,” which is *de ludo*, meaning “out of the game.” Identifying with Uranus connects us to the collective current of evolutionary experimental change. Hold on to your hat.

TRY THIS AT HOME

Right now (if you wish, of course), progressively contract and release every muscle in your body, starting with your feet. Tense and release all your toe and foot muscles. Then tense and release your legs, groin area, stomach, chest, hands, forearms, shoulders, back, and neck. Squinch all your face muscles, feeling a tingle right up into your scalp. Finally, tighten everything all at once—tight, tight, tight—and then release. Aaaah . . .

Now let us welcome Uranus and invoke Oya, the Santería goddess who summons the winds of change by whirling her horsetail whip. By extending the following invitation to Oya out loud, we will experience her winds as warm and tropical rather than as hurricanes: “Let the winds of change blow through my life, bringing the most radically enlivening thing that could possibly happen. I am hoisting my sails. Parasail me into the place where I can connect with my allies, and together we can do the most good.” We are hurtling into the unknown, yet experiencing intense pleasure rather than dread. Uranus is about being energetically alive, offering little resistance to the electricity of this Change God. We are pummeled and buffeted into flexibility.

In the tarot, Uranus has an affinity for the Tower, which depicts lightning shattering a tower from which tumble two little Adam and Eve figures. These represent the conscious and subconscious minds being forced to dive from their comfortable prison of isolation. Uranus always plucks us from what is not our life in order to cast us

into what really is our life. The shock transforms the circle of habit into a spiral of growth.

We know it only takes one person to start dancing at a party to give everyone else permission to start. When we are authentic, it liberates others, and radiates out. We rise out of our seats for the whole team of creation.